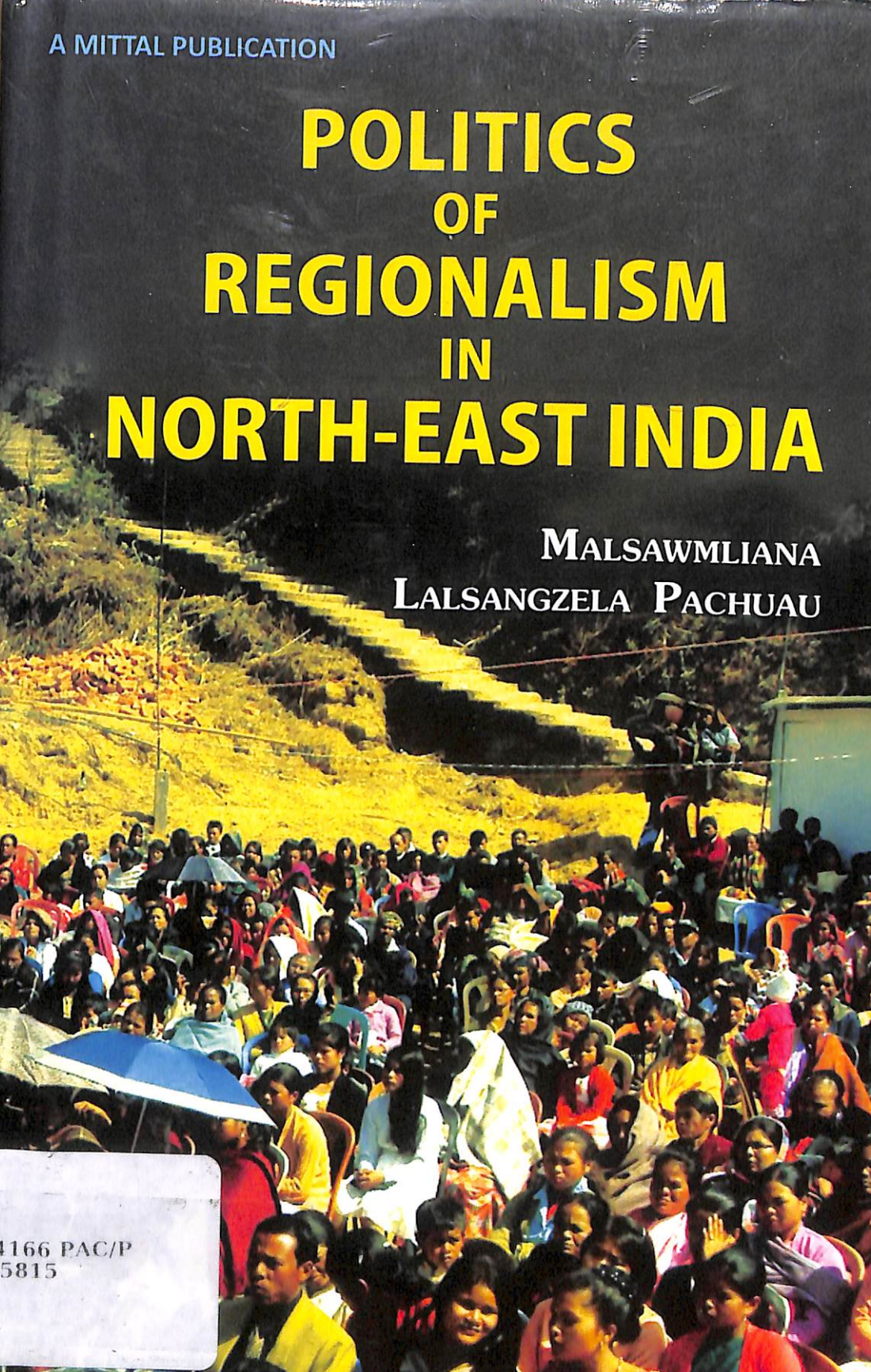


A MITTAL PUBLICATION

# POLITICS OF REGIONALISM IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

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# **POLITICS OF REGIONALISM IN NORTH-EAST INDIA**

*Edited by*

**MALSAWMLIANA  
LAISANGZELA PACHUAU**



**MITTAL PUBLICATIONS**  
**NEW DELHI (INDIA)**

# CONTENTS

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<i>Preface</i>	v
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	vi
<i>Introduction</i>	vii
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xi
1. Role of Regional Political Parties in Indian Polity — <b>RAMDINLIANI</b>	1
2. Regionalism in India : A Perspective — <b>LALTH ANSANGA</b>	9
3. Regionalism and the Politics of Accommodation: Federal arrangement under Sixth Schedule and Article 371 — <b>JOSEPH K. LALFAKZUALA</b>	15
4. Genesis and Problems of Politics of Regionalism in Various Communities of North Eastern Areas — <b>J.V. HLUNA</b>	31
5. Ethnic Assertion among the Karbis of Assam : A Contextual Study of Autonomy Movements in Karbi Anglong — <b>ALAKA SARMAH</b>	39
6. Mizo Ethno-Nationalism: A Paradox of Inclusiveness — <b>T. LALSANGLIANA</b>	51
7. Regional and Ethnic Identity: Issues in the Electoral Politics of Mizoram — <b>LALMALSAWMA KHIANGTE</b>	71
8. From Greater Autonomy to the Hill State : With Reference to Mizoram — <b>MALSAWMLIANA</b>	81
9. The Formation and Role of Eastern India Tribal Union : In Hill Politics of North-East India — <b>BENJAMIN RALTE</b>	91

10.	Student's Politics of Regionalism in Mizoram : A Case Study of the Role of Mizo Zirlai Pawl : With Special Reference to the Inner Line Regulation	105
	—LALSANGZELA PACHUAU	
11.	Mizo Insurgency <i>vis-a-vis</i> Human Rights : With Reference to Mizoram	119
	—C. LALHMANMAWIA	
	<i>Index</i>	131



# ROLE OF REGIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES IN INDIAN POLITY

RAMDINLIANI

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## Introduction

India's party system originated in the late 19th century as a response to the British colonial challenge. The beginning of the Indian party system can be traced back to the formation of the Congress, as a political platform in 1885. Other parties and groups emerged later. The first two decades of independence (1947-67) witnessed the continuous domination of the Congress both at the Central level and in the states. Since 1967, a multi-party situation has emerged, both in the centre and in the states. The period between 1980-89 later, was considered as the uneasy phase of tussle between the Congress and the opposition in the centre and the Congress and the regional political parties in the states. After this period, India witnessed a mushroom growth of regional political parties and their role also become more and more important in Indian polity.

A regional party or local party is one which enjoys its popularity in one or two states and which mainly identified itself with the interests of a particular area or community, or a linguistic or cultural or religious groups. The main holds of a regional party are in one certain states and mostly participate in the elections within the state. Most of regional parties have agenda fitting certain culture dominant within the state. Different regional parties were established at different periods because of different reasons, given India's social, cultural and historical diversity.

The rise regional political parties is a political development of no ordinary significance. They successfully exploit the local, regional

and parochial grievances and thrive on the propaganda of "Regional Imbalances in Respect of Economic Development". They represent not only the newly emergent regional elites but also the total complex of regional values and regional ambitions. By successfully transmitting the parochial and local discontent of the people they have carved out a significant space for themselves in the political horizon of India. Their emergence also indicates a shift in the centers of powers from cosmopolitan centers to remote provincial and rural areas. With the establishment of regional parties rule in a number of states, they have become a crucial element in Indian politics.

### **Types of Regional Political Parties**

In India, regional political parties can be classified into three types:

1. Firstly, for years, the Congress dissidents off and on, formed several regional parties and groups, mostly short lived and often for an ad-hoc purpose as a bargaining counter. For example, Bangla Congress, Vishal Haryana Parishad, etc.
2. The second types of regional parties are tribal parties as focal points of building a tribal political identity and as a platform for obtaining more concessions from the centre. They had often talked even secession from India and demanded complete independence. For example, Naga National Council established in 1946, Mizo National Front formed in 1961, etc.
3. The third types of regional parties are larger political formations in ethnically, culturally and linguistically defined regions like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir. These parties are bigger in composition, well-knit in their organization, and more stable in their role as important contents of the multi party system in India. For example, Telegu Desam, DMK and AIADMK, etc.

### **Role of Regional Political Parties**

#### ***Safeguards the Pride and Dignity of the Regions***

The emergence of regional parties in India has geo-political rationale. India, having a wide range of Socio-cultural and ethnic diversities in political integration, the diversities are bound to and indeed did aspire for political autonomy. The control of state affairs by the central leadership for instance, in matters of distribution of tickets at election time, formation of ministries, selection of Chief Minister, state planning priorities, location of industries, etc. and their style of working and public behaviour towards state leaders were often arbitrary and not

quite democratic. In this situation, to safeguard the pride and dignity of the region becomes one of the most important role of regional political parties. Moreover, one way of expression of political autonomy in a federation is the formation of regional parties and groups in order to bargain with the centre for a better deal for regional development.

### ***Represent different interests***

Regional political parties give representation to the interests of a particular linguistic, religious, regional, ethnic or cultural groups. So, their influence is supposed to be confined to an area as small as a single state assembly constituency or as an area as an entire State or region. Experience has shown that almost all national parties have neglected to give adequate importance to their regional and state units. As a result, there arise discontent among regional leaders and which in turn leads to the formation of regional political parties to represent the interest of their own particular region. So, all shades of interest gets due representation in the governance of the country.

### ***Role in Formation of Government***

In a democracy, having multi-party system like India, regional political parties play an important role in formation of government. Due to the high competition among political parties, there is no single party which is strong enough to acquire prescribed number of Member of Parliament on its own. So, in order to form government, regional parties are often approached by national parties or other regional parties as a coalitional partner. Regional parties have emerged as active actors. They have been able to impress the national parties and left tremendous impact on them. National parties also realizes the importance of joining hands with regional parties to strengthen their role and position in Indian political system. Therefore, regional political parties have a great opportunity to be in a position to capture and exercise government power. In many states, coalition government is inevitable and as such, the way regional parties operate may even lead to the dislvement of State Legislature.

### ***Role in Peace and Security of the Country***

The activities and operations of regional political parties determines a lot for the peace, security and integrity of the country as a whole. Usually, the main reasons for the formation of regional political parties are frustration with slow economic progress and the long negligence of a particular region by the Central Government. This inculcate separatist and isolationist feeling among the people of that region which, in its highest form, manifest itself as a demand for autonomy movements.



Since some of the movements carried out in this regard often resulted in insurgency, violence, strikes and clashes, the peace and security of the country often becomes endangered. Therefore, to maintain the peace, security, unity and integrity of the country, due respect and importance must be given to the interest of regional political parties all over the country.

### ***Role in Election***

In India, most regional parties have come to stay as important political formations enjoying sizeable electoral support. In our federal democratic polity, regional political parties would continue to have relevance and appeal, especially for certain dominant social and economic interests. Many of these in effect have a characteristic similar to pressure and interests groups, both in size and role in the political system. This means that they do not directly participate in election but acted as a strong force and their support to a particular party may bring victory to that party. Their influence waxes and wanes in the context of national parties. There are several regional and local parties, some trans-regional, some of municipal dimension, some recognized and some pretending to be cultural organizations which by their influence are capable of titling the balance of power in multi-party contest, and on becoming vote-banks of certain communities and castes. They belong to the various 'hues' of the ideological and political spectrum.

Regional parties have provided a new dimension to the process of national integration and nation building. They are now playing an active role which changed from a confrontationist conflictual orientation to a co-operative bargaining orientation in respect of Centre-state relations. In the era of coalition Government, regional political parties have emerged as active actors in the Indian political system. National parties realize the importance of joining hands with regional parties to strengthen their role and position in the Indian political system.

### **Negative aspect in the role of Regional Political Parties:**

Regional political parties, while having an important role in Indian polity, can be viewed from a different angle. The term 'regional' itself focused and concentrate on one particular region. Therefore, regional political parties represent the interest of a particular region in preference to the national interest as a whole. So, the interest of the nation as a whole become sacrificed at the alter of the regional interest. Sometimes, this disrupts the national unity which often takes a very serious turn and cause bloodshed. National interests



are subordinated to regional interests and loyalty of the people becomes shifted from the nation to particular region. But it is very important to realize that no party can exist unless it believes in national integrity.

In the second place, many regional political parties both in their formation and style of operation are often the result of political ambitiousness of some regional leaders. These persons often manipulate and exploit parties to satisfy their own political interests. Since, the party has its own iron discipline, the members of the regional political parties are supposed to cry ditto to what their political bosses say. Besides, some politicians who do not succeed much in national politics also sometimes resort for forming regional parties.

### **Reasons for the Increasing Role of Regional Parties**

In India, the emergence and spread of regionalism as a counter-movement to an exaggerated or aggressive form of centralization has resulted in the growth of regional political parties. Regional problems arise when there is a combination of two or more such, factors as geographical isolation, independent historical traditionalism, racial, ethnic or religious peculiarities and local and economic class interests. India has a regional diversity. Questions of inter-state boundaries, allocation of river waters and location of development projects roused the passions of regional, linguistic groups and developed into militant demands leading to bitterness and conflict.

The presence of a number of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religions and caste groups within the Indian society is greatly responsible for the origin growth of regional political parties. Though the regional parties operate within very limited area and pursue only limited objects, they have played a significant role both in the state as well as national politics. The regional parties have made a strong impact on the nature of Centre-State relations. They have also focused the attention of the people in remote areas on various political and economic issues and contributed to political awakening.

In the North-East India, the tribal factor gave rise to the formation of regional political parties. These tribes, having its own language, culture and traditions have through ages stood apart from the mainstream of national life and history. So, regional parties formed on the basis of these tribal factors have succeeded a lot in the integration of ethnic groups under one government, uplift the status and economic conditions of the people and in safeguarding

their respective religions. So, these regional parties enjoyed strong public support and have the greatest chance of gaining victory in elections. They inculcate deep impression in the minds of the people because these regional parties preserve the distinct identity ethnically, culturally and socially.

Economically, the development of various regions of the country has been uneven. Therefore, conflicts develop between people and even governments of various states and within states, between regions on questions of location of projects, etc.. Some states have a very slow economic progress and some have got improper treatment from the centre. These led to the growth of regional political parties among these frustrated areas.

### **Conclusion**

There can be two parallel analysis in the context of the role of regional political parties. One group observes the negative outcome of the emergence of the regional political parties. They are of the opinion that the multiplication and growth of regional parties has suffocated democracy. These organizations are merely Pressure Groups of various sorts, who have taken advantage of the weak political system in India. This group, again greeted the rise of regional parties with suspicion because they believe that regional parties reflect narrow regional identities and that regional parties brought about instability. The successful regional parties raise the specter of secessionist conflict. They believed that it has weakened the power of the centre. They call it Regionalization of National Politics. However, the negative influence of regional parties may be overstated. There is another group that sees the positive aspect regional parties. This group advocates that due to the emergence of regional parties, politics has become more democratized. Attitudes about loyalty to region and country do not always correlate with vote choice. It is also a fact that most of the regional parties that burst onto the scene in the 1990s actually traced their origins to the national parties.

Regional parties have their own merits and demerits. Though both sides are equally balancing yet, this does not mean that we should try to do away with regional political parties all together. Regional political parties are more directly linked with the regional people, they subscribe to the social, economical and political needs of the people and are able to mobilize more voters in different regions, they occupy an important place in Indian polity. Thirty years ago, regional parties were marginal players on the national scene. Over, the past fifteen years, the rise of regional parties has been one of

the most important trends in India's electoral politics. Today, they are fixtures in national level governments. Moreover, the electoral trend and the inevitability of coalition governments in the centre and in many states, regional political parties would continue to play an important role in Indian polity. Therefore, there is a strong need to reorganize the party system, preventing all chances of abusing it by the narrow-minded politicians and ensuring unity of the people in the country.

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