

Identity, Politics and Economic Development in North-East India



Edited by

Komol Singha and M. Amarjeet Singh

India's North-Eastern Region is the home to different indigenous communities, and socio-economic condition of these communities is relatively weaker than the average national level. Besides the weak physical, social and economic infrastructures, etc., they are primarily the victims of human rights violations in one form or the other. Ethnic, social and political problems have plagued and slowed down the region's development processes. Therefore, multi-faceted mechanism is highly recommended to overcome the complex issues of these traditional communities. With these understandings, the present volume "Identity, Politics and Economic Development in North-East India", consists of 23 essays, explores the issues of socio-economic, political and cultural dimension of the region. Also, the essays try to explore the difficulties faced by the traditional communities mainly community uprisings and human rights violations and the contributors, through their academic discourses, explored some probable ways and means to overcome the difficulties.

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Preface

India's North-Eastern Region (NER) consists of eight States and is a 'mixed bag' of several ethnic groups. Around 200, out of 635 tribal groups of the country, are found in this region. The region covers an area of approximately 263 thousand sq. km. (8% of the total geographical area of the country) and its population is about 39 million (3.9% of the country's total population) as per 2001 Census. Around three-fourth of the region's geographical area is covered by hilly terrain and majority of the population (around 85%) live in villages, rural areas in poverty, in the midst of abundant resources.

Despite several years of affirmative action on the region's development that have been taken up by the successive governments and other institutions since the country's independence, it remains an underdeveloped region till today and becomes a catchy word of the politicians, leaders and policy makers at the podiums and public platforms. Therefore, the issue of development of NER requires greater attention and re-look from different angles.

Keeping the urgent needs of development initiative of the region in mind, the present volume entitled "Identity, Politics and Economic Development in North-East India", consists of 23 essays/articles contributed by scholars from different academic institutions of the region and beyond tries to explore some ways and means of ending the prolonged underdevelopment. In totality, the volume focuses the broader issues of ethnicity, tribes, empowerment of women and weaker sections, structure of social sector and public policy towards the development of NER.

Definitely, the volume will give reflection of the region's weakness and opportunities for sustainable development to some extent and help

the policy makers in redesigning the policy initiatives of development of the region. For the effort, we want to express our heartiest gratitude to all the contributors for their ongoing support in the completion of this work. Last, but not the least, our special thank goes to Mr. A.K. Mittal of Concept Publishing Company Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi for his keen interest in bringing out this volume.

December 2012

Editors

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PART - I
Identity, Contestation and
Development

1

Dilemmas of a Receiving Community: Negotiating with Historicity and Projection

Bhagat Oinam

Introduction

There are few challenges that are perennially faced by the receiving communities—the communities who have been pushed to the fringes in the inter-regional or inter-civilisational politics, driven by historical contingencies. The fate of the receiving communities is driven by the fact that either they have remained isolated from the rest of the world due to their self-exclusive isolation or were marginalised by a more powerful military or cultural might. Communities of North-Eastern Region of India (NER)¹ face this plight of being pushed to the fringes by historical contingencies not totally of their making. The issue is not so much about these receiving communities *actually lacking* on different spheres of life, but of a lack being *projected* by the protagonists of power narratives. One of the challenges before these receiving communities obviously is to negotiate with the changing situations and the (colonial/global) forces that emerge from time to time. This chapter tries to engage with such issues taken up largely the case of Manipur as a point, where such sites of contestation are visible at different layers and the negotiations follow in various forms.

Negotiation often comes in the form of a dialogue. The assumption that participants in a dialogue are equal partners seems to be a misnomer since dialogue mostly turns out to be between the unequal parties. In the

face of such a situation, what is generally missed out is the inalienable tension between the Life-World of the receiving communities and the forces from outside. The space for negotiation is historically twined that cannot be displaced, yet are constantly in surge with contest and adaptation. The ideas of modernity and globalisation have created such tensions for the receiving communities.² Colonialism is supposed to have brought into the underdeveloped worlds of Asia and Africa the sceptre of modernity, a changed vocabulary with the same spirit that has come in the post-colonial world. Globalisation as the new terminology brings the sceptre of modernity to the developing world. As the older sceptre changes from *colonial power* to *global power*, the receiver also changes from *underdeveloped* to the *developing* world order. While the change in vocabulary is witnessed, the spirit continues to remain.

The crisis of the receiving communities with the sceptre of modernity has remained problematic throughout. Interestingly, this fate of the receiving community does not seem to be a unique fate of the North-East region and its people, but a trend that every receiving community encounters with overarching and impending external forces. Import of modernity along with colonialism has created existential and intellectual anguish among the elites of the receiving communities. While at few historical moments response of these elites was of accommodation and assimilation, at other, it was of protest and denial. These responses have been marked by the politics of the time. Negotiation on power and control was not merely between the receivers and the advocates, but also among the receivers, some among them playing the role of second fiddle advocate. The marginal communities are not homogeneous either, and do not show similar forms of response to the forces of modernity. While variation in responses depends largely on several historical and social factors, role of collective consciousness and subjective interventions serve as significant causal factor.³ The contest of modernity and tradition is not about two phenomena in alterity⁴, but of negotiation within the self, for a space of identity and assertion.

For the North-East India, like many other colonised worlds, it is of wearing a permanent garb of a 'receiver'. The 'bundles of contradictions' that the colonial rule brought during the first-half of the 19th century, has created fractured self/selves with several ideational and ideological divides. A longing to discover or invent a 'past', through which the self could be recovered, not merely for functional deliberation but for providing a paradigmatic account, has become a self-generated task of many communities in the region.

This chapter is an indicator, not in the sense of measuring a standard, but as hinting at a possible methodology for studying the marginal communities. Its engagement, more than the interpretation of events, is of enacting a discursive framework. While historical narratives of the North-East have brought out rich information about kings, communities and their rule. These have remained partial with many communities being absent in these narratives. Pluralism, transparent representation, and objectivity are what are strongly called for a future historiography of North-East India.

Modernity and Colonialism

Like many parts of the Indian sub-continent, modernity's entry into North-East India was by proxy. It is a well-established thesis by several eminent scholars⁵ that modernity did not emerge in the developing world in the way it appeared in the West, particularly in Europe. It was brought to the colonised world by the European colonial power in most cases. Entry of science, technology and education took a place that suited the colonial rule. Freedom, human rights, right to speech, etc., which were the major focus of modernity in the West, did not quite figure in the modernity programme in this part of the world. My difficulty is not so much with the critique that modernity 'while being rational within its confine, refused to be rational about accepting other traditions of knowledge'.⁶ Enlightenment programme had been equally harsh with its own traditional values. It was by breaking the cultural foundation of the medieval Europe that modernity emerged. My concern is of the hypocrisy with which colonialism operated its modernity programme when it travels elsewhere in the world. It was inconsistent and driven by imperial design.

Modernity was packaged with many other forces that were inherently opposed to its own programme. Take for instance, the Church. It was against the Church and Catholicism that enlightenment programme stood on its ground. But the two antithetical poles happily mingled in the colonial frame of operation. As much as Hume saw 'reason as the slave of passion',⁷ modernity in the colonized world became one of the tools for exploiting the receiving communities. Even it opens up the question if those were modernity at all. The contradictions that constituted colonialism not only made it internally unstable but also made scattered selves out of the receiving community. Take the case of several ethnic communities of North-East India where impact of Christianity has been immense. Often the gospel of Christ and sermon of the clergy is so overwhelming that

pre-conversion state of these communities is 'revealed' as a state of barbarism—'people hunting down heads as trophy'. Christianity is supposed to have brought modernist values to these native receivers.⁸ Contrary to such revelations, political discourse in many of these communities projects a contrary tale: 'of their unique history, of village republic, of their living independently from time immemorial'.⁹ Different domains of the same self varyingly assert itself, sometimes eulogising certain past and sometimes disowning certain other past. Such a complex articulation highlights the impact of colonialism in the garb of modernity and subsequent internalization of external values by the colonized minds. An interesting part of this internalization is about 'discovering' the past in an unendingly varied ways. Nehru's *Discovery of India* is one among many forms of this internalization.

Unfortunately in most cases, this discovery does not seem to critically evaluate the covert designs of these colonial administrations in general. What the victim-subject often misses out is an eye towards seeing colonialism's overarching and prevalent characteristic in its policy of 'divide and rule' operated by forging unity and inventing new identities. This trend, as can be witnessed elsewhere in the developing world, Manipur¹⁰ has had its share of experience—the seed of structural conflict in the region was sown by this policy. The case of Manipur explains quite explicitly the layers of impact that has been given by colonialism. To begin with, British colonial master's division of Manipur into hills and valley, and altering the boundary of the State was to serve the colonial interests by creating drastic changes not only in the socio-cultural lives of the people but also affected inter-community harmony. The aftermath of the post-1891 Anglo-Manipuri War witnessed not only a new Manipuri king being installed by the British, the administration of the hills by and large came under the direct control of the British. Installing a king reduced the colonial power of the day-to-day administrative responsibility, though the British political agent took major political decisions by proxy. Subsequent policies introduced in the Manipur valley showed naked economic exploitation of British colonialism. The British did not interfere much with the village administration of the communities in the hills except for a few additions like introduction of *Lamboos*.¹¹ Hills were left as playfield for evangelising activities. Even the space of operation between the Baptists and Presbyterians showed distinctive marks of boundary in their respective jurisdiction of operation. The entry of the missionaries in the hills enabled influence on the cultural/spiritual domain of the hill people leading to clear divide between the hills and the valley. Since

administrative division made the valley and the hills as two segments in the administrative domain, entry of Christianity in the hills sharpened the division in the cultural domain. It made the division between the two segments complete. Formalization of categories like Naga and Kuki,¹² even though for administrative purposes, later helped in consolidation of identity in the cultural domain. This aspect of colonialism—of dividing the natives (the receiving communities) was indeed a tool through which colonial rule was sustained in a foreign soil, so much so is the success story that discovery of a barbaric history of the self and encounter with a novel worldview from outside was increasingly told and retold by the natives themselves. This is indeed the plight and irony of a receiving community. This trend witnessed in the North-East India, though widely prevalent, is not a unique phenomenon. Similar trend was witnessed in other parts of India, one of which was briefly witnessed in the Young Bengal Movement.¹³

I shall miss out the point if I do not bring in the fact that colonial administration had been focused more than imparting modern values, towards the control of economic resources. This of course is an obvious fact. But mentioning this is important to locate the colonial power and its agenda in proper place. In brief, British administration's focus had been, as elsewhere, the control of the material forces of the receiving communities. Though administrative changes were made in the field of revenue, trade and economy in general, its impact was indirectly felt in the cultural domain as well. For instance, in Manipur, the shift from the *Lallup* to the *patta* system¹⁴ enabled the British to control the revenue of the State. In order to enhance trade, cartable road was developed from Moreh to Dimapur. In fact, British's interest in Manipur, in addition to creating a buffer State, was marked by need for a free trade route between Indo-China and British India. Colonial administration also brought about a more structured form of market economy. These changes led to 'dual government' that was witnessed in Bengal during 1757–1764. The British enjoyed all the power without responsibility while the king was given responsibility without economic power. This compelled the king to look for revenue in the cultural domain. New taxation such as *Chandan Senkhai*, *Mangba Sengba*¹⁵ was introduced to increase royal exchequer, which in turn led to consolidation of orthodox Brahmanism in the valley. Never before in the history of Manipur was untouchability witnessed as during the colonial period. This is against the background that Hinduism arrived at Manipur during fifteenth century AD. The episode is blown out of proportion by few vested interests that Meiteis practised

untouchability against the hill communities. More than the hill communities the Meitei subjects, particularly the marginalized and the underprivileged, were the real victims. Emergence of *Sanamahi* movement¹⁶ as a protest against such atrocities, which later contested the control of the cultural space, serves as an important historical marker.

What have been witnessed as a whole are several contradictions with which colonialism operated. While the British administration projected an image of a benevolent master bringing about transformation in each sphere of life, modernity has been selectively used. Though modernity's characterisation lies in the primacy of reason and self-criticism that operate in each sphere of human life, either towards capturing the knowledge about the physical or the life worlds, or understanding the intricacies of human reality, the same do not get reflected in the lives of the people in the region. This is an area where not only the colonial rule failed, but the present 'liberated' State equally fails to address to the need.

Making Narratives of the Past

The 'past' often juxtaposed along with the idea of 'modernity' shows presence of modernity as an alien phenomenon. Then tradition as a legacy of the past is seen from the prism of the present even if conceived as a process. Our past does not remain independent in isolation in pure form. All that we know or claim to know is about what we perceive. And what we perceive is through a prism already construed and formalised. Tradition is thus perceived through a prism, and is not divorced from the present and a desired future. And that prism could be the 'prism of modernity'.

A complex nature of the juxtaposition is that the relationship projected between tradition and modernity lies with the fact that modernity has already crept in the tradition. The two are no more exclusive, at least for the receiving communities. The inseparability of the two, even though often seen as mutually exclusive, can be illustrated through several instances. Many of the protests that sporadically came up in Manipur in the name of preserving traditional values and heritage, such as 'script movement' and 'traditional dress code for girl students', have nothing so traditional about them. The image of a tradition that these movements project has already incorporated the modern political ideas such as 'right to culture', 'civil disobedience and courting arrest', 'language and script as vehicle for inculcating nationalism', etc. Even the idea of a denial of Westernisation or Indianisation has already incorporated the image of that which they wish to deny. Though images of a past heritage are

projected, these images do not only seem to be very modern but also the mode of agitation is equally so. For instance, take the writings of Atom Bapu Sharma, Wahengbam Yumjao Singh, Asangbam Miniketan Singh and many others who engaged in the process of discovering a past that was close to Vedic lineage. Migration of *Kiratas* was thrown up to make the Meiteis closer to Vedic Bharata. The other group, *Meitei Marup*, completely rejected such a narration of the Hinduised Meiteis seeing it as concocted myth. Kangjiya Gopal's book *Adungeigi Manipur Kangleipak Natte* (The Distant Manipur is not Kangleipak) rejected the myth of locating the present Manipur (then Kangleipak) in the *Mahabharata*. While the two hold opposing positions, both look for traces of the past through the discourse of modernism. Linearity in modern historiography guides their perceptions that both fall back on constructing a long past heritage of 2000 years old history. More than the validity, or invalidity of the narration what becomes important is the mode of narration of constructing a tradition from the modernist perspective.

Anxiety of having a genuine tradition or a modernity of the indigenous kind is based on two criticisms: one, of an encompassing and homogenising tendency of modern science; and two, of an anxiety of being a part of the colonized self. Both are factitious, faced by the receiving communities. But the world has witnessed tremendous change in the last few decades. Enlightenment programme has undergone drastic changes. Positivism, for instance, is no more fashionable. But problem with the receiving communities, to my mind, seems to be arising from encountering and fairsing the complex 'bundles of contradictions', which colonialism brought. The dilemma and the anguish are not confined to the academia alone but also visibly witnessed in the day-to-day life world of the receiving communities. Complexity and paradoxes do not stop the ongoing journey of life. We continue to live with these bundles of contradictions.

Discovery of tradition among these communities is more about manifestation of anxiety of a scattered self. The failure at the material domain led to resurgence at the spiritual.¹⁷ Defeat from the colonial rule gave birth to this new programme. The resurgence specifically tends to look towards a past. The nationalist movement in Bengal, for instance, in order to reject the colonial rule started looking at superior image of the natives in their pre-colonial time. Siraj-ud-Daula, for instance, became the hero and Mir Zafar a villain in Bengali theatre and plays. Apart from the recovery, the attempt was also a search for an alternate space. What came quite natural was search for a political space in the cultural/spiritual domain. This was projected to counter the British onslaught that had

already overtaken the receiving communities in the material domain.¹⁸ Discovery of Ramakrishna in the Bengali middle class¹⁹ enabling assertion of middle class hegemony in Bengal was a case in point. This trend got reflected in Manipur through educated Manipuri middle class, who, from their education in Bengal, brought the spirit of nationalism. Introduction of print technology, inception of Nikhil Manipuri Maha Sabha, etc., were manifestations of the trend.

Similar cases had been witnessed in Manipur during the post 1891 colonial rule. Manipuris, unable to reconcile with the defeat in the Anglo-Manipuri War, looked for areas where the natives' supremacy could be recovered. Loss in the war meant loss of control over military, political administration, economy, and trade. The defeat in the political and economic sphere led the traditional Manipuri elites to look into the private domain. British were projected as impure and the 'dirty other'. There had been cases where houses entered by the British officials were destroyed and new houses were built.²⁰ These were collectively sanctioned and performed. It was a fight, more a protest, to a dominating power. It was not a direct fight as the domain of operation for the two were different. It was a judicious and selective move by the traditional elites not to directly confront the British yet register their protest differently.

Responses to modernity showed a complex phenomenon than a homogeneous archetype. Differences in the responses of these communities were shaped not only by the varying administrative policies of the colonial rule but also by the dynamics of power struggle among the receiving groups. In fact, complexity is shown by the varied and multi-layered character of these responses. Manipur, for instance, showed an interesting trend of elite formation. First was the traditional Brahmins and royal clan who still carried the legacy of a pre-colonial state authority. These were the priestly and feudal classes who were not very cordial, if not hostile, to the British. Slowly, this class was co-opted by the new state, took to English and Bengali education, leading to the formation of new elites. Some members of this class with the addition of a few other sections of the society formed a new group—the middle class. This second group was mostly educated at places like Sylhet, Dacca and (then) Calcutta. These emerging new elites were progressive, but used traditional idioms to register and propagate their political aims. They were the brands of middle class 'intelligentsia' as witnessed elsewhere in India. A case of Hijam Irabot could throw light into the trend and exceptions.²¹ The third group emerged out of an existential crisis of being left out, took contrary positions to the ones held by other elite groups. This traditionalist *Meitei*

Marup (Pre-Hindu Sanamahi sect) took to indigenous pre-Vaisnava values and life style. Impressions of the trend still find traces in many of the organisations of the present.

Contemporary Manipur experiences have two most popular narratives: 'merger of Manipur to the Indian Union' and 'unique history of the Nagas'. In the former, annexation of Manipur by the newly independent India on the 15th October, 1949 is highlighted as the black day in the history of the state. To strengthen the narrative, pre-merger state of Manipur from 14th August, 1947 to 15th October, 1949 is projected as 'a temporal space' of free and independent Manipur. The real duration of the period was not considered important. State of freedom as a temporal concept was shown in continuity by bracketing the consciousness of temporality. This was made possible because the immediate preceding event was the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891 where Manipuris fought a losing battle with pride and glory. Projection of Manipur as an independent kingdom before the British invasion, and an independent state after the British left, has been successfully made as continuity in the minds of the people. But the protagonists of the narrative ignore the importance of colonial regime (1891–1947) as a basis of nationalist historiography. They downplay the fact that Manipur not only lost many parts of its territory in the treaty of 1834, but also gained several parts. During the span of a century, the territory of Manipur fluctuated to a considerable degree. When territories are lost inhabitants too are lost, and when territories are gained new populations are added. The experience of Manipur falls within this trend. Perhaps, the India-Pakistan experience of partition was among the exceptional few. Further, the protagonists fail to see that nationalism is built not merely by projecting geographical space and past heritage of a few, but by accommodating the world views of all. In a similar tone of 'Merger' narrative, Nagas (particularly of Manipur) come out with an equally exclusive narrative. The projection is of a unique history: of village republic, an unconquered Naga territory even during the height of British imperialism. This narration though initiated by Naga National Council (NNC), has been given a new direction in recent times by the NSCN (IM) as the protagonist of the Naga cause. The direction of freedom has changed, so much so has the concept. Just as the notion of 'sovereignty' is talked in terms of a 'special federal relation' with India, freedom from 'Indian imperialism' has shifted to freedom from 'Meitei imperialism'! There is nothing new about such a concept. 'Right to Self-determination' has varied layers of interpretation.

The present case is about discarding one concept and appropriating another.

The crisis is of contradicting narratives that seem to have become a trend than exception. This can be witnessed not only between the Meiteis and the Nagas of Manipur, but also between the Bodos and chaste Assamese in Assam. Similar is the case found in Meghalaya where the Bengalis and the Assamese struggle to get a place in the historical narrative of the State, which tends to selectively erase certain past memories involving their origin in the State. While the Assamese, Bengalis and Manipuris (particularly Meiteis) are being charged of denying possible spaces to other communities in the region in their long drawn historical narratives, the new trend by the protesting communities to carve a space for themselves through a new historical narrative rather denies than supplements the existing narratives. At the end, it turns out to be a contest for the control of space among different communities.

A Note on Historiography

The above narratives take us to a site of contestation. Narrating the pasts, these traditions end up with contesting claims. While each community goes on 'totalising' its goal and identity, each act of narration ignores the other narration, so much so the goals (as 'totality')²² are mutually exclusive and opposed. In principle, two totalities cannot be realized simultaneously. A nation cannot have more than one 'totality' at a time unless it suffers from split personality. Even if the narratives (totalisation) differ, as in the case of a dialogue, the goal (totality) ought to be corresponding. The projection of the Nagas in Manipur narrating an alternative totalisation and totality shows that there is more than one nation in the present State of Manipur. And 'totality' is of an independent Naga inhabited land. Another version of the totality, largely held by majority Meiteis, is seeing the entire people of the State as one nation in evolution. A careful study will reveal that totalisation as present has deeper philosophical underpinning. Jean Paul Sartre's formulation that 'totalising present is conditioned by totalised and totalising past of the process of human development' could serve as a point for reflection. Totalisation projects a 'cultured' man (including illiterate societies) who totalises through centuries of history, through experiences.²³ In fact, each act of totalisation projects a long trace of historical origin of the people. The often-used phrase in these narratives is 'from time immemorial'. Through the phrase, legitimacy is sought for a narrative to become historical. Two options

clearly emerge: one, whether to see multiple totalisations and totalities as prelude to smaller nation-states, or two, that these are the voices of a fractured self. The problem is not only unique to the State of Manipur. This is witnessed at every level of political discourse, whether one looks at North-East India as a whole or the Indian nation State as one.

Concluding Note

The challenge before the contesting narratives is of drawing mutually corresponding and admissible narratives. This has remained a daunting task in the region. To have narratives that not only corresponds with one another, but also mutually encouraging, will overcome the limitations of exclusivist narratives. The present political crisis in the region is largely because of the gap that exists in our knowledge of the other. It is the lack of what Ricoeur calls 'pairing' (*paarung*) of individuals' temporal fields, which form a historical field of experience that correlates gaps in our perception of the surrounding.²⁴ It is the exclusion of the other as well as non-recognition of the claims of the other that pairing is most urgently called for.

To draw a comprehensive history of the North-East fulfilling representation, there is strong need to go back to the colonial period. This is not to denounce the already existing narratives. Chronicles, such as *Buronji*, *Cheitharol Kumbaba* and *Rajmamala* will continue to have their own significance. But there is need to be critical of the narratives that project a mere imaginative fantasy²⁵ without pairing. It needs to be clearly shown that arrival of modernity in the package of colonialism shaped the consciousness of the communities in a particular direction. It was the colonial rule that paved structural changes to almost all the communities in the region. North-East was physically bridged and spiritually distanced by the British colonial power. A narrative that comprehends the historical fields of experiences of the region with a comprehensive rationality seems to be the most reasonable approach to understand the region – of its past and future, through an accommodative present.

NOTES

1. North-Eastern Region (NER) of India encompasses eight States – Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

2. However, it should be noted that essentialising modernity or globalization is to make it (as an idea and process/act) stagnant which would be self-contradictory. Modernity characteristically is self-critiquing, and its goal lies in the act/process. It is in our performing the act(s) that modernity is envisaged and accomplished.
3. Collingwood's 'free and deliberate act of a conscious and responsible agent' as a historical cause needs a special highlight. See, R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press), 1962 (first published 1940), p. 290.
4. "Alterity" is about 'those' outside the self. But what is outside is not free from the actor who is an 'inside'. The conception goes closer to the ideas of Levinas where the outside gets meaning through the inside. See Michael B. Smith, *Towards the Outside: Concepts and Themes in Emmanuel Levinas*, (Pittsburg, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press), 2005.
5. Scholars like Ashis Nandy, Partha Chatterjee, etc., have been working on the theme, and it is well established thesis that modernity as it came in India had colonial tinge, some calls it as 'colonial modernity' (Nandy). So is modernity not a singular phenomenon even in Europe?
6. Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), (first published 1983) 2002, pp. 2-3.
7. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, L.A. Selby-Bigge (ed.), (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 1978.
8. This is not to ignore the 'liberation theology' that has come from Catholic fraternity.
9. This has been largely witnessed in the Naga narratives.
10. Manipur is the most North-Eastern State of India, bordering Myanmar in the east.
11. Roles of *Lamboos* were traditionally the intermediary between the king and the tribal chieftains. The same post was retained by the British administration who engaged them for collecting taxes from the villages in the hills.
12. Gangmumei Kamei (then Kabui) highlights 'common place' of origin of several tribes who are now clubbed within the category of the 'Naga' primarily to left the earlier period of origin of the term as well as identity of the group. This is not, however, left the present day expanse of tribes subsumed in the category as have existed during the pre-colonial or colonial period. What was known as 'Naga' to the Assamese before the advent of the British were limited to a few tribes inhabiting in the hill ranges south of the Brahmaputra valley. Further, many tribes of Kuki-Chin linguistic group today claim themselves as 'Naga'. The term was formalised by the colonial administration, and later internalised during the post-colonial period. The strength of identity formation lies not in merely tracing the origin but in futuristic engagement in the present. Naga identity formation precisely does that. To continue the debate, see

- Gangumei Kabui, 'Genesis of the Ethnoses of Manipur', in Naorem Sanajaoba (ed.), *Manipur: Past and Present*, Vol. 3, (New Delhi: Mittal Publications), 1995, pp. 21-25.
13. I am referring to Young Bengal Movement initiated by Henry Derozio in Bengal.
 14. Lallup is a form of military, administrative and civil services rendered by the subjects to the State. The subject in lieu of his service is entitled to hold land for cultivation. The practice was abolished to bring in patta system which enabled the British to have direct control of the revenue. See N. Joykumar Singh, *Social Movements in Manipur*, (New Delhi: Mittal Publications), 1992, pp. 29-30. Also see N. Lokendra Singh, *Unquiet Valley*, (New Delhi: Mittal Publications), 1998, pp. 29-30.
 15. Chandan Senkhai was a form of taxation against the use of chandan as tilak on the Vaisnava population. Mangba-sengba was the purification fee paid by those ostracised as impure either by the king, king's brother, or the Brahmin. Purification fees varied depending upon the nature of the declaration. New forms of taxation made the king increasingly unpopular, but substantive revenue could be gathered through these ill practices.
 16. Sanamahi movement aims at reviving the indigenous religious and cultural practices of pre-Vaisnava Meiteis.
 17. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press), 1993, p. 26.
 18. *Ibid.*, pp. 26.
 19. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.
 20. B.C. Allen, *Assam District Gazetteer: Naga Hills and Manipur*, Vol. IX, Part 2, (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press), 1905, p. 61.
 21. Leaders like Hijam Irabot, who were co-opted by the king, did not succumb to the pressure but genuinely worked for the people. He stood for the modernization of economy, social reforms and justice that shakened the existing feudal structure. He believed that Meitei society could be regenerated by rectifying the evils in the Hinduism itself. Activities of such middle class leaders were influenced by the dominant ideology of Indian freedom struggle. For instance, Irabot interacted with many leaders of Indian freedom struggle in Sylhet and Cachar. See, Yambem Sanamani, 'Nupi Lan: Women's Agitation, 1939', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XI, No. 8, February 21, 1976, p. 327. Also see, Karam Manimohan Singh, *Hijam Irabot Singh and Political Movements in Manipur*, (New Delhi: R.B. Publishing Corporation), 1989, pp. 153-54.
 22. For Sartre, 'totality' and 'totalisation' refer to goal of praxis and act of praxis respectively. Human praxis is narrating and asserting about oneself, which is about creating history. The difference between the two is that totality is totalized and the totalisation totalises itself. While the former is projected as 'become', the latter is 'becoming', which suggests that it is locating in time and, as such, totalizes itself. So totalisation as an act in

the present encompasses the past acts as well as the future goal. If history is totalisation which temporalises itself, culture is itself temporalising and temporalised totalisation. Although one totalises individually, one's culture cannot be treated as mere subjective accumulation of knowledge as 'my own', but is conceived as specific participation in interiority in the objective culture. See J.P. Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, tr. Alan Sheridan-Smith, ed. Jonathan Rée, (London: Verso/NLB), (first published 1960) 1982, pp. 53-56.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

24. Paul Ricoeur sees 'imagination' as an individual action. Each individual imagines independently in isolation that creates a flux. It is through the idea of 'pairing' that one temporal flux accompanies another. This leads to a higher order temporality that categorises isolated events and actions. The formulation largely explains intersubjective understanding of imagination as an act of constructing history. However, it remains to be seen how far it successfully explains inter-community understanding of imagination. See, Paul Ricoeur, 'Imagination in discourse and in action', in Gillian Robinson & John Rundell (eds.), *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, (London & New York: Routledge), 1994, p. 127.
25. To illustrate the point, take the case of Meities as descendants of mythic figures of the *Mahabharata*. Such attempts are manifestation of a desperate self to equate with an imagined superior race and tradition.