

TENSION AND CONFLICT IN NORTH EAST INDIA

B.B. KUMAR

416
5-CL
3





Tension And Conflict In North-East India

Dr. B. B. Kumar

M.Sc (double) M.A., Ph.D.

Principal

Kohima Science College



Cosmo Publications

New Delhi

1995

Call No. 303.6045416

Acc. No. 7773

ISBN 81-7020-682-0

Year of Publishing : 1995

© Text : Editor

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or stored in retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission of Cosmo Publications.

Published by :

**MRS. RANI KAPOOR
COSMO PUBLICATIONS**

For GENESIS PUBLISHING PVT. LTD.

24-B, Ansari Road,
Darya Ganj,
New Delhi-110002. INDIA

Typeset by :

Manav Computer House
Delhi-110092.

Printed at :

Mehra Offset Press
Chandni Mahal
Delhi

Dedicated
To The
Memory Of
Professor Umashankar Joshi

Contents

Preface	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
1. Tension and Conflict in North-East India	1
2. Aspects of History and Historical Background	29
3. The Identity Problem and its Expression	43
4. Language Politics in North-East India	57
5. The Autonomy Movements in Assam	83
6. Genesis of the Autonomy Movement in Nagaland	91
7. Autonomy Movements in the Naga Hills District	111
8. Social Change and Conflict in Tribal Society	124
Index	143

Preface

The tension and conflict in North-East India is due to the intersection of diverse social, political and economic forces. The strong-hold of colonial history, Indology, anthropology on our elite, creating obsessions, the real and imaginary grievances in the name of identity crisis have contributed to the present situation.

The paper on "Language Politics" by Professor V.V. Rao was published in the Thinker edited by me. The papers on "Autonomy movement in Naga Hills District" by Prof. S.K. Barpujari were presented in a seminar organised by me at Tuensang. These papers come under the parameter of the theme and are included in the present volume.

I shall feel rewarded if the book contributes to the generation of positive thinking on tension and conflict in the region.

B. B. Kumar

Acknowledgements

The author gratefully acknowledge the help rendered by Professor V. V. Rao and Professor S. K. Barapujari for their papers included in this volume.

1

*Tension And Conflict In
North-East India*

Tension and conflict is not new to North-East India. Soon after the formation of Assam as a Chief Commissioner's Province in 1874, Sylhet was added to it on 12 September 1874. This started the politics of tension between the Assamese and Bengalis. There was conflict of interest, and language politics generating grudges against each other. There were attempts to annul the amalgamation, sometimes by Hindus and sometimes by Muslims of *Borak Valley*; sometimes by the Hindus of both valleys. However, Sylhet continued to be part of Assam till the dawn of independence, when a part of the district was merged with East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). The dominance of the people of *Borak Valley* in Assam affairs and their opposition to the cause of the setting up of Gauhati University and Gauhati High Court in preference to Calcutta University and Calcutta High Court, sharpened the differences between the two valleys.

The problem of immigration of Bengali Muslims in the Brahmaputra Valley became acute from the early part of this century. The Line system, which was introduced to safeguard the interests of the Assamese was often violated and immigrants many times grabbed land by fraud. The Assamese, without much caring for their future, sold their lands as the immigrants often offered exorbitant prices.

The problem of immigration became acute as early

as 1931 and a note of caution was voiced in the 1931 census report about the situation to be faced by Assamese and their identity every where except in Sibsagar district. The problem did not surface after independence as the Bengali Muslims tried to hide their identity by declaring Assamese as their mother tongue in the census reports. However, when twenty eight Muslim MLAs were elected in 1978 elections and names of 7500 foreigners were detected in Mangaldai parliamentary constituency, it led to the six year long agitation against the foreigners spear-headed by the All Assam Students Union, All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad, Assam Jatiyatavadi Dal, Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad and Assam Sahitya Sabha. This region has witnessed a many faceted conflict between the states and different ethnic groups. There are border conflicts between states and conflict as well as violent clashes between different groups in every state. Autonomy demands by various groups continue to plague the region.

The ethnic hatred often takes the shape of communal outbursts. The assertion of identity often takes negative turns such as in agitations against Assamese and Bengali Scripts and ban on use of *sart* by Tripuris.

The present social tension in North-Eastern India is due to the interaction of the diverse historical, social, political and economic forces. Neither are the factors generating of these forces new to the North-Eastern situation, nor the forces which have emerged. In the present situation these forces which were dormant for some time, have only reappeared with their new permutations and combinations, creating an explosive situation. The forces operating in the North-Eastern scene are a strange combination of both integrationist and disintegrationist, constructive and destructive forces. The movement, if we take the entire region into consideration, has an adequate share of violence and non-violence. The tragedy is that in the present situation, the forces, which are so

vigorously active in the North-Eastern scene are thoroughly successful in dividing our people into two camps. The picture which is painted day and night is either perfectly white or perfectly black. An atmosphere charged with emotions, distrust and fear is created knowingly as well as unknowingly, making it impossible for the voice of dissent to be heard and thereby widening the gulf. A hysteria is successfully built up, which needs urgent remedy, so that reason has its effective appeal, the rigid attitudes smoothen and national leadership gets time to diffuse and solve the problem. Unfortunately, even those who are supposed to be highly responsible persons and who ought to refrain from expressing such tendentious reflections as are likely to exacerbate relations between different communities, are failing to do so.

The present social tension in this region poses a complex problem before the nation. There is a need for imaginativeness and thorough understanding of the situation, which may be utilised with patience, determination, ingenuity and tact, to find a solution that benefits the region without harming the country. It is really very difficult to take a holistic and balanced view of the complex situation specially when widespread attempts to create confusion, distrust and bias are being made; but there is hardly any way out. This is necessary for abandoning rigidity and for the creation of goodwill, which is so vital and essential for any negotiated settlement of the problem. The North-Eastern situation demands the strongest possible political will to make it apolitical, a will to view it as a purely national problem.

It will be a grave mistake to regard the present massive agitation and unrest in North-Eastern India as accidental. It is also not the effect of a sudden cause. Both, the tendencies of confusing effect for cause and to view it as an accidental and sudden phenomenon are clearly visible, which are bound to result in misjudgement and dangerous consequences.

As already stated, many factors are responsible for the present state of affairs in North-Eastern India, some of which are given below:-

Demographic Factors

1. *The changing demographic pattern* in some of the states of North-Eastern India has been the greatest cause of unrest in this region. Overall growth rate of population in Assam was as high as 34.97% and 34.95% for 1951-61 and 1961-71 respectively which was higher than all-India rates (21% and 24.75% respectively) during the same period. The increase of population from 55.61 lakh in 1951 to 145.25 lakh in 1971 was remarkably high. In the case of Tripura the rate of population increase was the highest. This was certainly due to large-scale influx of population from Bangladesh and Nepal. The Assamese, who are continuing their nine-month old movement for the detection of foreign nationals, their defranchisement and subsequent deportation, term this large-scale influx as a "silent invasion". They apprehend a threat to their language and culture if this influx is allowed to continue. The case of Tripura and Sikkim is cited in this regard, where the original settlers were swamped and outnumbered by the large influx of immigrants. The movement run by All Assam Students Union (AASU) and Gana Sangram Parishad (GSP) is also supported by Assam Sahitya Sabha, which is giving it an intellectual flavour. The movement received the present intensity and momentum after the Lok Sabha polls in 12 constituencies of Assam and Meghalaya were postponed. The spontaneous fervour of the movement supported by the masses, is certainly also due to fear of being outnumbered.

While immigration is not a new phenomenon for this region, its massive nature from the beginning of this century is new for Assam and other neighbouring areas. This region has seen planned large scale immigration of tea-garden labour from far away places like Bihar, Orissa, U.P and Andhra, by British tea planters followed by large-scale planned Muslim immigration from East Bengal

(specially from Mymansingh District) by Sadulla's Muslim League Ministry in pre-partition days. This was done with a view to including Assam in East Pakistan.

Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India, divided Bengal into two parts on communal lines to pursue his policy of divide and rule. He tagged Assam, without any justification, on to the Muslim majority East Bengal Province. This initiated large-scale influx of land hungry peasants from highly populated East Bengal districts. Here it may be recalled that Assam which was once a highly populated, well developed region of the country became highly depopulated, during the last century due to the repeated Burmese invasions. The devastation caused by the invasions was so great that many areas of Assam during the course of half a century were converted into dense forests. It took hardly fifty years for the highly inhabited Dhansiri valley to be converted into the famous Nambor forest (the densest forest of Asia). The same was the case of Kapili valley in Nowgong district which has the largest concentrations of such immigrants. The immigrants, who came to Assam in the early parts of this century, occupied the forest reserves, waste lands and *chor* areas. Cases of forcible occupation of the patta lands were also reported. The famous "line system" was introduced in 1920 in BARPETA subdivision of Kamrup district and in Nowgong district to prevent such indiscriminate and illegal occupation of vast area of land by the immigrants. The line system, which barred the settlement of immigrants in certain categories of land, did not succeed in preventing immigration. This caused serious concern among the Assamese people, who protested against the inflow of lakhs of people. Their protest, however, failed to bring any result.

Very soon, the partition of Bengal was undone, but by that time the large-scale immigration was already taken to be a serious problem. As early as in 1911, the Census Commissioner warned that unchecked immigration was "likely to alter permanently the whole future of

Assam and to destroy, more severely than the Burmese invaders of 1821, the whole structure of Assamese culture and civilisation". C.S. Mullan of the Census department warned that Sibsagar would ultimately remain the only district where the Assamese race would find a home of its own. These remarks and large scale immigration created concern in the minds of the Assamese intelligentsia which slowly developed into a sense of alienation from the rest of India. As a consequence, even persons like Nilmoni Phukan joined Ambikagiri Roy Choudhury in representing to Jawaharlal Nehru that, as a means of saving the Assamese race from extinction, a considerable section of the Assamese intelligentsia had even expressed views in favour of the secession of Assam from India.

The pace of immigration increased after independence. Post independence immigrants fall into the following three categories:- (a) Hindu refugees from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), (b) Illegal Muslim infiltrators from East Pakistan and (c) Immigrants from Nepal. The case of former two categories should not be mixed up. Unfortunately such tendencies abundantly visible, are creating a lot of confusion and apprehension. Again, the cases of the Nepalis of Indian origin and those who came to India from Nepal recently are not alike and the latter should not expect the same treatment.

Let us examine these cases separately.

Partition of India and the Refugee Problem

The devastating effect of the partition of the country is most felt in the eastern sector. One of the most important sections of our pre-partition population, whose contributions and sacrifices for the freedom of this country were second to none, overnight found themselves third grade citizens of a hostile country. Freedom, which was once so dear to them, became a curse; the day of independence was the beginning of an unending nightmare. Millions left their home and hearth for an unknown destiny, only to experience untold suffering. More than

forty seven years have passed since that day but their sufferings are yet to end and the human flow from across the borders is yet to cease. About ten million victims of the 'Two-Nation Theory' are still residing in Bangladesh. They are there in a state of perpetual terror with swords hanging over their unfortunate heads. Who will guarantee them their freedom and safety?

It is true that next to West Bengal, Assam and Tripura have received the largest number of refugees from Bangladesh. Their continuous influx has undoubtedly created demographic imbalance and therefore needs to be checked. The refugees who have come to India, fall into the following categories:

- (a) Registered naturalised persons: they are Indian citizens with a right to stay anywhere in India.
- (b) Refugees who came to India earlier but due to ignorance or any other reason have not registered themselves as Indian citizens; but who are otherwise living a settled life. Such persons should be awarded Indian citizenship. They should not be forced to leave their home and hearth a second time.
- (c) Refugees who came to India earlier but due to their ignorance or otherwise have not registered themselves as Indian citizens; and who are yet to be rehabilitated. A section of this category of persons may be taken out from Assam and settled in other states.
- (d) The refugees coming to India after the cut off period, should be deported back to Bangladesh.

In the last instance, some pertinent questions emerge. Should India deport these persons to Bangladesh without adequately safeguarding their rehabilitation and safety there? What can we do if Bangladesh does not agree to take them back? What can this country do to ensure safety for the minorities of Bangladesh? (Reports are pouring in

about fresh atrocities on Chittagong Buddhist tribals by Bangladesh armed forces. The tribal population constituted 97% for the population of these hills before partition) . If atrocities on the minorities of Bangladesh are not stopped, then will they not try to cross the boundary and come to India?

India was a party to the creation of the history of partition and therefore cannot escape the resultant responsibilities. For India, to demand adequate safeguards for the interest of the minorities of Bangladesh, is a part of its moral responsibility thrust on it by history. It cannot be denied by India on the pretext that it will mean interference in the internal affairs of Bangladesh. If India protests loudly for the cause of Palestinian refugees without interfering in the internal affairs of Israel, there is no reason why this country's protests cannot be louder for the cause of the refugees in India and for the ten million minorities of Bangladesh, who may otherwise be forced to come to India as refugees later on. Needless to say, India can hardly afford to receive them, as that will defeat all its family planning efforts and shatter its economy.

Problem of large-scale illegal infiltration

Large-scale, unchecked infiltration of foreign nationals from Bangladesh started right after the independence. This further disturbed the demographic pattern of this region, which had to shoulder the responsibility of the rehabilitation of millions of refugees coming from that country. Immigration from Nepal provided yet another dimension of this already complicated problem.

The provisions of the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, could not be implemented due to certain difficulties. Shri Bishnu Ram Medhi, the then Chief Minister of Assam, wanted to implement it and he persuaded the Central government to make certain amendments so as to tide over certain difficulties; but he was removed from Chief Ministership soon after that.

The news of Pakistan flags being hoisted in parts of

Assam during the period of Chinese aggression in 1962 caused concern throughout the country. The Consultative Committee of Parliament for Home Affairs made some recommendations in this regard. Shri B. N. Mallick (the then director, C.I.B.) was also sent to Assam to investigate into the matter. The members of the Consultative Committee were informed in an informal meeting by the Home Minister, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, that the Central Government had agreed to take measures to check the inflow of illegal entrants into Assam from across the borders, as short-term and long-term measures, and some of the measures were: increasing the number of border outposts and check-posts, strengthening the existing check-posts and delegation of full powers under the Foreigners Act, 1946, to the Superintendents of Police and District Magistrates in the border district for summary deportation of Pakistani infiltrators.

The Central Home Minister visited Assam for about a week during the early part of 1964 and announced certain measures for the deportation of illegal infiltrators. The announcements made by the Home Minister were welcomed by the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee, which adopted a resolution on 1st April, 1964 in which some practical measures were also suggested. Some of the relevant parts of the resolution are quoted below:

"The problem of Pakistani infiltrants is posing a serious problem for the security of this frontier State. The Committee welcomes the various announcements made by the Union Home Minister after about a week's visit to Assam on the question of expeditious deportation of illegal infiltrants.

"The Committee also feels concerned about the reports of harbouring infiltrants in some areas. The committee will like to make it clear that such anti-national activities call for stringent measures against the offenders. In the interests of the security and peace in the State, it is very necessary that every man should extend his full co-operation in tackling this problem. The Committee,

therefore, appeals to the people of Assam to extend their full cooperation to the administration in detecting such illegal infiltrants.

“Strict vigilance is necessary on the part of the people.”

The following concrete steps were suggested in the resolution:

- (i) That a target date not later than March 1965 to complete the deportation of Pak infiltrants in Assam be announced and acted upon accordingly.
- (ii) That the Citizen's National Register with house number intended for preparation of the Census of 1951 be made the basis of tracing out Pakistani nationals and deporting them without delay.
- (iii) That adequate number of tribunals be appointed immediately to achieve complete deportation of Pakistani nationals within the target date.
- (iv) That a strip of land with such depth as may be needed along the entire East Pakistan border be cleared of all habitations and declared a “prohibited area.”

Soon after, in the year 1964, a scheme known as the “Prevention of infiltration of Pakistanis into Assam” (PIP) or Nehru scheme was put into field operation. The scheme was drawn up by the Assam Police and financed by the Central government till 1969. Several quasi-judicial tribunals were set up for the purpose. The scheme was often opposed by certain circles; but Pandit Nehru firmly backed it. Some M.Ps from Assam made a representation to Pandit Nehru in 1962 against the scheme, to which he replied: “It is time infiltration was stopped and effectively dealt with. Therefore, steps have been taken recently to stop such infiltration. We may take further steps to remove illegal immigrants and we may fix 1952 as the date of our enquiry.”

The tribunals functioned effectively without political

interference upto 1967. The immigrants were given an opportunity to establish their claim to Indian citizenship in the light of the Citizenship Act, 1955, and other related enactments and 1952 was taken as the base year for the purpose. During 1964-1969, 2,40,000 infiltrators were detected, of which 1,92,000 were deported. Only 20,000 cases could be decided during the period 1967-69, as against 32,000 in 1963, 72,000 in 1964, 73,000 in 1965 and 25,000 in 1966. After 1967, political interference started and the scheme was ultimately dropped in 1969. It was again revived by the Assam government on 4th October, 1979; but it is yet to start functioning. The controversy over the cut-off year should be settled for its re-functioning.

The Nehru-Liaquat Ali Pact, India-Mujib Pact, and constitutional and legal provisions regarding foreign nationals should provide three dimensions for any consideration and the things should be decided soon in the perspective of greater national and regional interest so that the tribunals once again start functioning without any let-up and hindrance.

Large-scale, post-independence, illegal infiltration of foreign nationals was made possible mainly due to (i) mismanagement of forest reserves and other government lands in North-Eastern India. (ii) loose international borders and (iii) harbouring and shielding the illegal infiltrants by a section of people.

- (i) Mismanagement of forest reserve land and other government waste-land: anybody, who has extensively toured in North-East India, knows that these lands provided readymade shelter for lakhs of illegal infiltrators. This was not possible without the co-operation of the government officials. It will be better if immediate steps are taken in this connection.
- (ii) Loose international borders: our difficulties are also due to our loose international borders with

Tension and Conflict in North-East India

Bangladesh. The above mentioned Nehru Scheme (authored by Bhola Nath Mallick, the then Special Director of C.I.B; also known as Mallick Scheme), apart from suggesting the prevention and deportation of illegal infiltration also suggested the following measures:

- (a) Erection of a wall on the India and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) border as in the case of East and West Berlin.
- (b) Providing identity cards with photos to the Indian citizens residing in the Assam-East Pakistan border areas.
- (c) Increasing the number of check posts on the border and intensification of border security.

Pandit Nehru, it is said, instructed B. P. Chaliha, the then Chief Minister of Assam to start the construction of the wall. The Central government was to finance the project. Chaliha unfortunately advised against the erection of the wall and the scheme was dropped.

BSF played a very insignificant role in the matter of the detection of infiltrators. In the sixties, when more than two lakh infiltrators were detected by Assam Police in a period of 4-5 years, BSF could hardly detect more than an average of 200 per year. In a recent new report, an interview with a BSF officer was published which gave a very grim picture of their ability to check influx, even during the coming two years in spite of the new arrangements envisaged. The steps taken until now to check further infiltration cannot be said to be satisfactory in spite of the old agitation continuing as before.

In this respect, it is essential to prepare and implement a co-ordinated plan on influx without any delay. Construction of walls with barbed wires, electric fencing, creation of no-man's land on the border and intensification of guarding by security personnels are essential throughout Indo-Bangladesh border. This should include West Bengal-Bangladesh sector of the border also,

otherwise infiltration through that sector of the border cannot be ruled out.

(iii) It is alleged that a section of the people harbour and shield the illegal infiltrants due to obvious reasons. This not only helps illegal infiltration, but also makes their detection difficult and creates bad blood between the different communities. It is also often alleged that illegal infiltration takes place with active connivance of a section of Indian citizens, politicians, and police. A strict watch on such elements is essential. Rules should be framed in such a way that they may be firmly dealt with.

2. *State re-organisation* on linguistic lines gave momentum to the ethnic politics in North-Eastern India, which was responsible for the creation of many states and Union territories in this region and the consequent dismemberment of Assam. It had the following effects:

- (a) Limiting the job-opportunities of the Assamese people.
- (b) Creating a sense of deprivation in the minds of Assamese people.
- (c) Strengthening of the regional and ethnic sentiments in North-Eastern India.

These factors contributed their part in generating tension in this region.

3. *Lack of understanding between the dominant communities:* i.e., the Assamese and the Bengalis in Assam, Khasis and Bengalis in Meghalaya, is not a new phenomenon. The two Bengal *kheda* movements in Assam and a few riots in Shillong created deep distrust in the minds of the people and scars, difficult to heal. Some of the reasons of the lack of understanding between the dominant communities residing in this region are the following:

- (a) Over-emphasis on certain uncharitable prejudices,

like "Bengalis have superiority complex". "Assamese are idle people" etc. Such utterances need to be discouraged by one and all.

- (b) Deliberate attempt to create communal and linguistic disharmony by a section of people for their own selfish and anti-national purposes.
- (c) Over-play of ethnic and parochial sentiments with a view to creating a sense of alienation among the various sections of the people.

Apart from the above mentioned factors there are other reasons also on which some light is thrown in the succeeding chapters.

4. *Faith in the effectiveness of agitational methods:* In recent past, there was mass agitation and *satyagraha* by the Assamese people for : (a) the bifurcation of North-Eastern Railway to form North-East Frontier Railway, (b) location of head quarters of N. F. Railway in Assam, (c) building of the first road-cum-rail bridge over the Brahmaputra near Gauhati, (d) demand of a second bridge over the Brahmaputra near Tejpur, (e) providing a broad-gauge railway link upto Gauhati, (f) construction of a mini-refinery at Noonmati (Gauhati), (g) a bigger refinery at Bongalgaon, (h) recognition of Assamese as the State language, and so on. A community, which has to take recourse to agitational methods to get the tiniest of their grievances redressed, cannot be blamed for their faith in the effectiveness of agitational methods.

The stiff attitude of the Assamese people during the present agitation is partly due to their faith in the effectiveness of the agitational methods and partly due to their lack of faith in the present State-mechanics.

5. *A wrong belief in a section of the people that "violence pays", leading to insurgent activities:* Insurgency by Mizo-rebels in the early sixties and

the latest insurgent activities in Manipur (first by Kuki-Chin insurgent groups, later on by Pre-Pak, people's Revolutionary Party of Kungleipak, and MNF: Meitei National Force) and Tripura (by extremist Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti, Tripura, National Volunteer Force and Tripura Sena) should not be labelled as mere misadventures on their part.

6. *Unimaginative Bureaucracy*: If there is a general belief in a large section of the people of this region that agitation and recurring violence may ensure a massive flow of resources from New Delhi, then the lion's share of the blame must go to the unimaginativeness of the bureaucracy. It is necessary to ascertain how and to what extent this factor is responsible for misdirectional and disproportionate growth of primary sector, wrong plan and development priorities leading to the lack of adequate infrastructure and transport facilities, perpetuating a sense of backwardness and neglect and lack of industrialisation in this region.
7. *It needs a thorough study as to how far the apathy, short-sightedness and selfish motives of the ruling elites including all shades of politicians are responsible for aggravating the problem in the North-Eastern region.*
8. *Bottleneck psychology*: A very narrow land-mass (only, few kilometers wide near Siliguri) links this region with the rest of the country. This has added a new psychological factor. Due to this bottleneck psychology, this region needs constant reminding that the rest of the country has no apathy towards this region and due attention is paid to their defence and other needs.
9. *Overemphasis on certain historical facts*: In this region, certain historical facts are unnecessarily overemphasised and unnecessarily repeated in

public utterances and writings. These take the form of allegations and counter-allegations and create an atmosphere of mutual distrust and fear.

"Indian leadership", barring Mahatma Gandhi, is charged with having agreed to a proposal of a formula of Cripps Mission according to which Assam was to be grouped together with the Muslim majority East Bengal to form a Muslim majority State. The people revolted against this plan under the leadership of Shri Gopi Nath Bordoloi, who was helped by Mahatma Gandhi.

On the other hand, it is argued that the partition of Bengal was the result of the fear complex and rigid posture of the Assamese leadership, which sealed the fate of undivided India and of the Bengali Hindus. Indian leadership wanted to give a cautious trial to the Cabinet Mission plan so as to bypass the vexed communal question and consequent partition of Assam. Undivided Bengal and Assam were given almost evenly balanced representation in the constitution-making. Assam was also empowered to opt out from Section C if it so desired. The AICC resolution gave a clearcut assurance that "it will not compel Assam to act against the declared wish of the people through the Legislative Assembly". But all the persuasions, explanations and even AICC resolution failed to allay the apprehensions of the Assam leadership. It is also alleged that Assam leadership unnecessarily agreed to divide Sylhet district of Assam to get rid of the Bengalis.

It is also often repeated that Nehru abandoned the people of Assam in the face of the Chinese aggression. The allegation, although not true, has a wide appeal due to the bottleneck psychology of the people and provides enough ground for harbouring a grudge against the national leadership. The truth is that Nehru (like any other Indian leader or member of the public) was exceedingly disturbed and distressed by the military reverses suffered by India in Wallong, Sela pass and Bomdilla on November 18, 1962. It was necessary for the Prime Minister of a country to reassure its people on such occasions. Nehru,

accordingly in a radio broadcast, appreciated the feelings of the friends in Assam and pledged that India would not only extend all help to them to its utmost ability but also continue to fight and drive the Chinese away from the Indian soil.

It is often repeated that Bengalis wanted to impose their language on Assamese people. This is too old a phenomenon which is disproportionately publicised and unnecessarily gives an opportunity to a section of Assamese people to sharpen their grudge against a section of their own fellow Indians. In this context it is necessary to remember that the Britishers themselves introduced the Bengali language in Assam in the early part of their annexation of Assam (as they did in other parts of Bengal Presidency) for administrative purposes. Assam did not have an adequate number of people knowing Persian or English at that time, therefore, it was not possible to introduce these languages for administration of that State as was done elsewhere in those days.

10. *Distortion of historical facts:* Deliberate attempts to distort history have become a regular phenomenon in this part of the country. Unfortunately, the academic community is fully participating in this foul game. This helps the upsurge of all sorts of chauvinism. A fuller study of this topic, although of a controversial nature, will be highly interesting and paying in terms of national integration.
11. *Failures of the academic community:* The academic community in this country is imitative rather than creative. This is more so in the case of North-East India, and mostly in the field of social sciences. Most of the works published in the name of research are mere crude descriptions of people, society, and events. They lack reasoning and analysis. They are full of quotations from the writings of British officers, without judging the authenticity of what they wrote. The fact that they were pioneers

in the field does not undermine a more important fact that they were not trained academicians (anthropologists, historians, etc) and what they wrote was not without bias. The *Matsya Nyaya* period (a period of anarchy) continued in this region for a fairly long time, which affected the observation and judgement of the British writers, who lacked a deeper understanding of everything which was Indian. Unfortunately, everything which is written and published in the English language (and specially so if written by an individual with a white skin) has a seal of authenticity for the Indian elite.

Most of these writings describe the minutest of our differences, ignoring the massive, apparent as well as hidden similarities. In this way, they tend to boost regional and ethnic sentiments. The instances of crude generalisations and over-simplification are numerous. In the North-Eastern context, studies about what the nation and the national leadership have done for the betterment of the living conditions of the people and all-round development of this region are mysteriously few. Needless to say that such studies are absolutely necessary for creating goodwill and for national integration. On the other hand, the minutest lapses are magnified to create a sense of alienation and permanent grudge.

It is found that often the situation is allowed to deteriorate and when it takes a serious turn and explodes, then third rate academicians rush with their crude theories and explanations mainly to attract the attention of persons sitting in the corridors of power (as they believe that power and power alone can get them recognised). In this way they not only tend to degenerate into a third rate protective mechanism around the establishment (the protective mechanism which the establishment needs no more), but also by doing so, they confuse the nation and thereby cause delay tackling the problem which consequently brings a series of shocks due to the

chain of repetition of such events.

Hundreds were butchered in Tripura not because the people of Tripura, Jamatias, Halams and Reangs were strangers to the Indo-Aryan ethics and they were forced to conform to the values of the Ganga Valley's ruling class. A poor cobbler sitting on the footpath of Thangal bazar to earn his butterless bread and a *pan* shopkeeper of Paona bazar with his worries for not being able to purchase medicine for his ailing wife had certainly done nothing to prevent the recognition of Manipuri language as a language of Eight Schedule of the Constitution. The reason for the mad fury, causing arson, killing and mass evacuation are certainly not so simple. A university teacher of Jawaharlal Nehru University is meak, timid and clever enough not to assert that the old Manipuri script was also of Indian origin and its replacement should not cause a grudge against the nation as a whole. Similarly he does not contradict the false propaganda that Mainipuris were converted from animism to Hinduism by King Garib Niwaz. He is the last man to come in the way of reassertion of Meithei nationalism. Then why should he be harassed and assaulted?

The academic community has always let this country down during crises. It lacks calibre, devotion, professional morality and courage of conviction (of course it does not have any conviction) to say what the ruling elite should be told rather than what they want to hear. This community is highly conscious of its privileges, comforts and promotions. It unnecessarily suffers from fear psychosis of being kicked in the stomach. This makes them dogmatic rather than pragmatic. A nation in crisis needs a philosophy of action which our intellectuals and academicians are incapable of providing.

The failure of the academic community in the present context (as in any other crisis of the post independence era, be it economic, social, political or due to external aggression or internal instability) does irreparable harm

Tension and Conflict in North-East India

to the nation, mostly in three ways:

- (a) It fails in its duty of providing clearcut guide-lines for proper and timely action.
- (b) It confuses the nation and helps in delaying the solution of the problem and causes misuse of scarce resources and
- (c) It dampens the spirit and the will of the nation to fight against the odds.

North-East India has four universities (including an agriculture university) and an university centre (J.N.U. Centre at Imphal). The academic achievements of these universities, apart from providing degree in prototype courses and thereby helping in the creation of an army of the unemployed and subsequently adding to the problems of society are insignificant. Some of them are as yet non starters in this respect. Hectic academic activities divert the attention of the students towards the finer values of life and help in easing tension. It creates a congenial climate for mutual trust, understanding and creativity.

12. *Yellow Journalism*: The social tension in North-East India is also due to yellow poison generously injected into its body.
13. *Communication gap*: There exists a wide communication gap between this region and the rest of the country. Wrong policies are adopted due to the ignorance of the politicians and administrators. Many newspaper editors and intellectuals, academicians, and columnists, write on this region without visiting it even once and with only a very shallow knowledge of the region. Factual errors, sweeping and generalising remarks, tendency to explain everything so as to fit into a preconceived ideological framework and motivational trend of analysis become too obvious when one glances through the flood of articles written in bad taste, which are published in our newspapers and magazines. This

attempt of mass education by those who themselves need education, further aggravates the problem of an already existing communication gap.

The knowledge of our intellectuals about this region is so poor that even the difference between the Assamese (Asomiya, Ahomiya) and Ahom is safely forgotten. Statements like, "Ahomiyas who themselves came from China. . .", ". . . many Ahoms might justifiably feel they are in danger of being swamped", ". . . 20 million North-Eastern Mongoloids. . .", "Nagas live in Golaghat district of Assam. . ." appearing in the editorials and columns of national dailies clearly indicate the utter ignorance of our information about this region. Here, I would like to quote a few lines from an editorial of a national daily newspaper. It says, "Behind the agitation and posturing by its sponsors, and the talk of keeping illegal immigrants out of the voters' list lies the unmentioned question, whether Assam should exclusively be for the Assamese speaking people and all those who speak any other language, should be kept out of the voters list even if they have lived in Assam for generations. This is not only an entirely unreasonable demand but also unconstitutional. It questions the very foundations of the Indian republic". Some pertinent questions may be asked here- What are the constitutional rights of the illegal immigrants? In what way does illegal immigration help in strengthening the foundations of the Indian republic? Who, according to the editor, are illegal immigrants?" It is clear that the editor has failed to understand and differentiate between the illegal immigrants and non - Assamese speaking Indian citizens of Assam. All this creates confusion and also helps in generating a sense of insecurity in the minds of non-Assamese Indian citizens of Assam and thereby helps in creating tension.

14. *Political misapprehensions:* A demand was made in 1954 before the State Reorganisation Commission to include Goalpara district of Assam in West Bengal. A similar demand was made to form a full

fledged state comprising of Cachar district of Assam and Tripura (it was only a class C state) at that time. This demand was made on the plea of these areas being predominantly Bengali speaking. It created misunderstandings between the two dominant communities of Assam. The demand of "*Brhattar Bangla*" from certain circles further aggravated their fear and misapprehensions. There was a slight tilt in the linguistic representation in the Legislative Assemblies of Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur during the last Assembly elections, which did not go unnoticed. A regional party named Purvachal Rajya Parishad by Abdul Kadir Laskar, was formed with the aim of the creation of a separate Bengali speaking state named "Purvachal" out of Assam. The party declared its intention to fight elections in ten parliamentary constituencies of Assam. This also generated psychological tension.

15. *Explosion of aspirations of the youth:* There was a rapid expansion of the educational facilities in this region in the post independence era. Similarly, due to the increase in the number of states, and expansion of administrative machinery, employment opportunities increased manifold. This catalysed the explosion of the aspirations of the youth of this region. The revenue-earning productivity and industrialisation was, however, slow and the employment potential of the administrative machinery has reached its saturation point. Thus there is a potential source of strain and tension.
16. *Vested interest in keeping up social tension:* A section of the society in this region has developed vested interest in keeping up social tension due to various reasons.
17. *Secessionist forces:* It is not a secret that secessionist forces are active in this region. We

have read about Sula (Seven units liberation army) and many other such organisations. Such forces become ineffective in an atmosphere of mutual trust and understanding. These forces endeavour to create discord, misunderstanding and deep-rooted distrust between the various communities. With their well-knit propaganda machinery they try to strengthen the parochial tendencies and help in sharpening the deep rooted sense of grudge and mass-resentment by constantly telling the masses that they are exploited. The tone of the slogans written on the walls of many North Indian cities and towns needs careful study. They convey the message to the dominant communities that they are being exploited by the outsiders. They also convey a message that their language and script are being neglected. This is no way different from what was done in North-East India sometime ago. Posters saying that 'Assam, gives oil, etc., and gets only salt' is a part of an organised game. The meak, mild, well behaved and hospitable Tripuris were constantly told that they were exploited by the outsiders and that nothing is done to develop Kok-Barak (Tripuri language) . Same was done in Manipur and elsewhere in this region. The poison worked slowly, unnoticed by the short sighted leadership. Slowly a community became organised and aggressive, and others terror-stricken and panicky. Other methods like killing a man here, another there, some cases of arson and looting, underground literature and notices threatening one community or another were also used for creating a sense of insecurity, specially in the minds of non-dominant communities. The slogans raised against the Bahiragat (people coming from other states of India to Assam) in newspapers of Assam created suspicion in the minds of non-Assamese Indian citizens of Assam. This helped in creating confusion between the illegal immi-

grants, refugees and non-Assamese speaking Indian settlers.

These elements also try to extend the area of conflict and thrive on genuine mass grievances without which it is difficult to create an explosive situation. Once such an explosive situation is created, the reason becomes the first casualty and it becomes very easy to spark a stir. "Trigger-happy CRP men sparked Manipur stir" was a newspaper caption. It is found that many clashes between different communities of this region were sparked by individual fights. This shows that upsurge of parochialism has created an explosive situation.

What happened in Manipur and Tripura recently was perhaps an experiment to find out the effectiveness of mass terror as a means of large scale reshuffle of population. It should be our endeavour to see that the same is not repeated elsewhere. This seems to be the second phase of their technique, which, if allowed unabated will start the third phase i.e., the chain reaction of such events elsewhere and thereby undermine the basic concepts of our republic.

At a time, it is necessary to rehabilitate the people involved in secessionist activities, but it should not be made a routine affair so that the lure of the unemployed youth to get employed and rehabilitated through violence becomes great. The V.I.P. treatment by passing through the corridors of violence sets a tempting precedence.

18. *Foreign hand:* It is alleged that active foreign hand is operating behind the scenes and helping the turmoil in North-East India. China and Pakistan actively supported insurgency in this region. The reports of training camps for Tripura tribal insurgents operating in Bangladesh are too fresh in our memory. The help rendered by other countries in creating tension in this region is also reported from time to time. The question is why should these foreign countries help anti national activi-

ties in this region and what do they want to achieve in this way. It is not difficult to find an answer to these questions. These countries with the help of anti national elements and their collaborators may try to convert this area into a region of instability, with a view to bringing a third split in this sub-continent. The centripetal forces i.e. nationalist forces in this region were always stronger than the centrifugal ones. It is necessary to have a balanced view of the situation and not to overemphasize and exaggerate the strength of the latter.

Action needed

The present situation in North-East India demands early and firm action on the part of central leadership. The people of this region should be made to believe that Government understands their problems and is sincerely trying to solve them.

It is necessary to solve the foreign nationals problem for ever, by sealing the borders with Bangladesh (by creating a no man's land and laying mines if necessary). The reports of Assamese-medium mobile schools in Bangladesh point to the fact that they mean to continue the influx of population to this country. A study of the demographic change in the border villages in certain sectors due to acts of the criminals from across the border is also necessary.

While sealing the international border, it is necessary to ensure diplomatically that minorities in Bangladesh are allowed to live safely.

It is also necessary to remove the genuine hurdles in the way of the development of this region.

2

*Aspects of History and
Historical Background*

North-East India comprises of the States of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. These seven states have a total area of 2,59,054 sq. kms., which is approximately 8% of the total geographical area of the country. It is inhabited by about three crore people mostly tribal. Except for the three valleys, namely, Brahmaputra Valley, Surma (Barak) Valley and Imphal Valley, the remaining two-thirds of the area of this region is hilly.

North-Eastern India has attracted considerable attention of the people of this country as well as that of foreign countries due to various reasons. This region has witnessed armed insurgency which was aided directly or indirectly by China and Pakistan now Bangladesh. This generated much concern in the minds of the people of our country, as this area has strategic international borders. It borders China (Tibet) in the north, Burma in the east and south-east and Bangladesh in the south and south-west. The principle of state reorganisation based on linguistic lines was successfully challenged in North-Eastern India and as a result, the formation of states like Meghalaya, Manipur and Nagaland took place. However, there were other factors also which contributed towards the formation of these states. This diversion in the principle followed in the formation of States on the lines other than the linguistic one gave a new dimension to the

into the village Namghars, or prayer house which they then set on fire".

"The terror which they inspired among the people was so great that many thousands fled into the hills and jungles... where large numbers died of disease or starvation; and only a small remnant, after enduring unspeakable hardships managed to reach the plains of the Surma valley. Several of the sub-montane villages of Jaintia are inhabited by their descendants, who still talk pure Assamese. The depopulation of the region around Doboka and the Kopili valley dates from this disastrous time, which is still fresh in the minds of the inhabitants of Nowgong, who speak with as much horror of the Mahar Upadrab or "oppression of the Burmese".

During the early part of British rule, Singphos and other Himalayan tribes attacked the plains of Assam and took thousands of people as slaves. The raids of the hill people on the plains continued till the end of the last century. Raids and counter-raids by and among the hill people and punitive expeditions by the Government, were regular features of British rule in North-Eastern India in the nineteenth century. Needless to say, this gave a bias in their historical viewpoint and they were unable to assess the real power and authority enjoyed by the kings of Assam over the neighbouring hill areas.

The state of affairs in North-Eastern India in the nineteenth century was an exceptional one in the whole history of this region. A comparatively longer period of dynastic rule of the kings of this region was only possible if they did not face the same challenge from the neighbouring hill tribes, as the Ahoms faced in the last part of their rule and the Britishers in the beginning of their rule in this region. Long dynastic rule in a narrow strip of land like the Valley of Brahmaputra or that of Imphal and Burma could only be possible if there was an understanding and harmony in power equations between the people of hills and plains of North-East India.

Dearth of early historical records is an all-India phenomenon. Naturally, like the prehistory of the rest of the country, the history of the North-Eastern region of that period is also based on gleanings from a few ancient inscriptions. There are copious references of *pragjyotish* in *Mahabharat* and *Kamrupa* in *Puranas* and *Tantras*, *Kalika Puran*, *Vishnu Puran* and *Yogini Tantra* give the boundary of Kamrupa in the ancient times, which does not show any exaggeration over that of the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, Huen-tsang, who visited India in the first half of the seventh century and also Kamrupa during that period during the reign of Bhaskar Varman (600-648 A. D.) Huen-tsang says that the circumference of the kingdom of Kamrupa was nearly 1, 700 miles and its western boundary was the Karatoya river, while the eastern boundary was a line of hills adjacent to the tribes on the Chinese frontier.

One point, which deserves mention here, is that the political system in this part of the country was similar to that of the rest of the country. Like other parts of the country, this region had local chieftains under the petty kings who in turn accepted the sovereignty of the monarch. Bhagdatta, the legendary king of *pragjyotish* and Bhaskar Varman, the king in the seventh century accepted the overall sovereignty of the central authority i.e. Yudhisthir of the *Mahabharata* age and Harsha, the India monarch of the seventh century respectively. The horse-sacrifice (*Ashwamedha-Yajna*) was also performed by the Varman kings of Kamrupa, such as Mahendravarman, Bhutivarman and Sthitvarman and their imperial powers were duly recognised.

India allowed decentralization of political power with limited control by the monarch. The boundaries shifted, but India remained India. A look at the following quotation from the *Sutra of the Excellent Golden Light* shall make my point clear.

“When the eighty four thousand kings of the eighty four thousand states are contented with their own

territories, they will not attack one another or raise mutual strife. When all these kings think of their mutual welfare and feel mutual affection and joy, contented in their own dominions, India will be prosperous, well-fed, pleasant and populous. The earth will be fertile, and the months and seasons and years will all occur at proper time. . . And all living beings will be rich with all manner of riches and corn, very prosperous but not covetous".

The decentralized political power frame provided a strong and effective control mechanism at the grass-root level, strength to the system and relative stability inspite of wars and occasional strife. This system successfully worked till Turk and Afghan invaders with a different political philosophy attacked India and tried to destabilize it. The conscious readers of Indian history fully understand the need of a strong and united India as the external threat with its manifestations shall always remain. Under the umbrella of a strong central power, we need to have effective decentralization of power upto the lowest level.

This should operate in a democratic frame. The grass-root democracy should not function under a conflict situation where unity is always at stake and the whole society is divided. Consensus should guide the working of democracy to avoid wastage of energy. Unfortunately, this has not happened and this is one of the sources of tensions in society in North-East India and the rest of the country. In conformity with the above mentioned political philosophy, India has always had democracy at the grass-root level, and regional and sub-regional rulers with different degrees of political control. North-East India was no exception.

The foreign invasion posed a threat for traditional Indian polity and the traditional ruling elite. However, very soon the invaders learnt to live and co-operate with the system and to use it for their benefit. Akbar used the system and stabilized Moghul rule in India, Aurangzeb countered it and as a consequence the Moghul empire

became weak. The British smoothened their rule in India as they used the existing control mechanism to their advantage. The Nagas, who had fought them tooth and nail, cooperated with them and a single Deputy Commissioner could ensure satisfactory law and order situation. We undermined the system and made it ineffective and could not fill the void by creating a monolithic, huge law and order machinery. As a result, there is violence and disorder everywhere. This statement is valid for the entire country, but more so for the tribal areas of this region.

The hill people of North-Eastern India and those of the Himalayas were termed as Kiratas. The fact that Ganges and goddess Durga are termed "*Kirati*" stands in the way of accepting it as a racial connotation rather than a geographical one.

North-Eastern India has immense linguistic, cultural, social and religious diversity. In spite of the apparent diversity in view, there exist a large number of factors which unite the people of this region with each other on the one hand and with that of the rest of the country on the other. A study of the various aspects of life, beliefs, and folklore of the various communities of this region will reveal the unity in diversity (rather, the diversity in unity), which is certainly the outcome of centuries of contact and the process of give and take it generated. Except for a few cases, clan endogamy is prohibited throughout the country including the tribal areas of North-Eastern region. The concept of a supreme being which is the Creator, but not worshiped as He is uninvolved in the after affairs of creation, is shared by the people through out the country. Most of our languages have the "subject-object-verb" pattern of sentence. These are a few examples only which illustrate the age old contact and common shared heritage of the Indian people.

The myth of race was given undue importance by the Britishers, as it helped their imperial ends. They tried to forget that the people of this region have a thorough mixing of bloods. In this connection, I would like to refer

two points; Firstly, Indian society was not fussy about purity of Blood. This may be proved by copious examples from Vedic, Epic and Buddhist literature. The mother of Vyas, the editor of Vedas and the *Mahabharata* was a fisher-woman. The same woman, Satyawati was the ancestress of the *Kaurawas* and *Pandavas* of epic fame. Hypergamy and caste mobility had social sanction to a great extent. This is more true in the North-East region. Social degradation by declaration as *Vratya* and restoration of status by *Vratya-stom* were both permissible, allowing two way mobility. There are numerous examples of caste—tribe continuum and spatial mobility. Secondly, the society worked for cohesion and integration. In caste-society, a community found a place in *Varnas* frame. In tribal society, the distinct and diverse ethnic elements were gradually integrated. The dominant trend was towards perfect homogeneity. The social and not the ethnic frame was, and still continues to be dominant. It brings homogeneity. At best there is superimposition of one on another with a perfect equation to allow social harmony. Ethnic diversity used to exist only temporarily. A non-Chang in a Chang village and a non-Tangkhum in a Tangkhum village were essentially submerging their identities. Among Limbus (also known as Kiratis or Kirantis) of Libuan region of Nepal and western Sikkim, almost half of the clans are known as *Kastigotra* and another half as *Lhasa gotra*. The tribe allowed two distinct ethnic groups to merge their identities into a single homogeneous identity. Thus the entire social mechanic worked for cohesion, harmony and homogeneity and not for the heterogeneity and divided identity. Anybody else in a tribal village was to be adopted by a clan of that village to be an integral part of the same.

Apart from strengthening the myth of race, British colonialists also over-emphasised the migration of races and the migration theory. The British were the latest in coming to India and perhaps they wanted to convey to the Indians, "You came yesterday and we came today. The country either belongs to you and to us or to none"

For them the vast fertile enchanting and loving land mass of India — tenderly loving as a mother, was just empty till Aryans, Dravidians, Mundas and Indo-Mongoloids came to people it just a few thousand years ago. India with all the gifts of nature, sun-shine, rivers, abundant water, fertile soil, hospitable climate etc. had the curse of remaining empty. Central Asia and North Europe with all the anger and fury of nature and devoid of nature's gifts were the cradles of civilization: humanity flourished where nature was hostile. The illogical theory of migration has been carried to an absurd end by colonial masters.

The study of castes and tribes was started by our colonial rulers, resulting in publications of many beautiful and scholarly monographs. The study of Indian culture, religions, languages etc. was a welcome development. 'Linguistic Survey of India' by G.A. Grierson was a monumental work. While studying the language of the then *Madhya Bharat*, a team going from the Hindi area described it as a dialect of Marathi and another team coming from the Marathi language side claimed the same language to be a dialect of Hindi. It is clear that the dialect has something in common with Hindi and Marathi both, but the emphasis of the study was on pointing out the differences, rather than on similarities. The aim of the studies of the colonial master was to depict India as a confused and divided entity. This was a part of a well laid out strategy prepared after the 1857 sepoy mutiny. The micro studies on castes and tribes and other such work depicted India as a heterogeneous and confused conglomeration of different races, cities, tribes, languages, dialects, regions, and religions. They were successful in projecting the empire as the liberator, the deliverer of good, the unifier of India and the best guarantee for safeguarding the interests of the fringe areas, the tribals and the untouchables. "Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal" by Dalton, and numerous monographs by Gurdon, Lyall, Johnstone, Hutton, Mills, Shakespeare and others were written by in pursuance of the policy framed by Alfred

Lyall who was an important colonial functionary. They provide valuable information and many of them are true masterpieces. There was a need of macro studies based on such works and massive field and library works by Indian writers.

The search of the hidden cord of unity within Indian society by scholarly and objective studies by scholars to break the trend set by followers of Lyall was essential for India. Unfortunately, the trend set by him continues, and macro studies have failed to replace micro studies. The academic community and its culture of hundred quotes and re-quotes have not only failed to answer the imaginary conflict situation of core vs fringe, Aryans vs non-Aryans, exploiters vs exploited, caste vs tribe, giver vs taker etc. but have strengthened the same. Gait gave a strange twist to the history of Assam based on the fact that (1) the early kings of Assam had *Asura* epithet and therefore, they were non-Aryans and (2) the river names of Assam start with the syllable *Di* (Boro word for water) and therefore the land belonged to them. The word *Asura* had behavioural connotations and therefore "*Vritraghna*" (Killer of *Vritra* i.e., *Indra*) of *Rigveda* was also *Brahmaghna* (Killer of *Brahmana*) and *Vritra* was both *Asura* and a Brahmin. The word *di* and similar words in Mizo etc. are in no way different from the word "*toya*" for water in Sanskrit. *Garibniwaj* was instrumental in replacing one sect of *Vaishnavism* with another. Meitheis were *Vaishnavites* before him and remained *Vaishnavite* after him. This fact is ignored and a distorted history is presented to the readers. History of North East India is full of such oversimplifications and distortions which send wrong signals and strengthen the assumed grievances.

The regional sentiments based on the dichotomy of core vs fringe are mainly based on misgivings. They need academic answers more than anything else - as in reality, the said dichotomy is a myth. The problems and sufferings, the dreams and aspirations of the tolling masses, the peasants and tribals are the same everywhere. The

peasant and tribal societies operate on the same wavelengths. In case of languages, inspite of linguistic diversity, India is a language zone. These facts need to be conveyed in a proper perspective to the people to generate a deep sense of belonging. The communication gap needs to be bridged. Many parts of India such as the North East fringe of Bihar remained unconquered by the Moghuls, but the people of those areas never made issue out of the fact as is done in the North East. I take it as a failure of our academic community, which is incapable of answering them at the level of ideas. Basically, our academicians are the consumers and not producers. This is why our academic disciplines, specially history, anthropology, indology, sociology and linguistic continue to be colonial disciplines. The various obsessions of academicians and their lack of commitment further complicate the matter. India was facing the problem of insurgency in Nagaland, but Shrinivas did not care to cross even Tista, leave aside the Brahmaputra, for the study of social change in this part of the country. The works of Roy Burman are mostly descriptive. Indian historians, with the exception of Tapan Ray Choudhary and Irfan Habib, did not care to study the history of the North East as a part of the history of India. Even Roy Choudhary and Habib included the history of the medieval period of Assam only in the Appendix of the Cambridge History of India Vol 1 (1982). Serious studies on North-Eastern language are lacking, and for many, Grierson stands on the boundary of frontiers of knowledge. The study of politics and state systems needs to be done in a pan Indian frame. The analysis of the trends, the processes, the systems and the frame in such studies are more important.

The central government has generously given funds for the development of the region and yet there is a massive grudge. The political elites of the states are more responsible than anybody else for the silent demographic aggression by Bangladesh, but the anger is directed elsewhere. The leaders of the anti-migration movement

of Assam performed daecimally when given the power to rule and act. There is a massive systems failure. The problem of Bangladeshi Hindu refugees was to be tackled diplomatically, but India miserably failed in doing so and claiming proportionate land from Bangladesh. In reality, we have lauded the case of Palestinian refugees more than that of our own. Similarly, the problem of illegal immigration of Bangladeshi Muslims is a national problem, but our obsession with religion has forced us to close our eyes towards communalisation of the same.

A large number of our problems are based on assumed grievances of an academic nature and therefore need academic answers. Unfortunately, our academics have failed us in such cases.