

## State Formation, Nation-building and Aspects of Peace in Northeast India

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Peace may be seen as lack of violence and not as denial of conflict. Peace is also an inseparable ingredient of consensus building for an open society, which permits formal difference of opinions. Democracy, which was defined by Abraham Lincoln as the 'government of the people, for the people and by the people', cannot be conceived without a civic society. How does one conceive a civic society? A civic society is one, which is based on consensus of views on socially important issues among the citizens, who consciously decide to abjure violence for settling differences among themselves. In this way, peace, civic society and social consensus are significant ingredients of any democratic dispensation. No doubt, there is a variety of democracy; but in spite of all difference of opinions on its content, operation and forms of governance, it takes care of the maximum interests of the largest number of the citizens of the state.

Northeast India, formerly known as the British Assam, got its present identity after 1947, when the British Indian Empire was divided into Indian Union and Pakistan. The region, tugged into the easternmost corner of the country and bedeviled with a series of problems, developed an enclave mentality and invariably found itself pleading for operation of the normal rules of the Republic, which are elsewhere granted as a matter of routine. Why is it so? Some of us, who spend decades of active lives serving in Northeast India, are puzzled to apathy and stereotype on the region found elsewhere in the country. I for myself have been asking an obvious question: 'why do the violence, conflict, insurgency and denial of civic rights in Northeast region not



create an instant national concern?' Without blaming any body, one potential source of the answer may be identified with that of the uneven growth of civic society and nation-building mechanism in the country.

Nation-building is the resolution of the polity to shape the destiny of its citizens in the image of a commitment made by the national leadership. It may be in the form of welfare measures for the citizens, providing the basic necessities of life, diversifying the economy through time bound planned development of the resources, taming the rivers through dams, building steel plants, shipyards, harbours, machine making factories and a host of other visible signs of reconstruction. It may as well have some ingredients of image building devices such as a national airline, national flag, carrier shipping lines, an imposing architecture for seating its legislature and headquarters of the head of the state / government. The nation-builders send the message to the masses suggestive of their sense of purpose, direction of policy and capacity of resources. Normally, nation-building refers to reconstructing the polity with a purpose within a given time frame and accordingly the objectives of the nation-building exercise may change from time to time.

State formation is a historical process through which a polity transforms itself into a state with its various distinct functions with a distinct monopoly of physical coercion of its citizens in certain conditions. Though there are a number of claimed theories for the origin of state, social evolution, theory of coercion and conquest, theory of association throw possible light on the evolution of the state as a universal institution. However, all scholars agree that generation of economic surplus for maintaining a standing army, a functioning bureaucracy and building of a capital/ urban centre is the necessary condition in almost all the cases. And these considerations amply make clear how ecologically favoured locations such as Nile valley in Egypt, Hwan Ho in China, Mohanjodaro and Harappa in the Indus valley and Euphrates and Tigris valley in Babylon gave birth to not only the early civilizations, but also the organized states. The state boundaries depended on the might of the rulers and thus they kept on changing in course of time all through human history. There have been great empires, great rulers, and mighty conquerors in the past in the different



parts of the world, whose exploits make rich folklore of the human heritage. Though at least some of them inspire the peoples in different parts of the world, it is difficult and futile to identify and draw the boundaries of those past states as living reality of modern life.

Nation-states came into being in Europe after renaissance at the end of the medieval period of their history as a reaction to the supremacy of the papacy. Many of such newly emerged states sent voyages of geographical discoveries, took advantage of scientific and technological inventions and established great modern empires all over the world, turning many of the traditional societies into their colonies. Two Great Wars in the twentieth century changed the imperial map of the world and many of the past colonies declared their independence from the European powers. Indian Union was one of the early members of the newly independent comity of nations. The social reality of India turned it consciously into a federation of nationalities with a unitary constitution, which provides the basis for federating units' inter-relations on a democratic basis. In this way, India is not a nation-state on typical European model, but national state, in which nations together constitute the Indian Union.

The paper briefly examines the historical process through which regional entities of Northeast formed the states in the past and what happened to them in course of time. Secondly, it tries to identify aspects of nation-building, which impinge on the region and comment on the socio-political scene in the region. Thirdly, an effort has been made to understand the prevailing conditions of conflict and violence in the region as an uneven process of consensus building for a regional civil society. Peace in itself may be desirable, but it cannot be attained in the absence of consensus building among the regional communities, which may pave the way for building a civil society essential for a democratic polity. The author believes that violence emerges, when efforts of consensus building are denied a chance and thus, push the regional societies away from possibility of being a civil society. In other words, perpetrators of violence in an open society such as India, either do not believe in its efficacy, or are guided by their stark petty considerations and selfish motives.



### **State Formation in and Ethnic Groups of Northeast India**

A number of political philosophers wrote on the origin of state and developed a number of hypotheses as to how communities turned in to structured states. The study of early state formation has a problem of primary and secondary formations. Early states have been termed as the pristine ones and secondary states were termed as the derivatives of some or other primary states. However, Henry J M Claessen and Peter Skalnik believed that state as an ancient institution “gives expression to the existing relations in a society and to ideas pertaining to power, authority, force, justice, property and many other phenomena” (Claessen & Skalnik 1978). Frederick Engels found the state as a later development, as in his formulation, “the state...has not existed from all eternity. There have been societies, which managed without it, which had no notion of the state or state power. At a definite stage of economic development, which necessarily involved the cleavage of society in to classes, the state became a necessity because of this cleavage” (Engels 1972). Furthermore, based on the stages of development of the various societies, the states have been categorized into (i) Early and (ii) Modern ones. While early states were found to be institutionally simple, pre-capitalist and non-industrialized, the modern ones are complex, bureaucratic, developed and industrialized. After F Engel’s classic work, Sripad A Dange studied early Indian formation through his famous work, *India: Through Savagery to Barbarism*.

Historians inform us that Magadh was the earliest mighty empire in India. Chandra Gupta Maurya not only succeeded to the throne of Magadh, but also defeated Greek ruler, Salucus, a successor of Alexander the Great. From Maurayan rulers to Guptas kingdom of Magadh saw consolidation of the empire from Himalayan ranges beyond Vindhyan ranges from Afghanistan (Gandhar) to Pragjyotisa (Assam) and from the Arabian seas and Bay of Bengal. Thereafter, there were ups and downs, but there were a number of States, strong and weak, big and small, in the various parts of India all through ancient period to the medieval age of the Indian history. First, it was the Kushanas, followed by the Afghans, and then the Mughals, the migrants or invading armies from the North West corner of India, who turned out to be the rulers of better parts of India invariably



based in Delhi. The Great Mughals ruled India for better than two hundred years and consolidated their empire from Afghanistan to Deccan and Bengal to Baluchistan. It was a period of glory, wealth, luxury, power, prosperity and all-round development. In course of time, internal contradictions emerged and the empire declined leading to the emergence of the Marathas, the Nizam, the Awadh, Hyder Ali and others. In this confused situation, the British Empire came on scene and projected itself as the successor to the Great Mughals. A number of historians have written on that and we need not go into the details of it.

Coming to the Northeast region, it was the Ahoms, who crossed the Patkoi ranges and established their kingdom in upper Assam in the twelfth century A D. Since then a number of Indo-Burman, Sino-Indic and Indo-Tibetan speaking communities moved to the various parts of the region. These communities were at different stages of their socio-economic development at that time and their myths of migration and origin state a rich tapestry of human heritage. Naturally, some of them got evolved into state systems in course of time. In recent times, Surajit Sinha wrote his much acclaimed paper on Rajputization among the Bhumij of Chotanagpur, on the western border of Bengal (Sinha 1962), which set a new trend of analyzing polities among the preliterate communities. Some two decades after his major work on the Bhumij, Sinha initiated a seminal exercise on polity formation and state system on about half a dozen communities of Northeast region (Sinha 1987). Among more than two hundred ethnic groups of the region, only about half a dozen communities had state systems in the past: Meiteis, Ahoms, Jaintia, Koch-Rajbanshis, Dimasas, Cacharis, Bhotias. In all the cases discussed on the occasion, two reasons emerged supreme as catalyst for state formation: (i) coagulation of lineage or clan-based units of one or more ethnic groups, or/ and (ii) conquest of segmentary tribes by larger principalities or states (Sinha 1987: xviii). Based on the studies presented in workshop, Sinha developed a three-fold typology of the regional polities: (i) small chieftainships such as Mizos, (ii) evolved chieftainships like Khasi Syiems, (iii) archaic sovereign states such as Ahoms, Jaintias, Meiteis, Dimasa and Bhotias of Sikkim (Sinha 1987: xvii). It is pertinent to note that many of the regional communities remained in the classical pre-state stage of their social and economic



development up to the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the British emerged on the political horizon of the region as arbitrators of political destiny.

This brief and hurried survey gives certain lessons for us to keep in mind. Firstly, every age has its legitimate political systems in various parts of the present day Indian Union as elsewhere. Secondly, the state boundaries have been fluctuating and there is no fixity of territorial limits of a state in time and space. Thirdly, there has been evolution in case of certain communities from statelessness to state systems, while in case of others, there have been cases of devolution, when states lost political power and the communities got incorporated as subjects/citizens of some other states. Fourthly, human society is a dynamic entity; it not only evolves itself, but also migrates from one location to another because of a variety of reasons leading to plurality of the communities at strategically favoured regions. Lastly, taking lead from the first point above, Indian Union came into being on 15 August, 1947 as successor of the British colonial power and it legitimately inherited the territories enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

### **Nation-building Efforts among the Newly Emerged Developing Countries**

We have noted how the Second World War became a catalyst for the emergence of new nations, which aspired to evolve institutions, amenities, and over-all development of resources with a view to providing better quality of life to their recently liberated citizens. The problem was that the resources, human and material, were limited and urgent commitments to impoverished masses were daunting. There were two models of development easily available in the 1950s: market driven capitalist mode of production followed by the Western Democratic countries and their colonies, and the state-controlled socialistic planned economic restructuring of revolutionary Socialist blocks of the countries. It was a difficult choice for most the new nations, as they lacked resources, skills, administrative acumen and leadership. Moreover, those at the helm of affairs of these nations had made commitment to their peoples that once the hated colonial rulers would be driven away, all their problems would be solved within no time and they would have a life of comfort and prosperity. But the reality turned out to be harsh in especially war ravaged post-1945



years. In such a situation, India made a conscious choice to adopt revised Soviet model of planned economic development, in which State controlled market driven capitalist mode of production as a part of Five Years Plans. Very soon, many of the third world countries adopted different variants of the socialistic mode of planned economy and got themselves busy in building national resources in terms of institutions, amenities and services.

With a view to building a strong and new nation in many of the countries, special privileges of the elite were abolished; land tenure was reoriented; social engineering was attempted and people's voices were heard before taking far reaching decisions affecting them. New capitals were built; factories were installed; ports, airports, cities, and other such amenities were created; agricultural and industrial production was proposed to be increased in a pre-fixed short period of time. In brief, an outlook of newness, dynamism, capacity building and serving the national cause was instilled as the mantra of the new establishment. The new leaders of new nations were in a hurry, so to say, to show and prove to the world that they were capable of bringing prosperity, development and happiness to their peoples. But age-old impediments to these efforts were many and at times they proved to be stronger than that of the forces of the new dynamism. Thus, committed goals were occasionally not met leading to diffidence and frustration. Apart from traditional vested interests of religious obscurantism and feudal privileges, a variety of corrupting elements also got opportunities to sabotage the on-going march to future. Naturally, criticisms, and at times, quite uncharitable ones, were leveled and the entire efforts of nation building were ridiculed. In frustration, some of the newly emerged nations turned authoritarian; further giving gist to the criticism of their known or unknown enemies. The vested interest in the form of opponents of change and former colonial elements were as if waiting in the wings to find faults with the entire exercise.

Social scientists were quick to provide appraisal to this new experiment under way in such a massive and comprehensive way. For example, Karl Deutsch studied the routes of assimilation and mobilization in the post-World War I Czechoslovakia and Finland, a non-sovereign state of Scotland, a new nation-state of the Third World, India (Deutsch 1963). However, the most significant attempt to



conceptualize the phenomenon of state formation and nation-building was the series of studies of political transformation organized by Gabriel Almond –Lucien W Pye Committee of the American Social Science Research Council (Almond & Coleman, 1960 and others). These studies were mainly concerned with the newly emerged polities of the 'Third world' such as Burma, Ghana, India, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Ceylon, Turkey, etc. They tried to identify crucial variables in a generic process of change from the traditional polity to the modern 'bureaucratic – participant' state, though the idea of such a participant nation-state was European in origin. These studies failed to provide comparable experiences of nation building in Europe and the Third World countries.

Then in the 1960s, a series of studies were made in which varied experiences of nation building in Europe and other parts of the world were compared. In this series of studies, mention may be made of Richard Benedix's (Benedix 1964) comparisons of nation-building experiences of Germany, Russia, India and Japan. Holt and Turner's work on England and Japan, France and China (Holt and Turner 1966) and Barrington Moore's analysis of the economic bases of political transformation in England, France, Germany, Russia, United States of America, Japan, China and India. (Moore 1966) Karl Deutsch and his colleague at the universities of Yale and Harvard took up another dimension of and built up computer archival data on the new as well as the old polities.

By early 1970s, a relatively vast literature was piled up and it was thought desirable to assess the conceptual contributions to the understanding of genesis and growth of the polities of the world. In such an effort, Stein Rokkan (Rokkan 1971) identified the imbalances in the ranges of the cases and variables in the studies of the polities under the heads, (i) the large nation bias, (ii) the whole nation bias, and (iii) the economic growth bias. Further, he emphasized the need for comparability of nation building experiences across the continents. He also identified six 'crisis of development' such as penetration, integration, participation, identity, legitimacy and distribution as issues, challenges and policy options in course of nation building. Similarly, Kothari reviewed the literature on nation building under three heads: (i) social mobilization theory, (ii) centre and periphery and (iii) modernization as the favorite themes of the Western academicians.



(Kothari 1971). These Western biases were criticized by the academicians of the Third World, and rightly so. All these resulted in the publication of a significant work on State Formation and Nation Building edited by S N Eisenstadt and Stein Rokkan in 1973.

One learns from the above that nation-building is both an effort to reorient the national governance on a participatory basis, in which citizens willing to contribute and play a positive role in shaping the national policies, and a process through which various amenities, assets and services are created for the wellbeing of the nation state at large. This was considered imperative in the aftermath of newly emerged states in the 1950s, when the colonial powers withdrew from the scene, leaving behind their impoverished and exploited colonies to fend for themselves under trying conditions. The newly independent states were proud inheritors of rich historical traditions and had promised their citizens a new dawn of prosperity in freedom, but resources, expertise and experience were so limited at their disposal that they had planned for cherished goals. Many of them had visions for a bright future, but they were also handicapped by the hostile international atmosphere. Those were the days of 'cold war' in which external support was always provided at a political price, which many of the new nations were unwilling to pay. In this background, their visions, commitments, priorities, policies, and in short, their nation building efforts were implemented in a lop-sided manner leading to regional imbalance even within the nation states. Meanwhile, aspirations of the people were rising exponentially without reference to the nation building endeavours. Ill-effects of lop sided nation building are invariably expressed by the civil society as a mechanism of corrective democracy.

### **Civil Society and Democracy**

Civil society as opposed to primordial ethnic entities is considered an essential ingredient of a functioning and vibrant democratic system. Century's back, the social philosopher, Adam Ferguson, wrote an 'Essay on History of Civil Society' in 1767, in which he treated it as a system of interrelated institutions. Since then, there is a considerable literature on the theme of civil society. As a representative source, the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* finds the term used in five different meanings:



- (a.) The term civil society can imply a recognition of general obligation of citizenship and thus legitimacy of the existing legal order as a society as a whole; pains taken to limit defiance to a particular legal clause or policy, and/ or avoid violence, may be construed as an affirmation of general citizenship duties.
- (b.) Civil can be taken to refer to the opposite of 'military' in a broad sense. The customary stress on non-violence may be construed to signify either: (a) a recognition of the state's claim to monopoly with respect to all physical violence, or (b) a rejection of all physical violence as illegal or morally wrong under all circumstances regardless of purpose.
- (c.) Civil can refer to opposite of 'uncivil' or 'uncivilized'.
- (d.) 'Civil' can suggest that the objective of obedience is to institute changes in the political system, affecting not only one individual's or group's liberties, but the liberties of all the citizens". (*International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. 2: 473-474)

In this context, among the increasing corpus of literature on civil society, mention must be made of volume seven of 'themes in Indian sociology' series of publications. (Jayaram 2005). The volume was edited by N Jayaraman, the editor of the *Sociological Bulletin* and it contains as many as a dozen articles on the theme. In view of D N Dhanagare "(t)he most significant feature of civil society... is that there must be self-policing and modularity, and above all the pursuit of disinterested and individually sanctioned virtues, which are the most essential bases of democracy and civil society". (Dhanagare 2005: 63) In Indian conditions, P K B Nayar draws certain prerequisites: a political system with a neutral state and liberal democratic setup; an economic system guaranteeing economic justice to all citizens; and a sociocultural system based on universalistic values. (Nayar 2005: 133) Nayar's prerequisites of the civil society appear to be more in the nature of ideal types than based on empirical situations. In every day life, one finds a binary existence between the state and civil society, either one versus the other or one is paired against the other. And for that, there is a background of this development. It so



happened that during the past communist regimes in Europe, some of the intellectuals felt that the idea of civil society was a programmed one of building independent forms of social life from the below, free from state tutelage. However, the conviction became widespread that this independence of society should be an integral feature of democracy. Jayaram pleads that setting aside the binary opposition between the state and civil society, we see other dimensions of relationship between the two such as an intermediary group between the two. (Jayaram 2005: 21) For the time being, I shall go with the most liberal definition of democracy with the plea that this may not be the ideal form of the governance; still it is the least evil among all the known forms of government.

### **Nation-Building Efforts in India's Northeast**

We have noted above that nation building refers to both the efforts initiated by the states to evolve institutions and infrastructure for an assumed national prosperity. However, some historical points need to be noted before under-taking such an exercise for the region. The British began administering their Indian colonies from Bengal Presidency of Calcutta, Madras Presidency in port city of Madras and Bombay Presidency from port city of Bombay on Arabian Sea and further vanquished territories were added to them turning them in course of time hugely cumbersome entities. These Presidencies turned out not only territorially unwieldy, but also multilingual in terms of human multitude. The All Indian National Congress (AICC), when it was in the vanguard of the freedom movement, had made a commitment to the nation that once they would come to power, they would institute linguistic states as the units of independent India. And thus, naturally, major regional languages became the basis for formation of the new provinces such as Andhra, Orissa and so on after State Reorganization Commission gave its report in 1956. The Assamese speaking people of Assam perhaps without realizing the implications that their state was not monolingual such as Bengal or Tamilnadu, decided to declare Assamese as the state language, which was seen as a problem of communication among the many of the Hills communities. Secondly, the British bureaucrats since 1928 tacitly began to work on a plan to give an impression that the hill districts and the plains parts of the province of Assam were so different that



they would not work together in an administrative unit once the British withdrew from India. Its culmination may be seen in Sir Robert Reid's Coupland Plan to carve out a Crown Colony from Garo Hills to Upper Burma and from present day Arunachal to Arakan Hills on Bay of Bengal. Wisdom prevailed on all the sections concerned and this plan was not carried through ultimately. Thirdly, in the confused scenario of the 1940s, the Christian Missionaries had created an impression that the Muslims were getting a separate country of Pakistan and the rest of India would be governed by the Hindus. Hence, the hills tribes, who were neither of the two, would have a difficult future in Hindu dominated province of Assam in India. Thus, many of the hill communities became restive immediately after independence.

The national government of free India was luckily aware of these implications and thus, they framed the Indian Constitution in such a way that the Northeast tribesmen were given an autonomous status through the enactment of Sixth schedule. Moreover, the national leaders were careful to the sensitivities of the various cultural entities of the region. To understand this, one has to read Prime Minister J L Nehru's Secret Note to the Chief Ministers of the various provinces after his visit to the Northeastern frontier Areas in October, 1952. He pleaded through this letter how historically and culturally unique Manipur and Tripura were and why they should not be integrated to the province of Assam and why these two units should have representative governments of their own. (Secret: A Note by the Prime Minister on his Tour of the North-Eastern Frontier areas in October 1952) Nehru also tried to take the Assam Chief Minister, B R Medhi, in confidence on an already complicated Naga Issue. (Secret & Personal, No. 1116-PMH/56: 1956) Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Second World War with the rising prices all over, it was expected that the state would start industries for creating jobs for unemployed youth in the region, the public in Assam, specially the students, went on an agitation for establishing an oil refinery for which crude oil was drilled in the state. Nehru wrote to Fasl Ali, the Governor of Assam, why it was not possible to establish such an industry in Assam, as Defence Chiefs of the time refused to undertake security of such a heavy industry in the then hostile international environment surrounded by East Pakistan, China and the unsettled Burma. (Top Secret/No. 459-PMO/57: 1957) It is another matter that a small refinery was set up in course of time,



but the state got the impression that they get nothing from the Centre without an agitation. Broad gauge railways, national highways, bridge over the mighty river Brahmaputra and other establishments were created. Of late, a number of academic institutions of repute have been opened in the region. Now a decision has been taken that all the states in the region will have a centrally funded university within their limits.

The tragedy was that while Assam was trying to consolidate itself institutionally, its own hill communities and the Central government were evolving plans for its dismemberment. The State Reorganization Commission recommended language, geographical location and historical antecedents as the criterion for creation of federating states in Indian Union. Bulk of the states was created on linguistic basis. However, Maharashtra and Punjab remained bilingual, which were divided within a few years on linguistic ground. Manipur was permitted to remain outside Assam on the plea of its historical uniqueness. Bengali speaking Tripura was not merged with another Bengali speaking West Bengal because of the geographical distance between the two. State of Nagaland was the first in India, which was created in 1963, on ethnic basis out of Naga Hills District and Tuensang Frontier Tract. This set a trend for the other hill districts of Assam which went on agitation demanding for separate states of their own. Ultimately, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh were carved out of Assam as separate states in course of time. Of late, this logic has been further extended by creating Jharkhand and Chhatisgarh.

Most of these frontier states are small states in terms of their territories, population and revenue. They are located on topographically difficult mountainous region. They lack basic infrastructure. They have a subsistence level of agriculture and there is hardly any industry worth the name. In such a situation, primary and tertiary (service) sectors of the economy are the major employers in these states. These are the states, which have a higher literacy rate and educational amenities are of traditional type in which graduate degrees are awarded for general subjects and graduates are normally not exposed to an expertise, which enables them for skilled jobs. Consequently, the state governments are the biggest employers in these states, still states cannot employ every educated unemployed person. And thus, there is a built-in unrest in these states, as the system of governance is always



constrained in trying to win legitimacy by offering non-existent jobs to potential trouble shooters. Apart from apprehensions in the minds of hill men, there was a massive human migration from across the border of the then East Pakistan and now Bangladesh to the Brahmaputra valley in particular and the region in general, creating a reasonable apprehension in the psyche of the people. The regional youth hailing from relatively small ethnic groups find India overcrowded, complex, callous and even hostile to their aspirations. Ever since the demise of Gopi Nath Bordoloi and B P Chaliha, there has been no regional leader of stature and concern, who could fire up the regional imagination and inspire confidence among the youth. Furthermore, in an open and democratic system such as ours, it takes time to build up a consensus on issues of national importance. By the time it is done, genuine demands made by a small articulate social segment of society at one time, can turn into a potential source of political upheaval at another. A former politician-cum-academic has rightly come to conclude: "...the inordinate delay spanning over two decades on the part of the Union Government had drastically reduced the amount of good-will of the people which it should normally have been able to enjoy had it not been for such undue delay or for drifting policy". (Pakem 1993:120). Then it was an easy way to build up unrest leading to insurgency in Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam and elsewhere in the region.

### **Civil Society and Constituency of Peace in Northeast**

I have mentioned above that compared to others, the states in Northeast India are relatively small in size, territorially and demographically. Moreover, there has been uneven pace of nation building endeavour in the country in general and in the Northeast region in particular. India consciously adopted a democratic style of governance for its multi-ethnic society. However, because of the historical reasons, class and civil society emerged elsewhere in India much earlier and societies developed a shock absorbing capacity within it and civil society could tolerate the variety of disagreements and still work for a common good of the people at large. The story is slightly different in the region. To begin with, in case one takes the type of administrative and political development in India from the beginning of the British rule, the British rule came to Assam almost a century after it came to Bengal. Then they had different rules for the administration of the hills and the



plains of Assam. Apart from Inner Line Regulation of 1873, separating Arunachal, Mizoram and Nagaland from the rest of the region, almost the entire hill region was administered by the Governor of the province calling them 'Excluded or Partially Excluded Districts'. To aggravate the situation still further, between the hills and the plains, these hill districts were apportioned to the various Christian Missionaries for evangelical and educational purposes, while in the plains the colonial administration itself established such institutions. Consequently two sets of development took place: white color jobs, an emergent middle class, a variety of occupations, various political institutions and the rudiment of political parties etc., took routes in the plains districts of Assam on the one hand, and on the another, the hill districts were not only denied of such developments, but were deliberately kept under tutelage of the specially selected army or police service Political Officers' paternalistic rule along with the scholar-administrator ICS officers. In such a situation, the public space was very much controlled by the British administrative machinery in the hill districts and it was they who used to speak effectively for the hills communities by and large and their voice was audible and also heard, where and when it mattered most.

Once the British were forced to withdraw from the Indian scene, there was chaos, uncertainty, worries among the hills communities, and lack of a clear contingency plan among the new rulers. Whatever the limited infrastructure they had, were all either dismantled or damaged or reduced to non-functional ones because of the division of India into two warring countries, India and Pakistan. Food scarcity was further aggravated by the communal clashes. The former political agitators, now occupying the chairs as the rulers, lacked expertise to tackle complex problems of administration. Moreover, they had their own bias and prejudice, at the same time; their political parties (National Political Parties) did not have presence in the hill districts by and large. Apprehensions, prejudice, inexperience, lack of resources, limited infrastructure and non-existent guidance in the event of contingency created a lot of complications and misunderstanding among the people of the region in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In this confused situation, the Nagas reportedly declared their independence even before Indian independence and were threatening to take to arms for the sake of independence. In such a situation, there was no possibility of



existence or formation of a civil society; what came in its place were the ethnic associations, which began to play political roles. And within the years to come, a series of insurgent groups emerged operating from various parts of the region. The British trained civil police was found ineffective to tackle these trying situations and the new rulers sent in the armed forces to help the non-existent / non-functional administration in the region. Thus, it was no more a civil strife but it turned out to be a civil divide.

The irony of the fate was that ex-agitators, now new rulers, were pleading for peace in society so that a democratic beginning could be made. And elections were held for the state assembly and federal parliament, once the Indian Constitution was approved in 1950. This did create a level of legitimacy and lull in the violent political acts, but it also created heightened expectations and urge for achieving something spectacular. Very soon, the hills turned out to be unsettled even outside Naga Hills. Sane elements from among the local ethnic groups and church leaders came forward and pleaded for giving a chance to peace. This went almost unheard in an environment of the sound of the guns and peace remains illusive in the region today. But generations have suffered and today's children are not sure whether they will have a different path than the violence. But then the appeals for peace are made more frequently and more and more fervently. Will there be a dawn of peace in the region?

What are they fighting for? A series of insurgents' objective has been their 'liberation' from India. Is the Indian Union an empire, a dictator's regime, a totalitarian state, a theocracy, a monarchy, a feudal kingdom? Is it ruled by an army general, or autocrat, or an oligarchy or a cartel of financiers? India is a democratic republic, run on the rules framed as per provisions of Indian Constitution. It is one of the few open societies, where democracy is practiced since India gained her independence. So these dissenters are fighting for what, what their objectives, and who suffers from the atrocities committed by the rebels? A columnist in a respectable news Journal from Chennai wrote on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 2007:

This (ULFA's attack in the third week of January, 2007 on the migrant Hindi-speaking labour in Upper Assam) may be the final war, in which the enemy is the citizenry of the country. It has no weapons and no intension other than to earn some sort of living.



But that may provide *casus belli*; seeking to work is very well but where it is sought is crucial. If it is the state of Assam and the citizen is not born Assamese, and then it means he is not seeking work there, he is seeking war against the State of Assam. At least, this is what the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) obviously believes and would like us to believe. It considers mere fact that Biharis work in Assam, or go there to look for work, and what better enemy could it have than the unarmed labourers, who would not know what to do with semi-automatic rifle any more than they would with a variable energy cyclotron. It means they, the brave ULFA warriors, are in danger of being injured, let alone killed. And in this war they will obviously win every encounter. (Ghose 2007: 107)

The Indian Union is a democratic state, run by the elected representatives of the bonafide Indian electorate. It has an honoured position among the comity of the nations. The Indians and aliens, who act against the established law, will be dealt with by the appropriate law enforcing authorities as per the criminal law of the state. Those who wage war against the Indian state will have to confront the defenders of the Indian state, the Indian armed forces. But what happens to those unarmed common citizens, who are subjected to untold misery? Is there any way for them to be heard? And why do people take to arms? Why do they rebel? And there are many more questions, which beg at least some answers. Do we have some? No doubt, the constituency of peace has the maximum stake holders. And peace has different shades of meaning also.\* Peace does not necessarily mean end of all the conflicts. Similarly, perhaps, here we may not be interested in individuals' peace, which is an 'undisturbed state of mind'. Here, we endeavour to secure a lasting peace, which will mean "freedom from public disturbances or disorder; public security; and law and order."

One point needs to be mentioned for the sake of the legal and constitutional pundits. When the states were created on ethnic basis

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*Oxford University Dictionary* defines peace as: 1. free from war or civil strife; 2. a treaty or agreement to end war; 3. freedom from public disturbances or disorder; public security; law and order; 4. freedom from disagreement or quarrels; harmony; control; 5. an undisturbed state of mind; absence of mental conflict, serenity; 6. calm, quiet, tranquil.



such as Nagaland, Meghalaya and others, the migrants from other states (linguistic, ethnic, religious minorities) who also have constitutional safeguards – do they have any right of citizenship or is it the reign of terror of majority local ethnic group, which will prevail? In other words, does it mean that, say in Meghalaya, the basic constitutional rights of those not from Meghalaya will have no validity? Whom will they turn to when their very physical existence is being threatened? Can we think aloud on such possibilities? And such incidents have been happening quite frequently.

It is perhaps time for thinking aloud on the constitutional framework of the country. Rajya Sabha, the upper chamber of the Indian parliament, is also reflective of the demographic size of the federating states, some thing like the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the parliament, for which members are elected by the electorate. In this way, Rajya Sabha is a smaller version of the Lok Sabha, demographically speaking. May be all states should be given equal representation in the Rajya Sabha to inculcate a semblance of equality among the federating Indian states of the Union. Similarly, the small states do not have upper chamber of state legislature. In such a situation, can we think of having, say, a legally binding Community Consultative Body? This body should continue to exist as a permanent body with periodically retiring members, who represent linguistic, religious and ethnic minorities, occupational and professional bodies (such as lawyers, doctors, teachers), NGOs, artists, craftsmen, men of letters, and any group of citizens, who are otherwise not represented in the system of governance. The idea is not to shackle the existing legislative procedure and to minimize the legitimacy of the exalted position of the people's representatives, but to enhance the legitimacy of the democratic system in the eyes of all its citizens. Now we have the Right to Information, which may enable us to pin point the sore points in the system conveniently; this proposal has a potential in which every modest citizen may see himself/herself as a part and parcel of the political system. May be this will give boost to the civil society on a broader basis. May be, these new actors on the political platform, who otherwise avoid taking part in the political process, would provide some new input without threatening or minimizing the significance of the existing process of governance. Perhaps this may strengthen the constituency of peace, which is the precursor of the



nation-building endeavour at another level. There are many new schemes initiated by the Central government. Some niche will have to be found among them for these unrepresented segments of the people. In this way, state formation, nation-building, civil rights and peace will not remain isolated as concepts and will not be seen as distinct processes; rather, these all will proceed in unison in one direction towards peace, prosperity and welfare of all.

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