

**The Look East Policy and Insurgency in India's North East :  
A Few Case Studies (1990-2014)**

**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
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**CERTIFIED THAT THE THESIS ENTITLED**

**THE LOOK EAST POLICY AND INSURGENCY IN INDIA'S  
NORTH EAST : A FEW CASE STUDIES (1990-2014) [PhD-Thesis]**

Submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at  
Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of

**PROFESSOR SHIBASISH CHATTERJEE**

And that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree  
or diploma anywhere / elsewhere.

**Countersigned by the  
Supervisor  
Dated :**

**Candidate :  
Dated :**

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ADB - Asian Development Bank

ADCs - Autonomous District Councils

AEC ASEAN - Economic Community

AEM ASEAN - Economic Ministers

AEP - Act East Policy

AFAFGIT ASEAN - Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Goods in Transit

AFAFIST ASEAN - Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Inter-State Transport

AFAMT ASEAN - Framework Agreement on Multi-modal Transport

AFSPA - Armed Forces Special Power Act

AFTA - ASEAN Free Trade Area

AH - Asian Highway

AHN - ASEAN Highway Network

AIA - ASEAN Investment Area

AICEA ASEAN-India Comprehensive Economic Agreement

AIDS - Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

AMM - ASEAN Ministerial Meeting

APEC Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

APG - ASEAN Power Grid

ARF - ASEAN Regional Forum

ASAM - ASEAN Single Aviation Market

ASEAN - Association of South East Asian Nations

ASTP - ASEAN Strategic Transport Plan

ASW - ASEAN Single Window

BBIN - Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal

BCIM - Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Forum for Regional Cooperation

BIMPEAGA - Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines East  
ASEAN Growth Area

BIMSTEC - Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic  
Cooperation

BOT - Balance of Trade

BRICS - Brazil, Russia, India, China, Sri Lanka

BTAC- Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Council  
CBI- Cross-Border Infrastructure  
CBTA- Cross-Border Transport Agreement  
CEC -Comprehensive Economic Cooperation  
CLMV- Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam  
CNF- Chin National Front  
CSO- Central Statistical Organisation  
CSS- Centrally Sponsored Schemes  
DEA- Department of Economic Affairs  
DFC- Dedicated Freight Corridor  
DGFT- Director General of Foreign Trade  
DMIC- Delhi–Mumbai Industrial Corridor  
DONER- Development of the North East Region  
EAS- East Asia Summit  
ERIA- Economic Research Institute for ASEAN  
ESCAP- Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific  
EU- European Union  
EWEC- East–West Economic Corridor  
FC- Finance Commission  
FDI- Foreign Direct Investment  
FICCI- Federation of the Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industries  
FTA- Free Trade Agreement  
GDP- Gross Domestic Product  
IIE- Indian Institute of Entrepreneurship  
IIFT- Indian Institute of Foreign Trade  
IIM- Indian Institute of Management  
ILP- Inner Line Permit  
IMT- India–Myanmar–Thailand  
IMTTH- India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway  
IPN- International Production Network  
IPRs -Intellectual Property Rights  
ISEAS- Institute of South East Asian Studies  
KMTTP- Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project  
KNA- Kuki National Army

KSRL- Kunming Singapore Rail Links  
LAC- Line of Actual Control  
LC- Land Customs  
LCSs- Land Custom Stations  
LEP- Look East Policy  
MAAS- Multilateral Agreement on Air Services  
MAFLAFS- Multilateral Agreement for Full Liberalization of Air Freight Services  
MAFLPAS- Multilateral Agreement for Full Liberalization of Passenger Air Services  
MEA- Ministry of External Affairs  
MGC- Mekong-Ganga Cooperation  
MIEC -Mekong–India Economic Corridor  
MoDONER- Ministry of Development of the North Eastern Region  
MoU- Memorandum of Understanding  
MPAC- Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity  
MPMCS- Mendipathar Multipurpose Cooperative Society  
MRAs- Mutual Recognition Arrangements  
MVA- Motor Vehicle Agreement  
NAC -National Advisory Council  
NAM- Non-Aligned Movement  
NCAER- National Council of Applied Economic Research  
NDA- National Democratic Alliance  
NDFB- National Democratic Front of Bodoland  
NEC- North Eastern Council  
NEI- Northeast India  
NER- Northeast Region  
NHPC- National Hydro Power Corporation  
NLD- National League for Democracy  
NNC- Naga National Council  
NPA- Non-Performing Assets  
NSCN- National Socialist Council of Nagaland  
NSCN-IM -National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isaac-Muivah Group)  
NSCN-K- National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang Group)  
NSDP -Net State Domestic Product  
NSEC- North–South Economic Corridor

NSSO- National Sample Survey Organization  
NTB -Non-Tariff Barriers  
NTMs- Non-Tariff Measures  
NVA- Net Value Added  
OBOR -One Belt One Road  
ONGC- Oil and Natural Gas Corporation  
PLA- People's Liberation Army  
PPP- Public-Private Partnership  
PREPAK -People's Republican Party of Kangleipak  
RAP -Restricted Area Permit  
RBI- Reserve Bank of India  
RCEP- Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership  
RIATS- Roadmap for Integration of Air Travel Sector  
RICMT- Roadmap Towards an Integrated and Competitive Maritime Transport in  
ASEAN  
RIS- Research Information Services  
RTAs- Regional Trade Agreements  
SAARC- South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation  
SAFTA South Asian Free Trade Agreement  
TGAP -Trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline  
TH -Trilateral Highway  
TPP- Trans-Pacific Partnership  
ULFA- United Liberation Front of Assam  
UNCLOS- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas  
UNCTAD- United Nations Conference on Trade and Development  
UNESCAP- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific  
UNLF- United National Liberation Front  
UNLFWSEA- United National Liberation Front of Western South East Asia  
UWSA- United Wa State Army  
WTO -World Trade Organization



# **CHAPTER-1**

## **INTRODUCTION :-**

### **AREA OF RESEARCH :**

The North-eastern region of India has been embroiled in controversy since the time of British rule and continues to face inter and intra-tribal conflicts to this day. The complexities of these conflicts have made it challenging for both the British and subsequent governments to effectively address and resolve them, despite the region's significant potential. During the British rule, the Northeast region of India was operated from the mainland and was granted a significant degree of autonomy. This ultimately made the local population hesitant to cooperate or coordinate with the central government of India. As a result, efforts to establish civil society, promote peace- building and peacekeeping, and develop trade and cooperative relationships with Southeast Asian nations faced significant challenges. The interwoven nature of multiple disputes in the Northeast further exacerbated these difficulties. In recent years, the northeast region of India has made concerted efforts to bridge the developmental gap with the rest of the country. This has been made possible in part through the implementation of progressive policies, such as the Look East Policy, which has since been upgraded to the Act East Policy<sup>1</sup> These policies represent a significant step towards improving the socio-economic conditions of the region and bringing it on par with the rest of the country.

The Northeast region of India has long been mired in low-intensity conflicts, which have made it a challenging environment for development initiatives to take root. The persistent nature of these conflicts has created controversy and contributed to a general sense of uncertainty that can make it difficult to advance sustainable development goals in the region. The tribal communities of the Northeast region had little faith that the government of India would be able to effectively address the conflicts that were destabilizing the region. According to the tribes, the politicians

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<sup>1</sup>India's Act East Policy focuses on the extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region. The policy which was originally conceived as an economic initiative, has gained political, strategic and cultural dimensions including establishment of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/printrelease.aspx?relid=133837>

connived with the insurgent groups to instigate violence in the region. However, with successive efforts of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi<sup>2</sup> contentious issues eventually got a platform via consecutive discussions. Though sorted for the moment, complications ruptured as central and the state government eventually became occupied with international affairs to strengthen state's economic structure.

My research explores the challenges that the state faces in fostering economic relations with Southeast Asian nations through major developmental policies, which have frequently contributed to insurgency situations in the Northeast region. Additionally, I examine the ways in which government-led peace-building efforts, in conjunction with civil society initiatives, have helped to reduce violence and promote greater participation in mainstream development across several states in the Northeast. While there may be differing views between the Northeast and the rest of India regarding development, my research aims to shed light on the effectiveness of various initiative and the gaps that remain in their execution.

### **BRIEF HISTORY:-**

Amongst all the major foreign policy ministers of independent India, very few had serious intention of sorting things out with northeast. The complex relationship between the tribal communities and the government has been a significant obstacle to progress in the Northeast region. India's desire to enhance its economic ties with Southeast Asian nations through ASEAN has highlighted the strategic importance of the Northeast as a key engine of India's growth. However, the region's numerous emotional and economic disputes have made it difficult to navigate and have created a narrative that is fraught with complexity. The transit facilities that can act as mediums of communication are also few; one of them is a 22 kilometres narrow strip of land known as Shiliguri corridor. In order to settle things, it is important to increase the communication facilities and thus the execution of the Look East Policy hence became significant.

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<sup>2</sup> At 40, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi was the youngest Prime Minister of India, perhaps even one of the youngest elected heads of Government in the world. His mother, Smt. Indira Gandhi, was eight years older when she first became Prime Minister in 1966. His illustrious grandfather, Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, was 58 when he started the long innings of 17 years as free India's first Prime Minister. [https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/former\\_pm](https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/former_pm)

The north-eastern region of India is composed of 8 states, with the recent inclusion of Sikkim. It is the storehouse of the major resources, majorly water, bio-diversity, and minerals along with the other resources, which are yet to be discovered and properly utilised for the benefit of the citizens. With India's independence, there was a profuse change in the socio-politico-economic scenario, which majorly affected the tribal of the northeast. The tribal communities of the Northeast region were deeply impacted by the divide-and-rule policies of the British colonial government, which sowed discord and created divisions that persisted even after India gained independence. As India sought to assert its own self-rule in the post-independence era, these communities continued to struggle with the legacy of these policies and the challenges they created. Post 1947 policymakers began to prioritize security interests in the Northeast region, often to the detriment of development initiatives aimed at benefitting the region's citizens. This focus on security concerns led to increased isolation of the region, and a lack of emphasis on addressing the development needs of the Northeast zone.

Look East policy, a strong initiative of the Indian government came about as a by-product of the Cold War and the historical world wars. In the wake of globalization and the increasing importance of international trade and communication, the Indian government introduced the Look East Policy in 1991, shortly after the process of regionalization. This policy was viewed as a politically necessary move by the then-Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao<sup>3</sup> aimed at fostering closer economic, security, and communication ties with other Southeast Asian nations. Until then, India was a closed economy state and the Look East Policy was a strategic change in its external affairs, especially towards the South East Asian states. For national interests, it was a confident step..Initially, the developmental concerns of the Northeast region were included in the broader national development strategy. However, over time, greater emphasis was placed on addressing India's overall developmental needs, sometimes at the expense of the specific needs of the Northeast region.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/former\\_pm/shri-p-v-narasimha-rao-2/](https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/former_pm/shri-p-v-narasimha-rao-2/)

As Southeast Asian states became increasingly important economic players, it became clear that India's own economic development was contingent on the development of its Northeast region. Eco-political strategists in India recognized that closer coordination with Southeast Asian nations on trade could help to address the longstanding issues and conflicts in the Northeast. The region is home to approximately 40 million people, including 213 of the 635 tribal groups listed by the Anthropological Survey of India. The population is primarily rural, with just 12% living in urban areas, and the region's diversity is shaped by its proximity to neighbouring states such as Tibet and Burma, as well as major countries in Southeast Asia and beyond.

The Northeast region is a melting pot of various religions, including Hinduism and Buddhism from greater India and Tibet, Islam brought by Bengali migrants from neighbouring states, and Christianity introduced by missionaries. The coexistence of these religions within a single region has created an environment of extreme volatility, with underlying tensions that require only a small spark to ignite the already tense atmosphere. The culmination of latent and immediate factors resulted in successive waves of insurgency across the northeast. The civil society operative in the region has rejected the fact that the separatist outfits of the northeast were born out of a diligent nexus between the outfits and the political leaders from the state and central government. These were the major allegations towards the state of Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. Assam, which was initially (immediately after independence) a peaceful and stable state, with all its needs and frustrations, later became the cauldron of disputes.

A reflection has been seen in Karbi Anglong and NC hills. There are many dissensions raging in Assam and it has become quite evident that the resources for tackling them are actually inadequate. The persisting issue of Bodoland, the Muslims, other tribal communities, and the government approach to resolve these conflicts by means of violence highlights the mentioned discrepancies. This henceforth gives a tough blow to the administration.

The displacement of the local population and the emergence of new insurgent outfits in Assam currently add up to the tensions of the government. Not only in

Assam but the entire northeast endures these difficulties persistently. In the case of Manipur and Nagaland, both states witness an open confrontation between Meitei nationalism and Naga ultra-radicalism. Hilly regions that are difficult to invade due to dense forests are breeding grounds of Meitei outfits. The People's Liberation Army (PLA), which has close ties with other militant groups in the area, seeks to develop cordial relations with China to facilitate a smooth supply chain of arms, which is strongly linked with Maoist groups in the region. In the case of Nagaland, the development of the Pan-Naga Outfit causes strong repercussions in the region. There are only a few regions in the Northeast, which are free from any sort of torments. Tripura is one such state but the recent scenarios in Tripura are quite disturbing. The National Liberation Front of Tripura is said to be triggering the insurgency situation in the region. Similarly, in Meghalaya, the militant outfit of Khasis, (HNLC) and Garo National Liberation Army are engaged in conflict to maintain their identities. The situation in Arunachal Pradesh was stable for quite a long period, but eventually got engaged in the battle of dominance ignited by Naga militant outfits. Not to forget that the hurdles in Arunachal Pradesh have been accentuated by the interference of China.

The Northeast region of India is characterized by significant cultural and geographical differences from the rest of mainland India. As a result, the political situation in the region may be perceived as unfamiliar or misunderstood by those outside the region. This lack of understanding can pose challenges to maintaining a balanced federal system within the country. Nevertheless, the present nation-building process of government involves policies for the preservation towards tribal culture, linguistics and customs. In terms of settling things in the northeast, the government is engaged in peace negotiations to foster the empowerment of the tribal communities by trying to bring them into the mainstream. The provision of liberal economic packages to tribal communities following independence was seen as a means of promoting nation-building. A separatist mentality was not projected.

## **BOOK REVIEW :**

One of the books I have analyzed on the topic of northeast insurgency, counter-insurgency, and government efforts to restore peace and development in the region is *"India's North East- New Vistas Of Peace"* by N. Goswami. The book provides a detailed examination of the developmental history, independence, ethnic cultures, and demands of each state, along with the challenges they have faced since being integrated into the Indian Territory. The author delves into the insurgencies in Assam, Manipur, and Mizoram, which have had a ripple effect on other North-eastern states. The author also highlights how the transition from a stable region to a terrorism-infested area was not an overnight phenomenon. The lack of peace in the northeast has been a major hindrance to the region's development. The issues of insurgency, identity, ethnicity, and external influences have contributed to an atmosphere of insecurity in the region. This has resulted in a prolonged period of neglect and misguidance from the government, which has contributed to the rise of terrorism in the area. It is important to recognize that peace and development are interdependent and that without peace, development in the northeast will be difficult to achieve.

This is an edited book, which offers excellent arguments by esteemed writers. Author Nag depicted the effects of counter-insurgency in the political fallout of the Northeast. The persistence of the external forces, the involvement of the ISI<sup>4</sup>, the training facilities provided by China and how the government tackles these narratives; revolve around the arguments posed by Bhowmik and Baruah in this edited volume. The work aims to provide an account of the efforts made by think tanks, media, and security forces to establish peace in the northeast region, as well as identifying factors that could facilitate India's trade relations with Southeast Asian nations.

The policymakers of India have placed major emphasis on extending trading ties with Southeast Asian nations, often overlooking the historical discord that has plagued the region. However, for long-term stability and progress, it is essential that all agencies involved share the common goal of promoting peace and development in the area. Through coordinated efforts, including government cooperation, the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/miscellaneous/isi-pakistan/articleshow/97445080.cms?from=mdr>

region can potentially overcome the crises stemming from underdevelopment and historical tensions. With governmental cooperation, the region would potentially evade the crises emerging out of underdevelopment. The book gives a clear picture of India's need to forge regionalism. The book, unfortunately, does not address the crucial issue of how India can effectively aid the development of the northeast region in the face of ongoing terrorist threats. It fails to provide answers on how the government can resolve the region's issues while pursuing trade ties with states that support insurgent groups. Moreover, despite over a decade of implementing the Look East Policy, the northeast region remains under military control, raising questions about the policy's effectiveness.

These questions have been extremely poignant in the writings of K. S. Subramanian, who is an independent researcher and has previously worked with the Government of India's Union Home Ministry. His words analyse how the northeast has remained in a constant state of turmoil since independence. The author establishes a connection between the chaotic situation in the region and governance deficiencies, citing the government's failure to ensure security and promote cooperation by providing adequate infrastructure and development facilities.

There are various government agencies and institutions in the northeast that are working together on peace settlement in the area. The author provides detailed analysis of specific states in the Northeast region such as Manipur, Tripura, Assam, and Nagaland. In addition to this, the author also covers topics such as centre-state relations, the government's counter-insurgency strategies, and the role of human rights commissions in addressing the situation. According to the book, the major policy-making organs of the government have made various attempts to resolve the disputes between the states and improve the ties of the northeast with the rest of India. The author also discusses the significant economic policies implemented by the government to promote the development of the region. The book highlights the Look East Policy, which was later upgraded to the Act East Policy due to changes in power politics at the centre.

As far as the orientation of the Look East Policy is concerned, Dr Rupachandra, in his work *Periphery within Periphery: a challenge towards an Integrated Manipur*

analyses the effects of the Look East Policy and its major failures in the northeast, specifically in Manipur. He discusses the volatile political environment in the northeastern states; and how these states play a vital role in connecting India with the Southeast Asian region. He vividly analyses the tribal communities with their major international links. The author argues that Manipur has historically struggled with various ethnic groups fighting for identity recognition, and even after six decades of independence, the state is still battling for peace and development within the largest democracy in the world. It is apparent that the Northeast region, once regarded as a *paradise*, has now turned into a breeding ground for conflicts and instability.

The book delves into centuries of neglect, insensitivity, and reluctance by policymakers in addressing the socio-political conditions of the Northeast, particularly Manipur. Hazarika and Raghavan have also conducted similar grassroots discussions in their edited book "*Conflicts in the Northeast – Internal and External Effects*." The book covers a range of discussions on the development of insurgency in the region, starting with Manipur. Additionally, Singh tracks the origins of conflict in Assam, focusing on its most prominent group, ULFA, which was nurtured and supported by the Bangladeshi government.

Kakoty, in his article, further contextualizes the issues in the northeast as a result of migration, reiterating the point made in the aforementioned works. He argues that the conflict in the region is a collateral damage of migration, with a majority of people migrating from Bangladesh and settling in the region. This has caused the development of a majority-minority conflict between the tribal population and the refugees who have settled in the area. Mishra's analysis highlights that the inter-tribal conflicts in Nagaland are not limited to the Nagas alone but have wider roots in other states of the northeast as well. Mishra argues that these conflicts have been a serious concern for the government for decades. A detailed analysis of the changes that Tripura has faced in determining its socio-political status post-independence was given by Jayanta Bhattacharya, a renowned journalist from Tripura working with Press Trust of India. The state of Tripura has faced significant challenges due to the continuous influx of migrants from Bangladesh since Partition, which both the central and state governments have failed to effectively regulate. This has resulted in excessive population growth and an existential crisis among the Tripuris and other



indigenous tribes of Tripura. However, with the cooperation of the leftist government of Tripura, the situation has improved.

Mizoram, unlike any other state in the northeast, faced the Mautam<sup>5</sup> famine, and the government's failure to counter the situation led to increased aggression among the Mizos, resulting in a tense political situation that required cooperation from other tribal communities in the region. The Mizo peace accord, signed in 1986, seemed to have brought about a resolution to the situation. However, tensions rose again with the expulsion of approximately 17,000 Reangs by the Mizos. The state government of Mizoram claimed that there were an increasing number of refugees who could potentially occupy the region, while there was poor state capacity to accommodate these numbers, creating further tensions in the region. These refugees sought refuge in the border areas of Tripura and their numbers continued to increase, particularly in the year 2000.

The situation continued to be violent when these refugee camps lead to the creation of two major outfits- BNLF (Bru National Liberation Front) and BLFM (Bru Liberation Front of Mizoram). Besides these two major outfits, HPCD continued its negotiations with the state and the central government in settling things. The article also discusses the Singlung Tiger Force, which later became the Singlung Peoples Liberation Army. They worked in the border areas of Myanmar, Mizoram and Manipur to protect the Singlung tribe from being displaced due to hydel power projects by the state and the central government. The book's conclusion provides a detailed account of insurgencies in the north-eastern states, highlighting the government's indiscriminate and unbiased measures to counter them. It is generally believed that unheard stories from the northeast will not teach the mainstream policymakers of Delhi. Therefore, solutions for their distress are unreachable. However, the tribes are currently receiving support from NGOs, human rights commissions, and political organizations that are advocating for them. This support

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<sup>5</sup> Flowering of bamboo sends Mizoram into a terrifying spiral of crop devastation and food shortages. The last time it triggered a famine and violent insurgency.

<https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/states/story/20071210-the-flower-of-famine-734644-2007-11->

has given them a voice to speak up for their rights and seek solutions to their ongoing struggles.

One major book written on the severe effects of counterinsurgency in the northeast is by author Goutam Das. His work, *Insurgencies in North East India-Moving towards Resolution* hence deserves a special mention. Das was in the army from 1968 to 1991 and was awarded with *Sword of Honour*. He was in charge of the counterinsurgency process operated by the government in Nagaland from 1972 till 1973. He was strongly involved with both the administration and the ground realities of insurgency situations in the northeast which later inspired him to write the book. He discusses extensively the realities of the government in executing the counter-insurgency measures and the consequences that these measures had. The participation of civil society in the decision-making process was never sought in the northeast which essentially became one of the major drawbacks of the government in understanding the ground realities of the region. Besides, a majority of the developmental decisions such as infrastructure development, good governance, refugee management issues etc that are discussed in New Delhi are not available in the public domain, creating suspicion and misunderstanding. The work highlights the conflicting situation in the respective states especially in Nagaland and Manipur in the post-independence period with a detailed analysis of how the Look East Policy attempted to entwine itself with the betterment of the citizens of the region. The book concludes with a discussion of the challenges that the government needs to consider in order to formulate effective policies for these troubled regions. The book includes a comprehensive and often rare discussion about the major initiatives and intentions of the government towards the northeast and its civilians. The author's analysis of how to dispel the misconceptions that many in the region hold about the government and its policies is a unique contribution to the discussions surrounding the insurgency scenario in the Northeast.

Sangeeta Barooah Pisharoty's work *Assam, The Accord and The Discord* gives a detailed analysis of the insurgency situation in the northeast with a special focus on Assam. Assam, being the only recognized state of India in the post-independence era, remains the most significant state of the northeast region. As a result, it faced the major brunt of insurgencies compared to the other states which got independence

much later. The book revolves around the accord signed by the Government of India and the members of the All Assam Students Union against the undocumented immigrants of Assam. The accord, in many ways, did not achieve its intended objectives due to the government's reluctance to grant proper citizenship rights to undocumented immigrants. As the number of such immigrants continued to rise, the situation became increasingly controversial, particularly after the Congress was removed from power and the BJP came to power in 2016. The BJP government's decision to upgrade the National Register of Citizens (NRC), which excluded 14 million people and rendered them stateless caused significant problems in the region.

The refugee problem in Assam has been an age-long difficulty. Pisharoty traced the events back to the 19th century when the British merged Assam with Bengal. During this time, the British relocated numerous Bengalis from Bengal to Assam to run their administration. As Bengal was undivided at the time, a large number of Muslims from Bengal migrated to Assam for better job opportunities. Soon, the entire Assam felt the threat of this large-scale displacement. When the British left, Assam was left with this pressing issue unresolved, amidst extreme communal tensions. However, India's democratic structure post-independence gave Assamese the strength to raise their demands. Thereby the formation of AASU and the signing of the accord came into the picture. The process of resolving the migrant issue in Assam was not smooth, as vote bank politics played by politicians caused many difficulties. Unfortunately, no eminent political figure proved them to be different in this regard. As a result, the migrant issue in Assam remains largely unanswered. Archana Upadhyay's work *The Dynamics of Terrorism in North East India: India's Fragile Borderland* related to the issue of cross-border disputes in the region. The persistent incidents of terrorism in the Northeast, with insurgent groups supported by neighbouring states, have rendered the region highly unstable and prone to vulnerability. However, Indian foreign policy experts have prioritized the promotion of trade as a means of bolstering the economy, rather than addressing the fundamental disputes between the various states. The northeast region has been plagued by various issues such as trafficking of girls, drugs, and human organs from the South. East Asian states, which have contributed to a lack of security and development. Additionally, the constant influx of immigrants from neighbouring

states, who often form alliances with both insurgent outfits and security forces, is an ongoing concern for Indian policymakers.

Scholar Nirendra Dev gives us a different perspective in his book *The Talking Guns: North East India*. Dev, having grown up in a conservative family, witnessed his friends turn to military service due to a lack of other employment opportunities. As a result, he became heavily involved in anti-insurgency efforts from a young age, spending much of his childhood in military camps. Having personally experienced the effects of both government and militant activity, such as surviving bomb blasts and crossfire, he developed a unique understanding of the situation. He had seen how people's lives have been stalled by curfews after 6 pm and are helpless victims of such measures. At the same time, he believed that the policy makers of India had failed to focus on the real issues. The constant backing of the neighbouring states to the regional outfits has not only made their motives strong but has also been misleading by the state that they seek support from, for their own benefits. For decades, the isolated location of northeast India has resulted in neglect from mainland India, with little attention paid to it in policy or academic discourses. While the region has occasionally benefited from attention from Delhi, it has often been for the wrong reasons.

One such book which articulates about the region and its people is Sanjoy Hazarika's, *Strangers of the Mist: tales from War and Peace*, published in the year 1994. The book delves into the interconnections between the various insurgent groups operating in the northeast, who rely on one another for ideological, economic, and social support. Because they collaborate and have shared demands, eradicating them entirely becomes a challenging task. A detailed analysis of the Nellie massacre, in which about 1700 people were killed due to Indira Gandhi's<sup>6</sup> decision to hold elections, highlights the fact that the northeast is often politically exploited. The region is subject to a constant change of policy depending on which

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<sup>6</sup> **Indira Gandhi**, in full **Indira Priyadarshini Gandhi**, née **Nehru**, (born November 19, 1917, Allahabad, India—died October 31, 1984, New Delhi), Indian politician who was the first female [prime minister](#) of [India](#), serving for three consecutive terms (1966–77) and a fourth term from 1980 until she was assassinated in 1984. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Indira-Gandhi>

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party is in power in parliament. Hazarika with his practical experiences in his work explores the respective problems that have arisen in the northeast. The most dangerous issue currently involves the backing of outfits by immediate neighbours. The presence of insurgent outfits in neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar has added to the already tense situation in the northeast. The government's efforts to counter these groups have often worsened the situation, as the brutalities of the military and paramilitary forces have fuelled resentment and grievances among the local population, leading to an increase in the recruitment of insurgent groups. A significant challenge in the northeast region is the substantial migration that has altered the demographics, fuelled ethnic conflicts and triggered competition for economic resources. The involvement of Pakistan, China, Bangladesh and Myanmar in the region has exacerbated the situation. Hazarika's book sheds light on his efforts to make a valuable contribution to this complex issue.

Nevertheless, the work lacks in certain regards. Firstly, the book's analysis is limited by its publication date, and it does not provide an updated perspective on recent political developments and initiatives for the northeast region. A more current evaluation is required to fully understand the current situation in the region. Secondly, The lack of analysis on the active participation of non-governmental organizations in this work has been frustrating for researchers like myself. While the book effectively portrays the history of the northeast, it falls short in providing insights into the current situation and potential future developments. Due to these gaps, I turned to another work by Hazarika with the expectation of gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the region.

In the year 2000, Hazarika's work "*Rites of Passage*" delves into the issue of continuous infiltrations and its impact on the formation of identity in northeast citizens. This not only affects the citizens, but also those who choose to migrate and struggles to establish a stable identity in the region. This instability has resulted in a breeding ground for insurgency, terrorism, and mass movements, which is a matter of concern for all. Contemporary research done in the context of the northeast rarely addresses these issues, and as a result, the majority of India remains largely unaware of the turmoil in the region. Hazarika, a native of northeast India, draws on his

firsthand experiences to argue that the problem of identity in the region is rooted in the failure of the Bangladeshi government to fulfil its socio-political responsibilities. The influx of Bangladeshi infiltrators exacerbates the already existing issues of identity and demands, further fueling tensions in the region. Hazarika advocates for the inclusion of the northeast issues in discussions among policymakers, calling it a "historical conflict" that has existed since pre-independence. He suggests that this could lead to a permanent reduction of hazards and establish peace and prosperity in the region. Hazarika It can be said that Hazarika's works provide a comprehensive perspective on one of the major reasons for insurgency in the northeast, namely infiltration. The ongoing problem of internally displaced individuals, who feel excluded from the socio-political discourse, fuels the flames of unrest. Through his writings, Hazarika sheds light on this issue and emphasizes the need for policymakers to include the northeast in their discussions, which can lead to sustainable solutions. By studying Hazarika's works, I was able to gain an insightful academic understanding of the past, present, and future expectations of the northeast region.

Although the historical analysis of the region and the description of illegal immigration from neighbouring countries provide valuable background information, they alone are insufficient to address my research question, which focuses specifically on the insurgency situation in the northeast. In this regard, Samir Kumar Das's *Ethnicity Nation and Security- Essay on North East India* forms a strong stepping-stone towards the accumulation of proper shreds of evidence regarding the major ethnic communities of the region and their varied demands. The rise of insurgent groups in various states of the northeast starting from Nagaland and their various tentacles working across borders has been prominently highlighted in this book. It also examines the major actions taken up by the government to overpower the insurgent groups and their major lapses while doing so within a historical timeline. The needs for proper economic assistance from the government along with proper connectivity with the mainstream are some of the major concerns raised in this work. The book not only provides a detailed analysis of the ethnic minorities in the region but also emphasizes the importance of India's foreign policies being adaptable to maintain cooperative terms with the South eastern states, which, in turn, has an impact on the stabilization of the north-eastern states of the

country. However, the book falls short in analyzing the government's policies towards infrastructural development in the region. Although the knowledge gained from the aforementioned books is valuable, addressing the gaps in this area is crucial to understand the projection of the northeast in the context of the rest of India.

Probing more for the root causes of insurgency I took up Sanjib Baruah's *Durable Disorder; Understanding The Policies of The North East*. The work analyses the complexities in the policies of the Indian government and how the colonial experience and exploitation are reflected in different reactions in different states. The central discussion of the book is about insurgent groups, their slow but steady extensions and the major socio-political imbalances and their consequences. The work analyses the role of ULFA and how it has successfully provided a strong base for other insurgent outfits. Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur are the two states given special importance to emphasize the political and military influences existing there. The Look East Policy is highlighted as a significant tool employed by the Indian government to promote peace and prosperity in the Northeast. Despite being primarily composed of tribal communities and thus being considered *backward*, the Look East policy was expected to provide a glimmer of hope for peace and progress in the region. The work is a collection of essays sourced from various journals, resulting in a disjointed feel with disparate topics linked together in an academic context. While Baruah's book provides a path for studying the political scenario of the northeast, it does not fully address some aspects of my research. Specifically, it fails to clarify how ethnic demands stem from a long-standing separation from the mainland, and it does not explain other relevant policies apart from the Look East Policy that play a role in stabilizing the socio-political conditions in the northeast. As a result, my investigation into this topic continues.

The next book in my analysis is Subir Bhoumik's work *Troubled Periphery; Crisis of India's North East* (2009) focuses on the slew of initiatives taken up by the Indian government for controlling the political conditions of the northeast. As more works start to discuss the integrities of politics in the northeast; this reflects a growing audience in academia on this significant topic. Among all such crucial publications, Bhoumik's work offers an outstanding discussion on the ethnic crisis in the northeast. The work revolves around the writer's personal experiences. Bhoumik, an

eminent journalist himself has worked extensively in the north-eastern region and hence his work takes into account various issues that are often considered minor. For instance, he analyzes the role of the NGOs towards the development of the tribal communities and the role of small-scale businesses in ruining the recourses found in the region. The work is based on personal experiences and hence lacks a theoretical foundation. The work pays particular attention to the politics of each state in the northeast, the various socio-political movements that involve India's bilateral relations, and the ongoing struggle of ethnic groups for recognition and identity in the midst of illegal migration from neighbouring countries. The piece includes a lengthy discussion on the strategic importance of the north-eastern region and the major role that its political economy plays. In essence, the book provides an overview of foreign policies concerning the northeast region and their impact on the insurgency situations in the states. It effectively describes both internal and external conflicts in the region and their implications for India's security policies, making a significant contribution to the understanding of the subject matter.

Sanjib Baruah's work, *Beyond Counterinsurgency; Breaking the Impasse in North East India* (2009) describes the inherent difference between counterinsurgency and other forms of conflicts. In recent times with the advent of good governance, the establishment of democracy and the reorientation of policies towards the northeast have become necessary. This conflict-ridden region since independence has been a ground of intersection between different insurgent outfits. The government in several ways has attempted to effectively tackle the situation and the policies that it often puts into place are victims of civil conflicts. The book provides a thorough examination of the Naga insurgency and its significant consequences, as well as a comprehensive analysis of the terrorist presence in Assam. It also delves into the unique situations in various north-eastern states. For instance, it highlights the exploitation of Manipur through AFSPA, while also showcasing the development taking place in Arunachal Pradesh. However, the book fails to address the impact of the Look East policy as a key factor in stabilizing the region, which is a notable drawback.

Nandita Haksar and Sebastian .M. Hongray in the work *The Judgement that Never Came (Army Rule in North East India)* discuss the atrocities inflicted on the people



of Manipur by Assam Rifles in a small village named Oinam. The incident is significant to note because not only did it raise questions of human rights but also questioned the democratic functioning of Indian policy making. This is the place where for years the citizens hardly got the chance to place their stories in front of authority. The book explores the several petitions against the horrifying tortures of Special Forces deployed in the region for counterinsurgency. Such instances have often been brushed under the carpet as the media rarely gets to broadcast these stories. NGOs in their attempts to collect funds for their own stakes have also ignored these tortures. Both authors, being journalists themselves, have asserted that the Indian state has utilized torture as a tool of oppression against the powerless, causing great humiliation.

In July 1987, the Assam Rifles launched counterinsurgency operations known as Operation Blue Bird, which lasted for over a year and resulted in loss of life, property destruction, and sexual assaults on women. The citizens were often forced to be bonded labourers or would be captured in the local church for the entire day. This raised major questions about the Indian state and whether the state considered the tribal communities as actual citizens of India. It is safe to say that corruption has reached its peak in these states. Even Nandita was forced to turn to Christianity. The Nagas on the other hand were victims of abuse and constant humiliation by the militants. The book however fails to illustrate the reasons for insurgencies that are operative in the other states of the region. The work is of immense significance as it provides a detailed analysis of the atrocities inflicted by the administration.

Next in my analysis, Subir Bhaumik's work *Agartala Doctrine: A Proactive North East in Indian Foreign Policy* (2016) receives major attention. The work delves into the historical context of the northeast region and how its boundaries were not clearly demarcated for a long time. Following India's independence in 1947, demarcating the region's boundaries became necessary for effective coordination of foreign policies. The book provides an in-depth analysis of these boundary issues, with a particular focus on Tripura. The role of Tripura has been effectively analysed in the work as a significant state that even during pre-independence served as a trading region with Bangladesh and Myanmar. Being an eminent journalist, Subir Bhaumik has strongly advocated for the case of Assam which was the sole state in the

northeast before independence and the establishment of territories. However, till date, Assam remains a significant trade link between ASEAN<sup>7</sup> and BIMSTEC<sup>8</sup> states.

The book is structured into multiple sections and provides an analysis of various issues. It delves into the ramifications of the 1971 Indo-Bangladesh conflict and the impact of the Look East Policy in light of the rising influence of China, which has led to a more comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical narratives of the northeast. The Look East Policy, along with trade relations with the US and China, has a direct impact on the economic capacities of the northeast. However, the negative effects of China's involvement in instigating insurgencies in the region are also highlighted. The author suggests that alliances and mitigated efforts are necessary solutions, as alienation is not an effective solution. Overall, the book has been instrumental in exploring the politics of the region.

The next work that has proposed lucid explanations of the troubles faced by the northeast is *Consequences of Long Term Conflicts In North East*, edited by V. R. Raghavan. This book is a collaborative work by the Centre for Security Analysis and Transnational Consequences, in partnership with the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The book provides a valuable resource by examining the economic and political landscapes of India's northeast region. It offers an in-depth analysis of the region's challenges, which are intricately linked to South and Southeast Asia. The persistent insurgency and loss of life have irrevocably altered the northeast. Unfortunately, the region has received insufficient attention in research and study. The Indian government has attempted to establish peace through negotiations by treating the problems of the northeast as one, resulting in only temporary solutions. It can be concluded that the Northeast region has lost faith in the government's nation-building process and is still grappling with persistent issues.

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<sup>7</sup> The Association of Southeast Asian Nations is a regional organization that brings together disparate neighbors to address economic and security issues, but the group's impact remains limited. <https://www.cfr.org/background/what-asean>

<sup>8</sup> The [Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation](https://aric.adb.org/initiative/bay-of-bengal-initiative-for-multi-sectoral-technical-and-economic-cooperation) (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization comprising seven Member States lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal constituting a contiguous regional unity. <https://aric.adb.org/initiative/bay-of-bengal-initiative-for-multi-sectoral-technical-and-economic-cooperation>

Despite this, the book has made an extensive effort to analyze the region-specific troubles and provide insights into the complex issues faced by the Northeast.

A different work with a vivid discussion about the northeast is Anil Yadav's, *Is That Even A Country Sir: Journey in North East India By Train, Bus and Tractor*. Anil Yadav, a young journalist at that time, visited Assam with his friend Anhes Shashwat before the 2000 election. The work is significant as it analyses the political scenario of Assamese as it manages the Hindi-speaking citizens from the rest of India. The work undertaken by the author and their friend was a bold and daring endeavour, driven by the need to investigate the ground reality of the northeast region. As journalists, this endeavour not only enriched their career but also allowed them to deeply analyze the scenario on the ground. With limited contacts and supplies, they embarked on a journey covering Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Manipur. The work hence is not a mere travel guide; instead offers a case study of the respective states and their ideas regarding the geopolitical situation in the region. The book however fails to mention the recent developments in the region via the collaboration of the state and the central government. While travelling through the north-eastern states via public transport, the author and his friend encountered the harsh reality of the region's disconnection from each other and from the mainland. They faced ambushes, extortion, bombings and even had to walk down the streets of Guwahati. During their journey, they gained awareness of several significant factors, including the reasons proposed by the locals for the torture of Hindu-speaking individuals, the motive behind ULFA cadres surrendering, how the outfits were being backed by neighbouring countries, particularly China, and the ways in which cross-border trafficking was occurring with proper concatenation. The authors also discovered that the outfits and border security forces maintained situations to their advantage. The authors' daring exploration sheds light on the ground realities of the region, and their findings can enrich their career as journalists.

Sudeep Chakravarty's work, *Highway 39*, provides a detailed and vivid description of the violence, brutality, and corruption that plague the states of Nagaland and Manipur in the northeast region of India. The book centers on a dialogue between the author and Temsula Ao, the Dean at North-eastern Hill University. During the

conversation, Temsula Ao voices her apprehension that the people of the region lack trust in the government's efforts towards their welfare and the development of the nation. In his comprehensive discussion of the journeys, starting from Dimapur/Kohima, the author highlights the importance of the highway as the main link connecting the states of the northeast with the mainland and with each other. His journey shares an ample number of stories with the reader, but the most significant of them all has been the stories of the women's movement in the region. The book vividly captures the ground realities of the region, highlighting the story of a young girl in a red shawl who courageously narrated the atrocities inflicted on women by militants and the army. Her story became a symbol of strength for the women in the region, with the red shawl becoming an emblem of their sorrows and sufferings. The book also recounts other harrowing incidents, including the tragic case of a pregnant girl being shot on a road in Manipur and the abduction and torture of a school girl for ransom. The book also mentions the case of Erom Sharmila, the protester from Manipur, who dedicated a major part of her life to hunger strikes in revolting against the draconian Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA). The work hence is a collection of narrations by civilians especially women, of tribes who often face troubles in restoring inner line permits and stories of the general population who suffered at the hands of the government that offered them special status but never initiated a meaningful dialogue. Nevertheless, the work lacks details regarding the policies taken by the government towards the northeast and the description of the implementation of these policies. However, the book still deserves a special mention in academic writings that explore the north eastern insurgency situation.

Nandita Haksar, in her work *The Exodus Is Not Over; Migrations from the Ruptured Homeland Of North East India* analyses similar case studies of which the case of Atim and Yaokhalek receives major attention. The authors narrate the stories of abuses and helplessness faced by 'outsiders' in the region. The work is one of its first in compiling the narrations of migrant workers. The book sheds light on the story of Mayori, Atim's niece, who made several attempts to adjust socially and gain acceptance from her surroundings. Her efforts to make society more cooperative and comfortable for herself bring a new narrative to the forefront. Another character, Livingstone Shaiza, had a simple dream of running a restaurant but faced significant

challenges in the process. The book does not limit its focus to the Tangkhul Nagas from Ukhrul alone, as it recognizes that the challenges and issues faced by this community are representative of the problems encountered by many other tribes in the northeast region. The work also picks up the case of Haksar—a familiar person to the tribes now, especially after her marriage, who claims in her narration that the difficulties faced by the north-eastern migrants are entirely different from the troubles by migrants from other parts of the country. Also, the feeling of alienation seems to be more prominent in north-eastern migrant workers. Haksar lists out several factors responsible for this. She mentions that the difference in cultures, the role of the caste system, and the ignorance, reluctance and corruption in existing institutions allow easy access for tribes to be discriminated against and abused in the greater mainland which hardly any other part of India faces in case of migration. She analyses how these migrants feel insecure as they receive no support from their home states. Haksar's words express the undying spirit of the migrants who still seem to survive and fight for their existence.

Similar stories have been discussed by author Udayan Mishra in his extraordinary work *India's North East*. He analyzes the idea that the northeast is home to a wide range of ethnicities and remains highly complicated, extremely misunderstood and substantial research on north east India has only been a case of recent development. This book is a cluster of suggestions given specifically to the states of Nagaland and Assam. These suggestions cannot be considered suitable or just in the given scenarios in the northeast as they do not arise out of public discussion. In a major part of the book, the author seeks answers as to how Assam, being such an integral part of India, has created a scenario that allows the rise of militant outfits that wage an anti-government movement for the recognition of their rights. The author examines his questions through three different lenses. Firstly, he delves into the issue of identity politics, which is the primary reason behind ethno-nationalist confrontation. This confrontation began with negotiations with the tribal groups in the pre-independence era, and in the post-independence era, the constant turmoil in the northeast with the Indian states gains a platform. The state's initial attitude towards the northeast was extremely centrist, focusing on economic development and security. However, in the case of Assam, the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1949 was proposed with several assurances that eventually proved to be false. Post 1947 the

major areas of concern were the absence of the entire northeast in the national anthem, the pressure of the central government towards north-eastern state governments in accepting Bangladeshi refugees from East Pakistan, and later, the central government's leniency towards the migrants to maintain a vote bank which consequently effected the living conditions of locals of the region.

The author suggests that the Nagas have always maintained a separatist stance and considered they distinct from the Indian mainstream. As a result, Nagaland has often remained aloof from India's freedom struggle. The Naga National Council (NNC), the primary militant group, had even declared Nagaland's independence before India's. This led to the deployment of the military in the Naga district of Assam, with extensive powers granted to them under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) factions took up the mantle of freeing Nagaland from the Indian subcontinent. Since 1997, a ceasefire has been in place between the government forces and NSCN (Isaac-Muivah), and peace talks have been attempted several times but have not resulted in a resolution.

The second priority of the author's discussion revolves around the state's involvement in simultaneously repressing conflicts and negotiations for peace in the region. The author is of the claim that *"it would ... not is an exaggeration to state that the seeds of the separatist movements... were embedded in the policies and prejudices of the central Congress leadership"*. He believes that the situation worsened with the deployment of the AFSPA. This normalized restoring immense power in the hands of the army and consequently posed negative impressions in the minds of the civilians. The principle of peace being restored at gunpoint was questioned. Apart from these, frequent human rights violations such as disappearances, tortures, arrests, and "fake encounters" made the situation worse and led to the loss of innocent lives.

The third and perhaps the most significant analysis of the author is about the civil society in the region. He attempted to apprehend how these bodies played the role of a buffer zone between the state and the armed militaries in the restoration of peace in Assam and Nagaland. The author claims that the Naga civil society groups, especially the Naga Hoho and Naga Mothers' Association participated in the

reconciliation process between the Naga factions and the state government. *“If the peace process in Nagaland continues today despite so many hurdles..it is largely because of the collective opinion of the Naga people for a peaceful and negotiated settlement is so well articulated by the civil society groups of the state”*, the author mentioned.

On the other hand, in Assam, civil society involvement has been constantly obstructed by ongoing agitations and low intensity conflicts in the region. The All Assam Students’ Union (AASU) and the Asom Sahitya Sabha (Assam Cultural Association)<sup>9</sup> are the main civil society organizations propounding the “Assam agitation” and are reluctant about any form of negotiation. Moreover, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), a prominent armed group in the region, known for its extremist ideology, has suspended talks with the government, hindering efforts to garner support from the wider populace. As a result, both the ULFA and civil society groups in general have suffered from limited progress and development. However, recent peace talks have been initiated with the objective of restoring peace. Furthermore, there is an extensive analysis of the impacts of ethno-nationalist movements in both Assam and Nagaland.

Academic research in this field has been lacking, and there have been no active efforts to seek sustainable solutions for the region. The government's reluctance to initiate research and development projects concerning the area's issues is open to criticism. With the exception of civil society challenges, there is little that has not already been addressed elsewhere, particularly in the debates on identity conflicts of north-eastern tribes. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the government has failed to encourage in-depth analysis of these issues, which continue to be underdeveloped to this day.

### **RESEARCH GAP:-**

A thorough literature review has revealed a significant research gap, as none of the works have provided adequate attention to the LEP's potential as a robust approach

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<sup>9</sup> Assam Cultural Affairs Department facilitates promotion of the existing culture of the ethnic and indigenous groups of the state. Various initiatives have also been taken to safeguard and provide proper maintenance for important ancient monuments and historical sites of the State.  
<https://assam.mygov.in/en/group/cultural-affairs-department-assam/>

for addressing insurgencies. Additionally, the Act East Policy has not been clearly articulated. Conducting a comparative analysis of insurgency in Manipur, Meghalaya, and Tripura before and after the implementation of the Look East Policy would allow us to understand the political dynamics of these states and further improve policies for their development. The peace accords, negotiations, and ceasefire agreements that have become more flexible due to the coordinated efforts of the state and central governments to enhance trade relations have been overlooked as a research priority by both levels of government.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:-**

Since India's independence, insurgencies have plagued the entire Northeast region. Despite various challenges, the government has made strides in addressing these issues. One significant step towards resolution was the launch of the Look East Policy in 1991, which proposed several changes for the region. Enhanced communication was among them, and today, women from the Northeast are participating in national beauty contests, and students from the area are studying at prestigious universities across India. This demonstrates that the region has benefited to some extent from the development process. However, insurgent outfits in neighbouring states continue to thrive for survival, and they frequently exhibit their presence in low-intensity conflicts. The relative remoteness of the area, the close proximity of international borders, the existence of limited road and railway connectivity and the absence of any access to the sea; all play a major role in fuelling disturbance in northeast India. Upon conducting a comprehensive literature analysis, several critical questions remain unanswered and require immediate attention. Some of these questions are outlined below:

Globalization is the stepping stone in opening up trade relations in the northeast. The enhancement of trade relations by inducing regionalism between the northeast and states of South and South East Asia would lead to economic upliftment of the states. How helpful that has been in encountering the insurgency situation in the northeast is questionable.

It is worth examining how the establishment of cordial bilateral relations between India and Southeast Asian states has impacted the infrastructure of the Northeast



region, and the challenges associated with it. Additionally, it is crucial to scrutinize how the states have handled the challenges posed to them in the name of promoting good governance.

During the initial phase of the Look East Policy, the insurgency issue in the Northeast region was not prioritized, and the policy encountered significant difficulties in establishing seamless trade with neighbouring states. As a result, the second phase of the policy focused on addressing the insurgency situation in the region and exploring methods to eradicate it. An important question in this context is to identify the significant gaps that existed during the first phase of the policy.

Addressing these critical questions would likely pave the way for further research into the political landscape of the Northeast region, and could provide potential solutions for the region's issues.

## **CHAPTERS :-**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **2. THE LOOK EAST POLICY-CONNECTIVITY, TRADE AND INSURGENCY**

### **3. LOOK EAST POLICY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NORTH EAST INDIA**

### **4. LOOK EAST POLICY-CIVIL SOCIETY AND PEACE IN NORTH EAST.**

### **5. CONCLUSION.**

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY -**

Due to the contentious nature of the topic, a comprehensive understanding of ground realities, combined with an in-depth examination of the literature on the subject, is crucial for discussing the situation in the Northeast. Therefore, my research process

will primarily focus on qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations. Additionally, I will analyze existing data to gain a better understanding of the current state of affairs. This research methodology is essential for addressing the research questions presented earlier in this work.

## **CONCLUSION**

The conflict in the northeast not only portrays the shortcomings in the measures taken up by the policymakers but also manifests the intergroup dimensions that exist in the region. A static hindrance towards the socio-economic development of the northeast rather than the entire country is evident from the discussions made above. The consistent and enduring support of the Pakistani ISI to all terrorist groups operating in the northeast, irrespective of their ideologies and views has led to the emergence of terrorist linkages across the border. This has hindered the peace-making process. Misuse of political power and financial allotments by the departments of different tribal and ethnic councils has been a strong allegation by both media and citizens. Besides fraud and misappropriation of government funds, large amounts of funds are often believed to have been transferred to insurgent outfits to meet their needs.

This has provided an opportunity for neighbouring countries to actively take part in exploiting the vulnerable situation in the region to their own advantage. Not only have countries such as China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar been involved in the region but smaller state powers like Bhutan and Nepal have also shown their participation. Through political backing, economic assistance, military training and arms supplies these states have contributed to the ongoing violence in the region, in the name of encouraging good bilateral relations. The strategic location of the northeast has contributed to its present turmoil. The region is an essential gateway to South East Asia. However, due to economic distress, India was forced to liberalize and form trade relations which would also foster developments at the ground level.

This has enriched the Indian economy, while the northeast continues to be in the dark. The second phase was primarily prompted by political disturbances that posed obstacles in trade relations. However, had the northeast been situated in a

strategically less significant area, the situation may have been different. Insurgency has been a persistent issue in the region since independence and continues to be a significant challenge. If left unaddressed, it could escalate to violent confrontations. Hence, it is evident that the northeast is a hotbed of diverse political turmoil. My research aims to provide a fresh perspective on existing studies of the region, which could spur further research. When a particular medicine fails to heal a wound, it is imperative to seek alternative remedies rather than ignoring the issue. Therefore, my research is an attempt to find new solutions to the problem.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE LOOK EAST POLICY -- CONNECTIVITY, TRADE, INSURGENCY.

*Jo aj shaheb-e-masnad hay, kal nehi honge*

*Kiraydaar hay, zati makaan thori hay*

*Sabhika khun hay shamil yahan*

*ki mitti mein, Kisike baap ka*

*hindustaan thori hay*

--- *Rahat Indori*<sup>10</sup>

Standing between South Asian and Southeast Asian states, the northeast region shares significant socio-cultural and economic ties with the latter. The entire region shares a 1450-kilometre-long international border with Southeast Asian countries, resulting in shared characteristics among citizens living along the borders. Furthermore, the Northeast has experienced migration for decades. Despite differences in lifestyle, culture, and customs, it is evident that the north-eastern states share a deep bond with South Asian states.



Northeast India- the most disputed area of India after Kashmir is separated from the

<sup>10</sup> Rahat Indori, a renowned Urdu poet, was born on January 1st, 1950. He earned his PhD from Bhoj University in Madhya Pradesh and has gained worldwide recognition for his poetry recitals. In addition to his poetic talents, he has also contributed to the Bollywood industry as a lyricist.

mainland via a narrow strip of land called 'chicken neck' or Shiliguri corridor. The northeast region has been grappling with insurgencies since pre and post independence. As a result, the wider world perceived the region to be anti-nationalist due to their demands for a separate constitution, anthem, and flag. The ongoing socio-political disputes in the region continue to make it highly vulnerable to unrest. The constant deployment of the army has created significant barriers to entry for both Indian citizens and foreigners. While the government has taken some steps to improve political conditions in the northeast since the 1990s, it has also frequently relied on the deployment of army personnel and the enforcement of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA)<sup>11</sup> to manage the hostile situation. The Indian Army's brutal treatment of citizens, particularly women and children, has created an extremely volatile zone of conflict. Activist Irom Sharmila Chanu<sup>12</sup> has become a symbol of protest against such treatment. Kidnappings on mere suspicion and fake encounters are common occurrences. Insurgents in the northeast region operate a parallel government, with support from common citizens and neighbouring states. This has allowed India to pursue its foreign policy interests in Southeast Asia. Despite the region's ongoing socio-political disputes, the central government has focused mainly on economic issues, leaving the north-eastern states feeling marginalized from mainstream Indian politics.

The sense of anti-nationalism in the region has made its citizens more inclined towards Southeast Asian nations. Over the last few decades, effective foreign policy decisions and trade growth have made the Northeast a key area of focus for the government as the region acts as a buffer state between South and Southeast Asian nations. Because of its strategic importance, the participation of the Northeast in international trade has become essential, requiring three major requirements:

1. Connectivity
2. Infrastructure and
3. Government cooperation.

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<sup>11</sup> The Armed Forces Special Powers Act of 1958 is a parliamentary act that grants the military special powers to maintain public order in areas that are deemed to be disturbed. This act provides the armed forces with the necessary authority to effectively address situations that pose a threat to the security and stability of the region

<sup>12</sup> Irom Sharmila Chanu, the Iron Lady of Manipur, is a political activist.

This chapter will discuss these issues with a detailed study of Indian trade with the southeast nations having north east at the centre and the major hurdles faced by the region in the process.

Northeast India's abundant resources have made it an attractive destination for foreign investment, leading to increased trade with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan, Nepal, China, and other South East Asian states. However, the region has been plagued by various issues, including low-intensity conflict, underdevelopment, corruption, smuggling, trafficking, and extortion for several decades, which have hindered its overall potential. The prolonged insurgency and insecurity of ethnic communities have made the region dangerous and unstable, making research on the area challenging to conduct.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the entire region holds significant economic importance for the Indian government. Therefore, it requires careful planning, negotiations, cooperation, and the establishment of rehabilitation facilities by the government to promote its growth. It is necessary to foster a sense of attachment to the rest of India rather than having a separatist mentality in this context. This can help the northeast region pave the way for excellence in the country. The region comprises 3.8% of the country's population and includes approximately 440 tribal communities with diverse languages, religions, and ways of living. They also have varying demands, often ignored by the government, leading to their frustration and anti-government sentiments. It's evident that with each new government, the fate of the northeast region also changes. Neglected and ignored for many years, the northeast is making efforts to change its political landscape. Over time, the priorities of the central government have shifted and the north-eastern states are attempting to come out of isolation. They are breaking down barriers, enhancing trade, and building bilateral relations with the rest of India. To achieve this, substantial investment is required to improve infrastructure and communication. In order to support this process, the government introduced the Look East Policy in 1991, which marked the first step toward engaging with the northeast. Although the primary objective was to strengthen trade ties with Southeast Asian states, it provided a foundation for developing positive plans for the region.

India has been striving to build strong and enduring bonds with Southeast Asian countries for centuries. This is evident in the way India and the Southeast Asian nations pursue connectivity, trade, culture, cuisine, and lifestyle. Southeast Asia is one of the world's fastest-growing economic regions, and India's relations with these countries have always been mutually beneficial, despite some persistent challenges in these multilateral relationships. India, post- independence and especially after the 1990s, experienced an extreme economic downturn and needed immediate ways to recover. It was realized that opening up more avenues and creating more opportunities would only be possible if India proposed new economic policies with Southeast Asian countries and in the process, create stronger ties. To achieve this goal, India launched the Look East Policy, which not only reflected a new form of foreign policy making but also advocated India's foreign policy narrative in the international relations forum. This was an essential need of the Indian government in those years as the politics of the Cold War had created several obstacles in fostering solidarity among the ASEAN<sup>13</sup> states and created tense situations between India and China. This was the primary reason why India was unable to establish smooth relations with the Southeast Asian states and had to withdraw its efforts from global politics as it lacked political expertise. Therefore, it would be more accurate to consider the Look East Policy as a foreign policy initiative rather than a domestic renovation policy.

The Look East Policy was formulated and initiated in the 1990s with the aim of altering the global political scenario after the Cold War. With India's growing economic and strategic importance, it was realized that to seek international recognition, India would first have to develop its economy, which in turn depended on its relations with Southeast Asian nations. Thus, the Look East Policy was initiated with north-eastern India as its focal point. However, to date, the north-eastern region remains an isolated, landlocked zone of the country with minimal development and rampant dissatisfaction and unrest. Despite this, the region is extremely vital as it acts as a buffer zone between South Asia and Southeast Asian states. The need to differentiate between "insiders" and "outsiders" in the region has

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<sup>13</sup> The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is an intergovernmental organization.

often led to a volatile political situation, prompting the government to resort to military deployments. This has had a negative impact on the lives of citizens in the region, which remains highly disrupted. The transformation of the Look East Policy into the Act East Policy has played a significant role in positioning the northeast as an important part of India's foreign policy. This policy upgrade aimed to promote peace and cooperation in the region. Improvements in the rights of refugees and the establishment of rehabilitation facilities for insurgents have led to a different political scenario in the northeast compared to when the Look East Policy was in effect.

The Look East Policy was primarily aimed at developing the northeast economically by connecting India's economy with the Southeast Asian states. The northeast had faced geopolitical alienation since the British period, which had a significant impact on its economy. Therefore, creating new policies became a prerequisite for its improvement. Additionally, China's increasing power and domination became a major concern for India. The ASEAN states attempted to balance their relationships with India and China, which led to India's insecurity and fear of losing markets. The disruption of trading routes and economic policies in action post-1947 severely affected the north-eastern markets. The Look East Policy was a significant step in rejuvenating the northeast's market, as the primary intention was to foster rapid development in the Southeast Asian states by keeping the northeast as the main focal point. This tripartite trade development would correspondingly help India to get a grip on the ongoing troubles of the northeast. However, the loosening of borders raised the fear of unfair trade practices. Nonetheless, India took the risk as the northeast's economic enhancement would play a pivotal role in erasing the hurdles it faces. In his Singapore lecture in 1994, former Prime Minister P.V Narsima Rao discussed the significance of India's linkages with the Asia-Pacific nations. He viewed the inability of the USSR to support the Indian economy post-Cold War as having ushered in an economic crisis. Therefore, India had to seek alternatives by choosing strong partners to facilitate the creation of strategic and economic benefits and induce stronger trade ties while fostering regional influence. India found connecting with Southeast Asia effortless due to socio-cultural similarities. However, China's participation in the entire Southeast Asia was difficult to ignore, which raised security issues. The Look East Policy, especially, aimed to pursue



investment, trade, and India's overall security in the region by fostering relations with Southeast Asian states. The inclusion of Myanmar in ASEAN in 1997 made India's trade links even more productive.

In 1992, India was merely a sectoral partner of the ASEAN countries, but after 1996, it became an essential dialogue partner of ASEAN, presenting an opportunity to join ARF. Although cultivated by the government, member states cooperated to achieve the goals of this policy. The first phase of the Look East Policy enhanced the Indian economy, but the northeast remained in darkness. The north-eastern states were deemed special category states after independence, lacking their own productive system and heavily dependent on government grants. However, the majority of these grants failed to provide essential benefits due to high rates of corruption, calling for efficient state monitoring of these grants. With the advent of technology and the effects of globalization, the process of cross-checking was not unobstructed. These initiatives received their own set of setbacks, as the large section of the population below the poverty line and the high rate of unemployment crushed the GDP and affected the Indian economy, requiring immediate remedies.

The existence of small-sized local markets and poor access to larger markets has ruined the economy of the northeast. North-eastern handicrafts and nature-friendly articles only seem to offer a market of goods that attract both Indian citizens and foreign visitors. The northeast requires more exposure, which, in turn, requires cooperation from both the Central and State governments. The only way to eradicate unemployment is through exposure to jobs at national and international levels, along with a surge in markets. To understand the situation faced by the people of the northeast, one must live there and empathize with them. Thus, the immediate focus of the GOI is to first foster close trade relations with Myanmar, work on their ties with Bangladesh, and other Southeast Asian nations. Myanmar and Bangladesh are significant in this regard as they are India's immediate neighbours and have been our trading partners since the pre-colonial era. The relations only witnessed a major disruption due to Partition, affecting trading relations in the process. Thus, with the creation of highways, railways, and several pipeline transmissions, the gaps can be bridged. Through this connectivity, the government could exceed what it usually expects from the trading ties between India, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and also with

China via Nathula Pass.<sup>14</sup> Although there are ample difficulties in trading with these states, if we analyze the trade developments of India and South East Asian states since independence, we will see that the graph shows a steady rise.

**MYANMAR** Indo-Myanmar relations have always been significant since the pre pre-British period. However the relations have been unsteady at some points of time. The Indo-Myanmar border covers 1600 km of land and ocean boundary. During the pre-independence period, the relationship between Myanmar and India was stable. The turmoil began when the Burmese military junta arrested Aung San Suu Kyi and denied transferring power to the winning party, causing them to face international criticism and abandoning their egalitarian attitude. With that, India attempted to improve ties with Myanmar after Suu Kyi<sup>15</sup> came to power.



<sup>14</sup> Nathula Pass is a mountain pass that connects the Indian state of Sikkim with China's Tibet Autonomous Region.

<sup>15</sup> Suu Kyi is a Burmese Nobel laureate, politician, diplomat, and author who currently holds the position of State Counsellor

This had three major reasons: firstly, to obstruct China's growing influence in Myanmar; secondly, to uproot Myanmar and China's parallel influence in contributing to insurgency, trafficking (drugs), and inducing anti-nationalist sentiments in the northeast; and thirdly, to help combat the major internal and external issues that the respective states were facing, which would require negotiations, meetings, visits, and cooperative dealings. Myanmar's journey towards more democratization with the end of military junta rule in 2011 paved the way for the country to embark on economic and political reforms with India's cooperation. In the past few years, parliamentarians from Myanmar have visited India to learn parliamentary practices and procedures in order to establish proper democratic administration and to create a welfare state in Myanmar. India, being the second-largest democracy in the world, has valuable lessons for its neighbour to learn from, as the country has faced several obstructions to its growth due to the absence of democratic functioning in the state. This has been a known fact in most Southeast Asian states. However, besides these issues, persistent illegal and informal trade occurring through porous borders has been a major problem for these states. Since the 1950s, Myanmar's Golden Triangle has supplied drugs to Asian states via the northeast, which emerges as a parallel competition to the Golden Crescent<sup>16</sup> of Afghanistan. Issues of illicit trade, smuggling of drugs and narcotics, and unmonitored migration of people have been addressed several times previously. Nevertheless, this requires more attention so that these issues do not affect the efficiency of the trade and connectivity routes, especially in the context of the northeast. The estimated number of Rohingya<sup>17</sup> refugees presently in Mizoram, also vary. Many of them have fled political and military repression in Myanmar. People residing in the border areas of Myanmar frequently cross the borders to look for work opportunities in Mizoram as domestic helps, coolies, petty traders and cheap labourers. This has caused socio-political problems as these migrants are often alleged to be involved in crime, drugs and illegal border trade. This can be avoided by the tightening of porous borders and the enhancement of bilateral trade which would encourage engagement in government registered job opportunities.

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<sup>16</sup> The Golden Crescent is Asia's primary opium-producing region, located in between Central, South, and West Asia.

<sup>17</sup> The Rohingya refugees are a stateless Indo-Aryan ethnic group who primarily resided in Myanmar's Rakhinestate.

The Indo Myanmar trade was sanctioned in 1994 via three major border areas of north east – Moreh (Manipur), Champai( Mizoram), Longwa, Rih and Pangsaw Passes. The other areas GOI and Myanmar considered as trading points are Ledo, Pongru, Pokhungri of Nepal and Nampong, Vijaynagar, Khimiyang of Arunachal Pradesh. However, these areas are undeveloped on the grounds of connectivity and infrastructure. Myanmar has a considerable amount of internal road connectivity but the majority of them are not in good condition. Therefore, one of the primary tasks is to upgrade the existing networks with Indian cooperation and to improve them so that they are able to withstand traffic. Existing roads, which connect with international highways, need to be improved and made more durable to bear the load of cross-country trade and traffic. This would facilitate trade around these areas to increase. Both governments are focusing on these areas to foster smooth trading. The Rail India Technical and Economic Service (RITES) in 2005 conducted a study on railway links from Jiribam in Manipur to Mandalay in Myanmar. According to the feasibility report, the length of Section I of the rail link connecting Jiribam- Imphal-Moreh is 219 km and the length of Section II which connects Tamu and Kalay is 127.4 km. Thus, the total length of the rail line from Jiribam to Mandalay will be 885.4 km. The matter was last discussed in 2013, and there has been no further development in this regard. When completed, this would become a major section of the Southern corridor of the Trans Asian Railway corridor. Within India, there is no rail link between Jiribam and Moreh; while on the Myanmar side there is also no link between Tamu and Kalay.

Connectivity between these locations in both countries would boost communication and commerce. The Jiribam Tupul Imphal broad gauge line was expected to be completed by 2016, but it remained pending until December 2018 due to the depletion of resources. The route involved constructing numerous minor and major bridges and tunnels, with Bridge No.164 planned to have a pier height of 141 meters and be the tallest girder rail bridge globally. This remains a vision and is yet to be realized, even though the North East Frontier Railway has completed the initial survey work on the creation of a gauge rail link between Imphal and Moreh, which is currently awaiting approval. However, it should be noted that the border areas of the northeast and Myanmar are still highly tense due to decades of insurgency, lack of cooperation from the local government, and high rates of corruption. Despite the

obstacles, the Indo- Myanmar joint trade committee declared in 2015 that the respective states were eager to improve their trading relations despite all odds, given that India and Myanmar are the fourth largest trading partners among ASEAN states.

However, the smooth trading relationship between India and Myanmar was slightly disrupted when the government imposed a 40 percent tax on exports, which was a sensitive issue and could have led to the closure of trade relations back in 2015. This move had a negative impact on the social and economic relationship between the two countries. Since 2001, the Indian government has been working on infrastructure, development, and connectivity to enhance these trading facilities. The Indo-Myanmar Friendship Road was constructed with the help of the Border Road Organisation at an estimated cost of around US\$30 million. This road would link Moreh (Manipur) to Kalewa (Myanmar). Additionally, the upgradation of the Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo road in 2000 was estimated to cost about Rs.1.02 crore. Both states are now in consensus that the Ledo road, also known as the Stilwell road, requires up gradation and enhancement. The Ledo road connects Assam in India with Kunming in China while running across Myanmar. It was built during World War II for the Allied powers to transport supplies to China and is no longer in use. The major part of this road lies in Myanmar territory, passing through Shingbwiayang, Myitkyina, and Bhamo in Kachin state. Upgrading the road will prove to be resourceful for Myanmar, but due to the Indian government's reluctance, the road on the Indian side remains unusable.

The smooth trading relation between India and Myanmar was disrupted by a 40 percent tax imposition on exports by the government, which could have led to the closure of trade relations in 2015. Although the closure did not happen, it hampered the social and economic relationship between the two countries. Since 2001, the Indian government has been working on enhancing trading facilities through infrastructure, development, and connectivity. As part of this effort, the Indian government constructed the Indo-Myanmar Friendship Road with the help of the Border Road Organisation, which connects Moreh (Manipur) to Kalewa (Myanmar) at an estimated cost of around US\$30 million. Apart from this, the up gradation of Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo road in 2000 was estimated to be about Rs.1.02 cores. There is a growing consensus amongst both states that the Ledo road, also known as

the Stilwell road requires up gradation and enhancement. The Ledo road connects Assam in India, with Kunming in China, while running across Myanmar. Named after Gen. Joseph Stilwell of the US Army, it was built during World War II for the Allied powers to transport supplies to China. The major part of this road lies in Myanmar's territory, passing through Shingbuiyang, Myitkyina and Bhamo in Kachin state. Although it is no longer in use, upgrading the road will prove to be resourceful to the Myanmar's. However, due to the reluctance of the Indian government, the road on the Indian side remains unusable.

The Indian government is concerned that anti-India insurgents and rebels may misuse the Ledo road. Both governments have taken steps to improve the road's productivity, including a joint field survey in 2015 on the proposed 579-km Imphal-Mandalay bus service. The initial proposal for the bus service was submitted to MORTH<sup>18</sup> and the MDoNER<sup>19</sup> in 2009 and the distance is expected to be passable in all seasons with three routes under consideration. The Imphal-Moreh section is around 110 km, while the Moreh-Mandalay section is about 469 km. The MoU for the bus service was amended in 2012 and a technical committee meeting was held in 2014. A joint special team found that the roads between Imphal and Moreh are in good condition, unlike the routes from Moreh to Yagi and Moreh to Gangawis. However, the MoU is yet to be implemented. Among the proposed routes, the first route has 70 bridges in the Yagi-Kalewa section that need repair and reconstruction, while the second route is inaccessible during the rainy season. In early 2012, India extended a US\$500-million loan to Myanmar for development in various sectors, including US\$140 million for infrastructure. However, a major obstacle to smooth trade between the countries is the insurgency-prone porous borders of Myanmar no matter how cooperative India and Myanmar relations become. The connectivity between both states mainly depends on the Moreh-Tamu-Kalemyo Road, which have been experiencing extreme connectivity disruptions for ages. The shortest connectivity between both states is Kolkata-Yangon, which is also characterized by poor road conditions. In addition to these reasons, both states seem to be drifting apart due to existing political differences.

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<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Road Transport and Highways

<sup>19</sup> Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region

The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project, which aims to increase trading ties between India and Burma, is being piloted and funded by India's Ministry of External Affairs. Rail India Technical and Economic Services (RITES) conducted preliminary survey studies, while the Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) was tasked with executing construction work on Sittwe port and a jetty in Paletwa, along with the dredging process. Essar Projects Ltd, a division of the Essar Group, was appointed as the main contractor in May 2010. The World Bank approved a loan of US\$ 107 million for Mizoram State Roads II on 19 June 2014, funded by a credit from the International Development Association (IDA). The total cost of the entire project was projected to be US\$ 105.4 million, but it has not yet been constructed.

There are major underlying issues which need primary focus along with the construction of projects like that of immigration facilities and in creating banking facilities development, regulation of illegal activities, up gradation of accommodation facilities among others is essential for smooth trading. Indian scarcity of gas and oil, has made the country extensively reliant on the construction of cross border road and gas pipeline with Bangladesh and Myanmar respectively. The Indian government is currently trying to improve planning in the seaport sector and in the process attempts to make the Kaladan River more accessible. Rice was an important product of Myanmar and was supplied to India for a long time until India increased its rice productivity. Since then, this idea of connectivity has been kept into account. However, socio- political disruptions have often hampered the plans. This made Myanmar more dependent on Japan, Thailand, China and Singapore.

Air connectivity between India and Myanmar also needs significant improvements. Direct flights are a key requirement, as the duration of flights increases with unnecessary stops and layovers. For India, air connectivity with Myanmar is particularly important, as it would help pilgrims and monks to visit Bodh Gaya. At present, there is only one Air India flight that flies directly from Kolkata to Yangon once a week. There is even a connecting flight from Yangon to New Delhi via Gaya.

The Ministry of External Affairs has highlighted the successful implementation of LEP, as evidenced by the established trade links between India and Myanmar. This

contradicts the belief that northeast India and Delhi are incongruent, as the region is no longer isolated due to its involvement in cross-border trade. However, despite the various trading opportunities, the northeast remains wary of the Indian government. Cheap and easily accessible goods from China and Myanmar are prevalent in the region. In his book, *Changing Demographics in India's Northeast and its Impact on Security*, Ashwani Gupta discusses how neighbouring states often manufacture products to gain access to the northeast's inexpensive markets.

SAARC provides a forum for sub-regional cooperation amongst the Southeast Asian nations. The major benefits from negotiations at SAARC have paved the way for the development of trans-Asian highway and railway, with spurs to Southwest China. There are emerging opportunities for energy exchange between India and the Southeast Asian nations, which would be of immense benefit to the countries involved. India considers the development of the Sittwe port in Myanmar to give the landlocked north-eastern zone open access to the sea for trading purposes. The Sittwe port is part of a US\$ 214-million river and road network project, and its new 122-km highway linking Myanmar with Mizoram has proved significant in this regard. In 2013, the Government of India offered a US\$ 50-million line of credit for establishing a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Sittwe. Apart from all these, Myanmar is an important member of ASEAN, and its economic development cannot be ignored. The Government of India, on declaring the vision of free trade areas, accepted the strategy to create the growth quadrangle between northeast India, Myanmar, northern Thailand, Bangladesh, and Southwest China. This would allow free movement of goods and services among the countries. The government is currently looking forward to discovering and enriching this new bond, which may elicit reactions from the citizens of the northeast towards the growing role of the region in international politics.

### **Bangladesh-**

The significant role that Bangladesh plays in the economic development of the northeast has been essential since the colonial period, as it has provided an opportunity for the northeast to communicate with the outside world. Pre-Partition, Bangladesh and India being one nation had similar ways of living, culture, customs, religion, and language. The ties were ruptured after Partition, and the economy of



both states suffered. Nevertheless, northeast India has the closest link with Bangladesh. Bangladesh is one of the few Southeast Asian countries that witness the insurgency situation in the northeast closely. The strong bond between the states resulted in Bangladesh providing refuge to the insurgents from the northeast. This helped the insurgents find a safe haven on the soil of Bangladesh, made possible by the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Indo-Bangladesh border areas. Indian intelligence agencies also have much evidence regarding the presence of the ISI<sup>20</sup> at the Indo-Myanmar border. However, if we consider the history of the development of relations between the countries, their means of communication, and cultural ties, it dates back to the pre-Partition era. Before Partition, the states were connected through waterways. Therefore, the first step in renewing relations was to reform the connectivity ties. Developing the trade ties of India with Southeast Asia, keeping the Northeast as the center, was considered necessary. However, today the situation differs. The Siliguri corridor is usually congested and has been the main area of public outrage against the government since independence. For the majority of the time, the road remains inaccessible due to strikes, cutting off ties of the region from the mainland. Hence, what is essentially required now is a new alternative route.



Bangladesh, being the nearest neighbouring state of India, had a friendly trading relationship with India during the pre-independence era. Therefore, the initiative

<sup>20</sup> The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is the premier intelligence agency of Pakistan.

taken by both governments was to focus on improving such relations. The most significant issue that Bangladesh faced was the fencing of the border that went against the border guidelines of the country. The Partition cut off inland water ties, along with the road, railway network, and communication. The most significant complication that Bangladesh had to manage was the cutting off of linkages of the Chittagong port with Kolkata. All these, coupled with the increasing influence of China in Southeast Asian states and the closure of borders from the side of Myanmar, made the northeast landlocked. This blockade resulted in extreme economic and political disturbances in the northeast, causing a simultaneous rise in insurgency situations and resentments among the tribal communities. Besides, to contain the situation, the government deployed the army, which made the environment in the region even tenser, with rising anti-national sentiments. This made the northeast more inclined towards the neighbouring states, and slowly, via porous borders, the region became a hub of illegal affairs. Thus, in the way of re-establishing relations, the government took up the initiative of the Look East Policy and then the upgraded Act East Policy to increase cooperation among the states, encourage trade relations, and involve more citizen engagement in the economic upgrading of the region.

Northeast India serves as the gateway of India to Southeast Asian states. Since the colonial period, bilateral relations between the states have been constrained due to several reasons, including India's prominent inclination towards Bangladesh and vice versa. India took a major initiative in the independence of Bangladesh, but there have been several instances of Bangladesh's involvement in the insurgency situations in the northeast, which has been a constant dilemma for the Indian government. Changes in policies while constantly monitoring the status of international relations between the two have also affected the domestic policies of the country, often resulting in public outrage. Bangladesh is culturally, politically, and economically inseparable from India, and the renovation of Indo-Bangladesh ties was hence the first step in India's reach towards Southeast Asia.

The India–Bangladesh border is 4,096.7 km long, covering the states of West Bengal (2,216.7 km), Assam (263 km), Meghalaya (443 km), Tripura (856 km), and Mizoram (318 km). The Indo- Bangladesh border covers a range of natural and

cultural landscapes, which always poses a challenge to its effective management. The terrain along the border is a mix of hilly and jungle tracks, plains, riverside, and low-lying land. This diverse mix of topographical features makes the border of both India and Bangladesh extremely porous. The thick vegetation and steep gradient in the hilly and forested tracks along north Bengal, south Assam, Meghalaya, and Tripura hinder the construction of proper roads, fences and Border Observation Posts (BOPs). Patrolling the border is quite difficult because of the lack of roads and greater inter-BOP distances. Consequently, insurgent groups misuse these stretches along the border to smuggle arms and drugs.

There are a few linking roads for India- Bangladesh direct connectivity, the most significant amongst them are- Kolkata to Petrapole, Shiliguri to Phulbari, Shilling to Sylhet Road, and Kolkata to Petrapole Highway<sup>21</sup>. The connectivity between Petrapole and Benapole<sup>22</sup> is located 95 km away from Kolkata and is the trading point for goods produced from all over India. Goods transported from all parts of India are carried to Petrapole via NH-35 or the Jessore Road. However, this mode of connectivity faces major issues, such as heavy traffic, overloading due to three railways crossing five congested towns, the narrowness of the highway, and poor physical conditions of the road. These issues increase transit time, delay transportation and add additional transportation costs. The entry point at the border has only one single gate, which is used for exports and imports as well as passenger movement. At any given moment, only one vehicle or truck can pass, resulting in traffic congestion. Indian trucks, after unloading at Benapole, are allowed to enter India only after 7 P.M or are allowed to return to India before exports begin, i.e., from 10 A.M. This results in an increase in detention charges. Thus, the approach road towards the LCS<sup>23</sup> has to change. Government-bonded facilities are mandatory in all LCS so that it can promote the handling of export items.

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<sup>21</sup> The largest land Port in South Asia, *Land port* Petrapole is located along the international border between India and Bangladesh, at a distance of about 80 kms from the city of Kolkata.

<https://www.lpai.gov.in/en/icp-petrapole>

<sup>22</sup> Benapole Land Port, is a large industrial pispatch point known as 'Land Port', located in the town of Benapole, Bangladesh. It is a very important facility, a mixture of distribution premises, warehouses and storage buildings, with the total area close to 4 acres. It is estimated that over 90 per cent of imported goods coming from India to Bangladesh pass through BLP.

<https://www.latlong.net/place/benapole-land-port-benapole-bangladesh-11162.html>

<sup>23</sup> Land Customs Stations

The operation of LCS to promote greater trade requires bilateral cooperation, as well as efforts from local administrators and exporters to address issues such as poor quality of power supply in the concerned areas and strikes that hamper trade. Therefore, the liberalization of trading relations is necessary. On average, about 48 percent of exports from the north-eastern region flow to Bangladesh, while imports constitute only about 40 percent of the trade. The ICPs<sup>24</sup> located in West Bengal, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Mizoram require upgrading, which has been a topic of discussion in every bilateral meeting and discussion between the two countries.

The northeast plays a vital role in Indo-Bangladesh bilateral relations. The most significant advantage is that the northeast offers a good market for Bangladeshi goods and vice versa. Bangladesh often utilizes the natural resources of the northeast to trade for cheap Bangladeshi items, including Hilsa<sup>25</sup> the living silver of Bangladesh. The trading between the two countries happens via the northeast through the Chittagong port. The need for a more secure route for connectivity via trade is of growing importance, as the border areas of India and Bangladesh are not safe. Illegal arms are acquired from the arms market in Bangkok and transported to insurgents in the northeast, who occupy areas in Bangladesh by sea. Apart from these routes, there are about 21,000 km of paved roads and 2,858 km of railways connecting India and Bangladesh. Good connectivity has played a role in making the illegal business smooth. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that connectivity also increases trade relations and benefits both states. The majority of trade monitoring takes place at the land customs stations, and the renovation of these stations lies in the hands of the government. The major problems faced by these LCS include inadequate facilities for handling exports and imports, and they are not well-equipped. Only Mizoram in India offers LCS to Bangladesh.

The information provided by the armies from both sides of the border suggests that

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<sup>24</sup> Integrated Check Posts (ICPs)

<sup>25</sup> Hilsa is not only a delicious food popular in Kolkata but has also carved its place in maintaining diplomatic relations with the country. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee requested Bangladesh Commerce Minister during his visit to India this year, to request Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to send hilsa or rohu to India this festive season  
<https://www.indiatimes.com/explainers/news/hilsa-fish-is-popular-in-bengal-579346.html>

there are significant difficulties in the trading relations between Mizoram and Bangladesh, primarily due to the lack of proper facilities. Although there is a LCS at Tegamukh, it is not functional, and illegal trade is rampant on the borders. The trans-shipment facilities between India and Bangladesh are limited to the transfer of cargo from Indian roads and railways to Bangladesh's road transport. An efficient trans-shipment system is necessary to increase competition. North- eastern India has several entry and exit points, which it shares with its neighbouring country, Bangladesh. If the infrastructure facilities in both countries are well-maintained, the routes of connectivity via trade and transport will aid bilateral trade relations, and both countries would receive immense benefits from these negotiations.

For instance, both governments can impose royalties on the movement of goods, and the sharing of maintenance costs while using roads, rails, and ports would encourage bilateral ties. The governments can also impose duties and taxes on the passage of goods, but this requires negotiations between the two governments. Proper storage of goods requires robust preserving facilities, and the governments on both sides must explore the changes that are required and need to be addressed. The border areas stand to gain the most from these circumstances, as the growth of transport facilities allows more opportunities for citizens to actively engage. The transport service can provide employment to many people, including those involved in the hotel, restaurant, rest house, cold storage, and even road maintenance industries. The ports connecting India and Bangladesh, which were distributed during the partition, would see an increase in the capacity of Chittagong and Mongla ports along with Haldia.

Apart from Benapole- Petrapole, the other major LCS that are taken into account for Indo-Bangladesh border trade and security enhancement are-

1. West Bengal ( Banglabandha)
2. Meghalaya ( Kuliang)
3. Tripura ( Sabroom)
4. Mizoram(Demagiri and Kawripinchuaah)

The government constantly monitors the factors of security, infrastructure,

connectivity, and transportation facilities. Besides, a direct shipping link between Chittagong and Haldia is becoming increasingly significant. The Brahmaputra, which flows through Bangladesh, has been identified as a vital inland trade route that carries people and goods as far as the south of Bangladesh. It also links India's northeast and connects the ports of Chittagong, Kolkata, and Haldia. The Asian Development Bank has loaned US\$150 million for 24/7 navigation in the Brahmaputra to ease Indo-Bangladesh business protocols on inland water transits. To facilitate easy trade through these land custom stations (LCS), the administration needs to effectively cooperate with the local government. The Indian government has two main pillars for smooth trade - infrastructure and connectivity. Bangladesh, on the other hand, focuses more on roads and seaways with the cooperation of its policymakers. The main motive behind any form of cooperation from Bangladesh is to enhance its relations with northeast India. The establishment of trade links is the primary objective of both governments. Thus, a direct link has been established between Agartala and Sylhet. Bangladesh believes that the Sylhet-Silchar bus service would benefit the north-eastern economy and encourage citizen involvement. There are several other road projects, including:

1. Sylhet- tamari road
2. The Dhaka- Sylhet road
3. The Dhaka- Khulna road

The improvement of these road projects has strengthened the trading ties between India and the northeast region. Both governments have invested in the renovation of these roads to enhance connectivity between the states, especially in the border areas. In India, the road projects connect Agartala to Silchar and extend to Tripura, providing convenient access to the sea. This aids in the transportation of goods via roads to the sea, making it a cost-effective and convenient option.

However, the sea routes connected by the inland waterways of Bangladesh present a different picture and cannot be compared with the above-mentioned sea routes<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> Sanjoy Hazarika's "Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's North East" was published by Penguin Books in 2011.

The inland water trade routes require more security as they are mainly accessed by insurgents from northeast India. Additionally, the banking facilities in northeast and Bangladesh border need upgrading to attract foreign exchange. Enhancing connectivity will surely boost the economies of both states.

Transparency in every bilateral transaction is crucial for India-Bangladesh relations. However, the high rate of corruption in Bangladesh has affected the integrity and credibility of the Bangladeshi administration, and this has hampered relations between the two countries for decades. The most significant problem faced by the Bangladeshi government due to corruption is the situation in the northeast, which is closest to the country after West Bengal. This has vitiated the whole situation, triggering unrest. As the border areas are involved in trade, the risks of corruption are high. Both governments give maximum emphasis on the customs security procedures, and the World Bank has sponsored Custom Administration Modernization, which focuses on security facilities and reform in trade and tariff. Before this, the cooperation of the UNCTAD had helped in the installation of ASYCUDA, which is primarily used for electronic data control, with a focus on the shared border areas between India and Bangladesh. However, pre-shipment inspection in Bangladesh is deteriorating, causing delays at custom points. The trade facilitation at Phulbari is expected to increase trade between northeast India and Bangladesh, as well as Nepal and Bhutan, as India. Nepal and Bangladesh are connected via the Phulbari corridor. Thus, the passage receives an extreme load of goods, which leads to poor road conditions and excessive police checking, causing delays in transportation. An alternative route for Nepal and Bangladesh connectivity is through the Kolkata port. The significance of Phulbari is at stake in the present context, unless the governments take proper developmental policies to improve its conditions. The royalty charged by India from Nepal to use Kolkata port for trade purposes is high. Additionally, the allotted duration of transition is only two hours, which complicates the trade ties of Bangladesh with Nepal. The Indian government has taken initiatives for the renovation of the Phulbari and Bangabandhu port, which will aid citizens of the northeast by giving them access to a market of Nepali goods and easier economic transactions.

The Indian government has provided shelter to over ten million Nepalese in various parts of the northeast for nearly a decade. Therefore, it is crucial for markets in northeast India to receive the exact commercial value of Nepalese goods. This could be facilitated by the improvement and development of the Phulbari port, which could significantly foster South Asian sub-regional economic cooperation. India and Bangladesh have had shared connectivity linkages pre- and post-independence. The entire region before Partition shared waters with the Ganga, Yamuna, and Brahmaputra, which constituted around 1.4 trillion cubic meters. Since then, Bangladesh has spearheaded the planning of water resources management with its neighbouring states. However, several controversial issues in the context of water sharing often hamper Indo-Bangladesh relations. While a 30-year treaty was signed between India and Bangladesh in 1996 to settle these issues, the grievances were neither forgiven nor forgotten by Bangladesh. The water issue still persists, despite the treaty promising equality, transparency, cooperation, and mutual assistance in this regard. Major north-eastern states like Mizoram and other states like West Bengal have remained involved in the politics of this treaty. The treaty was designed to bring cooperation in sharing of waters. The business summit between India and Bangladesh attempted to determine the utilization of inland waters, apart from the Brahmaputra River, as the sole route of trade and transport. However, one lacuna of this policy is that these initiatives lack effective implementation.

There are other sets of dangers that loom large with the enhancement of water routes. The riverside borders, majorly the Dhubri district of Assam possess multiple river channels which makes monitoring the entire region extremely difficult. During the dry seasons, the rivers branch out into distributaries. It becomes difficult for the security personnel to monitor these distributaries. The chars, which develop during the dry seasons, get drowned in the river water during the rainy season. Several chars develop during the monsoons as well. These chars are often difficult to identify and monitor by the security. Hence in due course of time they act as temporary shelters to illegal immigrants and the insurgents. These zones often become the hub of the criminal activities like smuggling, theft, kidnapping, trafficking among other activities. As the new chars keep on developing with the change of river courses, insurgents change their address accordingly. However, this creates a problem of identification of the boundaries of these chars. The changing



ethnic composition of the people from both sides of the river causes extreme difficulty in identification of insurgents and migrants. Since access to inland waters is easier, the insurgents in northeast find it convenient to cross borders to enter Bangladesh and other neighbouring states to seek asylum. Along the river route, smuggling of cattle along with other portable items is a growing challenge. The problem is aggravated by complex border issues and convoluted procedures. Though the number of securities from both sides of the border has been raised, there has always been a question of efficiency. A dire requirement is accentuation in specialized training so that the personnel understand the ongoing discrepancies, and work on them.

Northeast India has huge potential for hydroelectricity production. However, most of this power remains untapped. The Bangladeshi government has recognized this potential and the need for proper management and development of natural gas production. The ongoing political disturbances in the region have affected its development prospects, making investors reluctant to invest in projects. Exploring these potentialities will be extremely beneficial for Bangladesh. With the opening of inland waters, access to natural resources will become easier, economic opportunities between both states will increase, and the transfer of hydel power will become easier and less time-consuming. However, transportation from northeast India to the rest of India is expensive, while the route via Bangladesh is easier. Bangladesh, being a good power trading market, benefits India; hence the idea of the Eastern Himalayan Electricity Grid was proposed to collect hydropower from Nepal, Bhutan, and northeast India, along with gas-based power from Bangladesh and coal from Assam. This requires support from both Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh, which can supply 3000 MW to Bangladesh. However, due to excessive export, the locals face the brunt of frequent power cuts in the entire region. There are several international organizations that support and invest in Indo-Bangladesh cooperation along with other Southeast Asian states. SAARC has set up a separate committee for Indo-Bangladesh trade development, and even ASEAN has cooperated with SAARC in developing Indo-Bangladesh ties while establishing proper guidelines to facilitate participation from the Northeast.

However, it cannot be denied that the partition has crippled the economies of both states. The plains of Assam and East Bengal, before partition, were usual markets for trade and easy means of communication and connectivity. Free movement in the marketplace encourage trade opportunities. A similar form of trade mechanism needs to be developed to de-escalate the tense political environment between the two states. This, however, requires surveillance, cooperation, and negotiation from both sides, with special attention given to the border areas. Corruption permeates deep down to the common man from the administrative officers who profit from illegal trade on the borders. The traffickers thrive, minting money in this imbroglio. Historical evidence proves that 200 Bangladeshis enter India by crossing the borders every day through roads or railways. The route usually taken by them is via villages as they remain extremely congested. Assam has been India's frontier zone because it connects the rest of India with Myanmar, Tibet, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. Thus, for ages, northeast India, especially Assam, attracts markets and traders from other states. Governments from either side of the border have been losing money due to their imposed trade restrictions, while smugglers and traffickers have enhanced their money-making capacities through illegal business, often approved by the border security forces. Illegal cattle smuggling from India to Bangladesh via West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura, also known as the 'cattle corridor,' is a huge source of income for traffickers since ages. There are several cattle corridors operating at the porous borders of India and Bangladesh.

An estimate of 1.7 million cattles is illegally imported into Bangladesh every year through these corridors. Cattle hides and meat are transported through these corridors, along with processed food, tobacco, electrical goods, and Phensedyl (cough syrup)<sup>27</sup>, which together make up around 2.44% of the profit. This can be reduced if the trafficked goods are legalized, but this raises concerns that the restricted items in this context might lose their market. Some of these areas are under SAFTA, nevertheless, governments receive maximum benefit from the sale of these articles, increasing revenue for both sides. Border trade hubs require improvement so that they can foster development while focusing on the collection of goods from both sides of the border and keeping smuggling under control. According to the

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<sup>27</sup> Phensedyl is a new cough linctus that combines medications used for treating dry cough.

government's joint venture, these hubs will have separate labour force centres to control immigrants, closely monitor the authorization of work, and grant free movement of traders based on these permits. Work permits in the border areas are extremely significant to control trade discrepancies, and they can be issued by the administration operating in the border areas. The duplication of these permits is nearly impossible as each permit carries a separate number that establishes the individual's identity. They also possess government seals, which help keep an account of the people crossing the borders, regulating informal trade and illegal immigration. The permits comprise a signature or a thumb impression of the permit holder along with their photograph. They also include a detailed address proof of the individual. A copy of the permit is usually submitted to the local police station, and it also serves as a written deadline for the individual to complete their work. Extensions can only be permitted after the individual's return. In usual circumstances, work permits can be extended for two years if the proposal is approved by the local police. However, it must be noted that permit holders enjoy no rights, and their identities can be traced via the unique number on their permits in case they are involved in any criminal activity. Improvements in the monitoring process require positive changes in infrastructure, which must be financed by both governments. Those who are denied entry at the borders are usually allowed entry by neighbouring states. Therefore, maximum involvement of the local police is required as they are aware of all the routes.

It is likely that either government will levy taxes on the river routes that allow transportation of goods. Proper taxation will be the usual means of using the waterways for either trade or communication. It has been envisioned that the railway connecting Tripura and Chittagong will decrease transportation time and costs. The states of northeast, especially Meghalaya, are huge producers of pineapples, which can be exported to Bangladesh via inland waterways. Even rubber from Tripura can find a good market in Bangladesh. Border trade is encouraged by the governments so that informal trade is transformed into legal money, giving the items extended market and economic access. Skills like fishing and boat making can also establish markets in Bangladesh. This attracts the attention of investors and markets operating in the neighbouring states. Due to the lack of communication, India often fails to effectively communicate with the north-eastern states. Bangladesh, being the

closest nation, can help India close the gaps that exist in the context of the northeast. The task of effectively sealing the Border States, along with proper monitoring, is the responsibility of the border security forces. The border security forces deployed are often numerically a small number and face difficulties in controlling intense situations. Mobile task forces are also required to monitor the borders. In the recent past, there has been a surge in illegal activities of fundamentalist organizations with the ISI at the border zone, which has increased sentiments of insecurity in these areas and in India. According to intelligence reviews, even ULFA has played an integral part in these activities. The border areas thus require extensive monitoring and infrastructure development.

To enhance Indo-Bangladesh relations, it is crucial to identify measures that can promote cooperation between the two countries. The most effective approach, as discussed earlier, would be to focus on fostering and facilitating border trade.

## **BHUTAN**



The Indo-Bhutan Treaty was signed in 1949, marking the beginning of bilateral trade relations between the two countries. Relations between India and Bhutan have been smooth and problem-free since then. Bhutan is India's second-largest trade partner

among ASEAN nations after Myanmar and is strategically located at the chicken neck area, which is essential for connectivity between the two countries. India's linkage with Bhutan increases the geopolitical significance of the northeast. ULFA insurgents who often use the Indo-Bhutan border find a safe haven in Bhutan, making the country essential to insurgents as the region acts as their main zone for training cadres and operating insurgency in India's northeast. This has strained Bhutan's relations with the Indian government, as the country has failed to combat insurgency in the northeast. In 2005, Bhutan constituted 75.1% of total imports and 87.5% of total exports, representing a 26.85% increase from the previous year.

The declaration of FTA by the Indian government with cooperation from Bhutan has helped in increasing trade in the successive years. The major LCS used by both the nations is as follows: 1.Dananga, 2.Halisar, 3.Ultapani.

These LCS (Logistics Control Systems) are mainly used for keeping track of trade records. However, they require infrastructure upgrades for proper monitoring of Indo-Bhutan trade. The state of Bhutan possesses high potential for hydel power generation. The entire Northeast suffers from electricity deficiency, which has been provided by the Bhutan government for ages. This makes India dependent on Bhutan's electricity production and creates a co-dependent relationship between India and Bangladesh. India, on the other hand, has always cooperated with Bhutan to manage domestic disturbances in the region. It is India's cooperation with Bhutan that has helped Nepal, another India-friendly nation, to seek thousands of Bhutanese refugees since the '90s. Due to such cooperative measures, India receives the cheapest electric power from Bhutan. India and Bhutan have established eco-sensitive ways for electricity production.

The Wangchu River in Bhutan was the first river used for the hydro-electric project named Chukha, which was entirely sponsored by the government on 60 percent cost and 40 percent loan. The Indian states that received most of the benefits via this project were Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi. This project guaranteed 78 percent of the electricity transfer from Bhutan to India.

The Kurichhu Power Project is the second most important project that influences Indo-Bhutan relations, coordinated by the National Hydroelectric Power Project Coordination (NHPC)<sup>28</sup>. The Indian government contributed Rs. 5.60 billion to this project. Essential electricity is consumed by Bhutan, and the surplus is transmitted to India.

The third important project shared by both states is the Sunkosh Multipurpose Project, which is the largest hydro-electric power project in Bhutan. The cost of construction was 77.93 billion Bhutanese currencies. The project occupies 141 km of the canal, the majority of which lies in Indian Territory, essentially in the northeast. This project supplies power to the entire north-eastern region, along with Bihar and West Bengal. The electricity also facilitates the smooth working of the irrigation facilities, which has enriched the agricultural environment in the northeast. The Indo-Bhutan linkage has been essential for the economic development of the northeast. Historically, the trade routes between Assam and Bhutan have been extremely productive and have also correspondingly influenced traders from Tibet. However, the route is not well-maintained, despite its significant role in the movement of citizens, traders, and travellers.

The hills and plains through which the route traverses have become thoroughly congested. The trade links between Tibet and the northeast converge at Bhutan, making Bhutan sensitive to both India and China. In the 19th century, Indo-Tibetan trade links favoured Bhutan, as merchants received a proper market in the country. The major trade items were apples, areca nuts, and handcrafted goods. The trade links between India and Tibet were disrupted after the 1962 war and China's domination of Southeast Asian states. However, if the situation had not ruptured, the benefits of all three states would have been reflected in their economies. The current trade route has been limited to Bhutan and northeast India. As Bhutan and India share good trade ties, some alternative routes are also being searched for easy and smooth trade. This may help in the exploration of more Bhutanese items. Assam, being the transit point between Bangladesh and Bhutan, can provide easy access to

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<sup>28</sup> NHPC Limited is an Indian company that specializes in hydropower generation. It was established in 1975 with the aim of planning and promoting hydroelectric power.

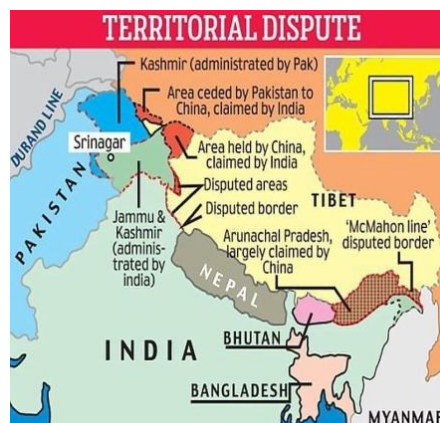
both markets, benefiting north-eastern citizens. Even Meghalaya, as per the Bhutanese trade minister's views, has been strategically important in maintaining cooperative relations with India and Bangladesh, and thus can be a medium of negotiations. In the pre-independence era, the government's economic power was solely dependent on the export of oranges and potatoes to north-eastern states. Bhutanese woollens in the past have received a good market in India and continue to do so today. Thus, traders from both states intend to open more trade routes. The Bhutanese market requires the involvement of several states for trading purposes. Therefore, Bhutan attempts to increase cooperation with Bangladesh. The most significant link between India and Bhutan is through northeast tourism. During a visit to North Bengal, we can get a chance to visit a part of Bhutan's territory without any constraints or restrictions because of the cordial relations between both states.

Simultaneously, the Bhutanese market in West Bengal provides the state with scope for economic exchange. Paro in Bhutan is now well-connected with Delhi, Kathmandu, Kolkata, Dhaka, and Bangkok, ending the isolation of the northeast. While the land routes of Bhutan via the central highway are smooth, the condition of the connecting highways is extremely poor. The constant rush of loaded trucks on these roads makes their condition even worse. Besides, the entire zone receives no electricity and is gridlocked with forests. The national highway is hence essential for both connectivity and trade and requires urgent improvement. Like all the neighbouring states of India, Bhutan also focuses on increasing tourism. The clean and well-organized state of Bhutan depends mainly on tourism and subsidies, making Indian cooperation significant. The state follows a policy of regulated tourism to safeguard the environment, culture, and distinct ways of living, making it difficult for international tourists to visit Bhutan. The flow of foreign currency is also low. From 1974 until 2005, if we compare the tourism development of Southeast Asian states with India and Bhutan, we will see that Bhutan received only 14,000 tourists in total. However, with the opening up of alternate routes, there may be a burgeoning tourism industry.

The restriction imposed by the Bhutanese government on the free movement of tourists throughout the country is a significant challenge for the tourism industry. The Bhutanese government only permits movement for Indian tourists until the

Phuentsholing monastery, which hampers the tourism market along the Indo-Bhutan border. Although air routes are available to Paro, there is a limited flow of flights. Furthermore, the land route connecting India and Bhutan cannot be used for both entry and exit from Bhutan. Tourists departing from Paro or Jhimpu exit southern Bhutan via Assam, leading to a search for new routes connected to Northeast India to expand their businesses. In this regard, cooperation from the North-eastern states is sought. India has also cooperated with Bhutan to uproot terrorists from their soil, and Bhutan is financially dependent on India's assistance. The historical evidence of tourists crossing borders between India and Bhutan and settling in cross-border areas still exists, which is only possible with Indian cooperation. A recent development shows the migration of the Indo-Bhutan border trade centre to Darranga in Tamulpur of Assam, giving high hopes of strengthening the border trade areas. Bhutan and India have shared special bilateral relations in trade and development for ages.

## CHINA-



The relationship between India and China was disrupted after the 1962 war. It is difficult to digest the fact that there is a historical snag in communication between India and China that puts trade relations between both states in the doldrums. The Indo-China relationship, which was interrupted by the 1962 war under the leadership of Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India; only moved towards reconciliation when Rajiv Gandhi visited China in 1988. The main areas of concern for both states were trade, security, politics, economics, and cultural relations.

Both states in this period, want more people-to-people connection to enhance continuous cooperation between India and China. However, when the economic



status of the states improved, they began to establish their individual dominance in the Southeast Asian states, creating their respective trade markets. There were interactions between the states regarding this market expansion, and investors from various trade and finance sectors from both India and China visited each other to explore business opportunities. The MOU signed by the chamber of commerce of both governments coordinates the markets. The trading graph of India-China is mainly descending, although it was initially at a high level. 2004 onwards exports between the countries increased by 27.5%. In the same year, imports were at 50%. The percentage of imports however increased minimally in the later years. India is China's 16th largest trade partner, which accounts for about 1.17 percent of China's entire trade volume. There are several trade agreements signed between India and China to increase bilateral trade via multilateral cooperation. The Chinese government's expectations from India are quite high, as the economy of both states remains dependent on each other, making cooperation inevitable in every possible way. Nevertheless, economic development plans and projects have still been incapable of pulling the northeast out of its isolation, even though the region shares a larger part of its boundaries with China. The northeast faces alienation, and many areas are poverty-stricken, far away from the economically affluent mainland India. The region remains neglected, like Kashmir and Tibet. However, northeast India and China do not share any border trade route, making it difficult to achieve direct benefits from China.

Arunachal Pradesh shares maximum borders with China, and the effect of China's influence is evident in the remote villages of Arunachal Pradesh. The three major trade areas discussed by the governments of both India and China as a result of their negotiation are Zemitang, Gelling, and Kibithoo. These are the three major LCS coordinated by both governments but are not well connected on either side of the border. For a long period of time, smooth trade relations flourished between China and several north Indian states. However with the advent of British rule in India, the Brahmaputra valley got disconnected from Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet. The passage that was often used by traders as an imminent trade route was hence obstructed. With long-drawn battles and disputes between India and China, the idea of opening these trade routes till date has been controversial.

One of the significant conflicts between the two states is the 40-year-long border dispute. India claims that China has illegally occupied 43,180 sq. km of Jammu and Kashmir and 5,180 sq. km of area which was illegally ceded to Beijing by Islamabad under the Sino-Pakistan boundary agreement of 1962. On the other hand, China is of the claim that India illegally possesses approximately 90,000 sq. km of land area in the state of Arunachal Pradesh. The discord between the states is very pronounced as seven rounds of border talks initiated by both governments have failed miserably. There has been no permanent solution, and the future seems bleak. Indian foreign policy, especially in the context of developing trade ties with neighbouring states, has given more importance to road development schemes which includes states like that of Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet. With the already existing troubles between the two states since the early 1960s, using these schemes to their utmost advantage would benefit both the countries. Thus, the border areas require an enhanced security system which can aid connectivity and linkups with the neighbouring states. Since roadways are easily accessible they require strong security checks. Hence to foster cooperative relations with the neighbouring states, monitored movement of citizens across the borders with issued governmental permits is essential. In this regard, the north-eastern states support the construction of a 1040m transnational road which would connect the states of Myanmar, India, and China, starting from Ledo in Assam. Similarly, rail routes are also being considered. The Chinese government has planned to lay 150 km of rail tracks via Yunnan Province. The entire Southeast Asian zone benefits from China's economic assistance. The state forms the second economically influential state after India in Southeast Asia. Therefore, China's stance in the matters of Southeast Asia is as crucial as India's. This is a constant source of insecurity to the latter. To protract its dominance, China has enhanced various economic and connectivity strategies with the Southeast Asian states; one of which is road connectivity. With economic assistance from China, the states that receive the most benefit are Myanmar and Thailand. China cooperated with Myanmar in the Irrawaddy Corridor, which starts from Kunming of China to reach the Indian Ocean via Myanmar. This opens better prospects for trade and people-to-people connectivity. The constantly expanding economic cooperation of both India and China in Southeast Asia will soon compel the states to cultivate cooperative relations and resume their trade ties.

India's hesitation increases with the emerging influence of China in Southeast Asia. This has prompted India to increase economic assistance to Southeast Asian states. Therefore, Indo-China relations need a permanent solution. Although several business discussions have taken place between these states and diplomatic visits have happened a couple of times, China's interest in trading with Indian border areas often antagonizes Indian foreign policymakers. The northeast region already shows significant cultural resemblance to both the bordering states and India. India is greatly concerned about the foreboding fear of losing the northeast, making it very attentive to the changing dynamics of Chinese foreign policy. In 2006, a survey group from China visited the state of West Bengal to cultivate trade relations between China and the border areas of the north-eastern region.

Many industrialists from the Chinese province participated in an international trade fair organized by the Assam government. It was at this fair that the governments of India and Myanmar decided to open the Stillwell Road<sup>29</sup> to usher trade relations. Due to the blockade of this trade route, supplies had to be transported from Myanmar to Bengal through Assam. However, the links between Yunnan and Bengal have been severed since the 1960s, and the situation still remains unchanged. Traders used porous borders for trade and communication purposes. It was the members of the Yunnan Chamber of Commerce who declared the need for more border points and the opening of the Stillwell Road for trade. China's main motive is to involve the north-eastern part of India in international trade, which could eventually lead to Chinese dominance over the entire northeast and Bengal.

Another important strategy of China's connectivity development project is the opening of the Nathula Pass<sup>30</sup>, which is another trading route which is crucial and has immense potential.

The 563 km long stretch of land connecting Lhasa and Bengal was opened in 2006. Tibetans and Sikkim have been using the Nathula Pass as a trade route for ages,

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<sup>29</sup> The Stilwell or Ledo Road was an overland connection constructed in January 1945 between India and China.

<sup>30</sup> Nathula is a mountain in the Himalayas located in the East Sikkim district. It serves as a pass that connects the Indian state of Sikkim with China's Tibet Autonomous Region.

including during the British period, and it has now become a major focus of Indo-China trade. This trade route accounts for about 8% of the cross-border trade between India and China. In recent years, the trade items include agricultural goods, blankets, food grains, dry fruits, beverages, and fertilized foods. However, this trade route mostly benefits China, and experts estimate that the trade through this route reached almost US\$48 million in 2007<sup>31</sup> and raised to US\$527 by 2010. Nevertheless, this was not sufficient for the Chinese economy, nor could it address the economic deficiencies in the Indian economy. China claims that India's reluctance to trade via the Nathula Pass has unnecessarily restricted trade, which hampers the economic prosperity of both states.

Fix the grammar: After the pass was opened, Chinese government officials visited India to discuss their contentions about the decrease in trade transactions over the Nathula Pass. Several issues were discussed by the Chinese officials regarding Indian reluctance to trade. In the past, India has registered 16 items to trade with China; however, India trades over 26 items that are not registered, and this illegal trade takes a huge amount of legal money away from China. Furthermore, Chinese traders do not have any facility for overnight stays in Indian Territory, while the Chinese government has always facilitated Indian traders to have overnight accommodations. India has opened the Changgu mart in Sikkim, with the least participation from China, even though the entire mart has a market for 60 percent of Chinese goods. Nevertheless, it was always expected that trade between the two would eventually increase.

The entire zone which is characterized by functioning hotels, restaurants, and transportation, would gradually benefit from the opening of the pass. Furthermore, the opening will definitely help the economic condition of Sikkim. Even the bus service from Gangtok of India to Lasha of China has been under discussion by both states; this would open a large part of the north-east to the international boundary. However there exist several functional discrepancies in the Indian context regarding cross border trade with China. The major endowments of the state are its natural resources, including its huge potential for hydropower generation. The idea of opening up border trade through Nathu La Pass poses both challenges and

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<sup>31</sup> Nischal Pandey's "India's North Eastern Region: Insurgency, Economic Development and Linkages with SouthEast Asia" was published in 2008.

opportunities for both the states. The advantages would include a higher generation of revenue by the state in terms of license fees, toll taxes, etc. Depending upon the volume of goods and services, one can expect a higher revenue and employment generation in the transport sector. This would be initiated by the movement of vehicles from Siliguri to Gangtok and from Gangtok to the Nathu La Pass. The major drawback of this route is that the pass remains closed in the winter months due to heavy snowfall in the area. The route only facilitates four months of proper trade transactions. Apart from these limitations, trading through this route requires a trade pass. Sanctioning of this trade pass is excessively time-consuming, leading to the increased involvement in alternatives like that of illegal trade. Therefore, Sikkim and the neighbouring states are actively looking forward to using this route to harness various trade, investment, and tourism opportunities in both western and mainland China. The Indian government projected Nathu La as an alternative corridor for Kailash Mansarovar. A Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministries of External Affairs of India and China was signed on September 18th, 2014, for the opening of this new alternative route for Indian pilgrims to the Tibet Autonomous Region in the People's Republic of China. Kailash Mansarovar is known for its purity of nature and its religion-cultural significance for majorly Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims. Nathu La is seen as a safer and easier route for this pilgrimage; since it allows pilgrims to travel the 1,500 km-long journey from Nathu La to Kailash by bus. If this alternative route becomes more common, the Indian trade through this route would eventually receive a boost. Besides Nathu La, places like Jelep La in Kalimpong have also historically played a very important role in trade; areas like 10th Mile and Topkhana have acted as important business centres with major Tibetan colonies.

However, the smooth functioning between both states will ease the grievances and aid China- India trade relations to grow. This would eventually enhance the economic development of India as a whole. The rest of India has benefitted from economic engagements with the ASEAN states under the Look East Policy. The north-eastern region on the other hand, often considered as the gateway to the South-East Asian countries has been left behind as the region failed to utilize the opportunities opened up by the Look East Policy. The weak economic base and the absence of proper infrastructure have been major obstructions in the betterment of

this region. To address this problem, the conceptualization of a road map in terms of specific projects would benefit the north-eastern region. In this regard, the ASEAN-India Vision Document 2020 could be the guiding document. High-visibility projects that could be implemented in a short period are desirable. These projects could be in the field of health, culture, tourism, capacity building, and food processing. The security situation of the northeast remains a matter of concern. It has been envisioned that the northeast has to take full advantage of the Look East Policy as the window of opportunity is shrinking because the states in the eastern seaboard of India are also intensifying their interactions with the ASEAN to reap the benefits of the same policy. The Look East Policy has to take into account the indigenous perspectives of the Northeast instead of pandering to views from Delhi.

The Asian highway is structured to pass through Moreh and Imphal in India. Myanmar and Thailand have agreed to collaborate on a 700 Km road that would cut across Myanmar and connect the state with Northern Thailand. However, Upper Assam and the Stilwell road are not included in that plan. This is why the Kunming initiatives need to go beyond discussions among academics and well-meaning industrialists and move to the field with adequate planning. The North East and its slogan, *"This is our view, this is our stake"* has to be taken into consideration. The region cannot be a dumping ground for Chinese goods or a corridor for Indian products. Unless a well informed plan is not strategized locally, until then the region will not be able to connect regionally. Only when the restrictions on tourism are lifted from the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram, can tourism develop. Many citizens from Myanmar and Thailand want to visit north-eastern states, like that of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Guwahati for tourism and medical treatment. They are often denied entry due to restrictions. Well known figures like Mr. Bachhan, Priyanka Chopra, and Narendra Modi (in 2017), being the brand ambassadors of Indian tourism, should actively promote tourism in the north east via social media. This can encourage foreign tourists to visit these states and help make the northeast a trade-free zone.

The chapter has highlighted India's significant international linkages with neighbouring countries and the challenges faced in maintaining these relationships. The Ministry of Tourism and External Affairs have initiated several projects to

strengthen ties with these countries. It is hoped that these efforts by the government will keep the Northeast region at the forefront of these international linkages, leading to its own benefits in the long run.

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## **CHAPTER-3**

### **LOOK EAST POLICY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NORTH EAST:**

*Tell me what has become of my life,*

*I have a wife and two children,*

*who love me, I am the victim of*

*police brutality, now*

*I'm tired of being, the victim of hate,*

*You're rapping' me of my pride oh,*

*for god's sake I look to haven to fulfill*

*its prophecy*

*Set me free-*

**MICHAEL JACKSON**

### **INTRODUCTION**

An analytical and detailed history of India's public policy towards the northeast and its implementation in the region is necessary due to the rise of crises in governance, security, and development in the entire region. The failure of governmental agencies working in the northeast has led to this situation. Before any conclusions are drawn, it is necessary to analyze the government policies operative and its effects on the region. It is difficult to comprehend the present policies of north-eastern states without understanding the complex histories of the people living in these states. The rise of major rebel militants in the northeast has not been sufficiently explored and requires more attention.

The states that have faced insurgency since independence are Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, and Manipur. If one goes by the accounts of the state and central governments, the other states have also shown involvement with the previously mentioned states in the same quagmire of conflict. These states have denied their

merger with the Indian state and demanded individual sovereign rights. Nevertheless, these states are still part of the same territory but do not consider themselves as part of it. Due to the states' coercive policies, the central government has to negotiate with the demands of the tribes in the region. The government's decisions in imposing militaries in the region after declaring them as 'Disturbed Areas' without effectively trying to explore the individual reasons for disturbances in the respective states has given rise to anti-nationalist sentiments among citizens. Correspondingly, promises made by the government to prevent the rise of corruption in the region, to increase the involvement of minorities in the decision-making process, and allocating funds with proper checks and balances failed to be fruitful; and became the cause of more atrocities.

The declaration of the area as 'disturbed' emerges when the governments fails to provide any sort of protection to civilians in the region. The actual fault lies in the fact that the states which received statehood post 1972, lack proper appraisal of their revenues that is required to run the state. These areas also lack resources to meet administrative and non-developmental expenditures. A corrupt form of democracy where intermediaries, bureaucrats, and politicians enjoy the allotted funds for development without much accountability to citizens is often operative in such areas. All of these pushed the central government to deploy armies in the region and enforce AFSPA<sup>32</sup> propelling the entire region into becoming an alienated zone. Poor governance in most sectors in the north-eastern zone has lead to maladministration and corruption without any trial. The basic benefit of maladministration is that those who are corrupt earns substantial profit.

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<sup>32</sup> The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958 is an act passed by the Parliament of India that grants special powers to the Indian armed forces to maintain public order in areas that are considered to be disturbed. Once an area is declared disturbed, the AFSPA rule is implemented for about three months. One such act was passed on 11th September 1958 and was initially applicable to the Nagas, who were then a part of Assam. Over the following decades, it spread to the other seven sister states in India's North East. Another act was passed in 1983, applicable to Punjab and Chandigarh, but it was only implemented in 1997, nearly 14 years after it was written. An act passed in 1990 was applicable to Jammu and Kashmir and has been in force since then.

Corruption has had an impact on the northeast since the British Raj. The entire northeast is situated in an extremely vulnerable area. Transnational trafficking and illegal infiltration have contributed in the corruption in the region, since the British rule. The entire northeast region is connected to the rest of India via a narrow strip of land known as the Chicken Neck. This forms as the only connecting land and increases the region's geographical vulnerability. The Chicken Neck acts as the sole means of transporting goods via road and railways, to and from the northeast. The remote northeast has alienated itself from mainland India especially Delhi which is reluctant to understand and consider its demands. The northeast is a region of different ethnic communities clustered into one. Eminent writer B.G. Verghese once described the northeast as *“another India, the most diverse part of a most diverse country, very different, relatively little known, and certainly not too well understood. Once coy, it is now turbulent and in transition within India's transition”*. The local and Central government have to work in unison to get a grip over the turbulent situation in northeast. The government of India has provided neo-liberal packages like the Look East Policy and the Vision Document of 2020 with the intention of rapidly developing the region and to get hold of the ongoing conflicts. This would help make the northeast an integral part of India.

However, the situation is different in the northeast due to the existence of constant transnational linkages of the region with countries like Myanmar, China, Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh, which provide a safe haven for outfit's groupings. The geographical location has made the region more vulnerable. In *Pursuit of Conflict* by Avalok Langer, we get an overall view of the geographical location of the northeast and its intensifying relations with other Southeast Asian nations, specifically Myanmar and Bangladesh. These states act as mediators between India and the north-eastern states. The Government of India has been through several rounds of negotiations, ceasefires, and peace talks but has never highlighted the actual reasons for the outfits protesting against the government and has tactfully bypassed these narratives. This has made it inevitable for the outfits to seek shelter and support from China (for military training), Bangladesh (for cross-border shelter), and Myanmar (for illegal trade). According to the militants, the Indian government has always been preoccupied with matters that require urgent attention and remain under pressure. Apart from these the government mostly deals with international economic

affairs. This has either made the administration incapable to understand the problems of the northeast region or has provided the government with an outlet to deliberately ignore these problems. The separatist movements in the northeast have had a devastating history of rapes, tortures, and violence and hence reflect extreme human rights violations. Amongst the eight states of the northeast (including Sikkim recently), only Mizoram is free from insurgency today, but the memory of the devastating famine in 1966 and the reluctance of the then government to rescue civilians from that calamity still lingers in the heart of every Mizo. However, Mizoram was forced to sign a peace accord with the government in 1989, which closed the chapter of government versus Mizo confrontation.

The situation in Meghalaya is quite different. The state has for long faced a triple triad of violence, racism, and exclusion. The lack of proper communication between the government and the state has increased misunderstandings and hatred. The state is overloaded with Bengali administrators, Nepalese soldiers, Marwari traders, and the authority of the church, meaning that the Marwaris, Sindhis, and Bengalis make the major politico-economic decisions of the state. This indigenous and outsider divisiveness has kept the fire of insurgency burning. The young Khasi students have become an integral part of the armed rebellion, gradually strengthening the insurgency situation in the state, due to a lack of employment opportunities. This indigenous and outsider binary is also reflected in the election process, where the right of self-determination and the power to govern themselves is the main demand of the civilians, who want to keep migrants away from their state.

However, the Indian government since independence has been reluctant to fulfill these demands. This has compelled the militants to take shelter in neighbouring states of India, especially Bangladesh. Bangladesh provides shelter and support to the militants to continue their revolt against Indian authority. In Bangladesh, the power of money speaks more than in India. The support of Bangladesh to the insurgents is based solely on money, and the fight against the Indian government is inconsequential to the Bangladeshi state. Thus, they maintain ties with both the insurgents and Indian administration at tandem. According to a survey by eminent non-governmental organizations, every border outpost of India and Bangladesh is administered by a major general, and to win their support, insurgents pay them



generously. In return, they get permits to travel cross-border. The intelligence agencies of India have repeatedly reported this to the state and central government.

The north-eastern region has strong connections with the tribes located on the borders of Myanmar and China, which produce the largest amount of opium in the world. In the case of drug trafficking, the tribes receive support and arms protection from China. They buy arms for their private armies, which are then recycled in the black market. The arms reach northeast India via the Indo-Myanmar border and are then transported to other parts of northeast and Bangladesh via Manipur and Mizoram. The government is aware of these activities but has not taken any action against them.

The growth of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in the northeast, particularly in the states of Meghalaya, Assam, Nagaland, and Tripura, has created a feeling of indigenous and outsider binary among the citizens, leading to anti-national sentiment. The lack of government action and proper planning has fuelled this feeling of alienation. There is a great deal of anti-national feeling among the tribes because of the alienation that reverses all gains accrued in the northeast. For instance, the developmental projects that falls flat because of this alienation and feeling of deprivation. The north-eastern states find Border States more reliable, which has taken the conflict to the external world as the neighbouring countries find a soft corner in these dissident tribes. The resources do not percolate down and the government is lackadaisical in preserving its image and preserving the gains done in its developmental work.

In Tripura, the situation is worse, with the fear of tribal land loss to nontribal Bengali immigrants being a significant factor in the rise of the movement in the state. The Communist Party of India (CPI), along with Congress and tribal heads, shaped the movement in Tripura while deciding the end results of the movement for the citizens. Although, Tripura in the contemporary times experiences less conflict, the government still finds it necessary to extend the imposition of AFSPA along with Assam Rifles and CRPF in order to avoid future trouble and mayhem.

There are more immigrants than citizens in Tripura. The government has been unable in handling this imbalance. This situation has been named as the "*Tripura Phenomenon*." This has resulted in a loss of power for both the central and state governments. The separatist movement in the region benefited the businessmen, and the agitation soon gave birth to the National Liberation Front of Tripura. The major participants in this underground movement were youths from Tripura who believed that the opportunities available to them were only limited to their own state. As the central government have been more focused on elections, no serious steps were taken in controlling the situation of illegal immigrants in Tripura. The representatives of NLFT<sup>33</sup> presented certain demands to the government, which were already established during the Maharaja's rule in Tripura. The result of this was the creation of a parallel government in Tripura by the NLFT. The Tripura committee delegated by the central government failed to give substantial attention in investigating the immigration situation to its very core. This caused intense confrontation between the administration and the militants, resulting in the loss of over thousand lives and several injuries to civilians. These events barley made it to the government accounts. The authorities failed to apprehend a simple fact; that violence often begets violence. Their means of controlling the situation was hence incapable of providing permanent solutions. The government's inability in tacking the mentioned scenario obligated them to increase control at the state boundaries. However, this too was not effectively monitored. Today, approximately 856 kilometres of the Tripura-Bangladesh border remain porous, inviting thousands of immigrants every day. With time it has been noticed that the movement led by NLFT has been able to slowly gather support from ULFA<sup>34</sup>, the militant organization of Assam. Together they fought against the government to regain their

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<sup>33</sup> The National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) is a militant organization based in the Indian state of Tripura. It is estimated to have 550 to 850 members and aims to establish an independent Tripura state by seceding from India. The group is actively involved in the insurgency in the north east of India. The NLFT was founded on March 12, 1989, operates primarily in Tripura, and has its headquarters in Bhutan and Bangladesh.

<sup>34</sup> The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) is a designated revolutionary rebel organization operating in the Indian state of Assam. Its aim is to establish an independent state of Assam through armed struggle in the ongoing Assam conflict. The Indian government banned the organization in 1990 and labeled it a terrorist group, while the United States Department considers it to be a group of concern. The ULFA has been active since 1971 and has its headquarters in Myanmar and China, with operations in Assam. Its opponents are the Government of India and the state of Assam.

identity and sovereignty. This inspired several outfits working in different states of the northeast, leading to the rise to a new mass movement. This resulted in about 1394 abductions in Tripura, especially from tea plantations. The tea plantation managers claim that the estates are a safe haven for the outfits. There is a rising concern regarding the tea estates situated in the east and south of Jorhat. The NSCN-IM<sup>35</sup> is believed to be gaining influence and control in the region, and to keep their growth unobstructed they have started targeting the tea estates for revenue. Many managers have complained that they often receive notes with orders and demands from the outfits. When these demands are not fulfilled, majority of the estate managers are either kidnapped or killed brutally on the spot. This is quite common on both sides of Highway 39 and the eastern part of the region, where a strip of land separates Nagaland from Assam. Whatever party might have ruled, the situation has remained unchanged for the people of northeast. Their struggles have increased manifold and there are no solutions in sight, at least not in the short run.

The government advocates that there has been a significant decline in militancy in the northeast due to the active implementation of AFSPA. According to the government that policy has effectively controlled area of the northeast that are adjoining to Bangladesh. Consequently, the government has also made attempts to relax the enforcement of AFSPA in the northeast. However, the reality is quite different from what is often portrayed. The conditions in the northeast remain unchanged, and the government continues to give a step-motherly attitude towards the citizens. this has caused immense distress in the economy, industry, and education sectors of the region. The militants find it difficult to strike against the government due to a lack of funds and moral support. This forces them to seek help from India's immediate neighbours. However some members of these militant groups have also left these grouping, pledging their alliance to the government by joining the army for a better life and living. This has increased an increase in the numeric strength of the SULFA<sup>36</sup> in Assam. The surrendered militants in other parts

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<sup>35</sup> The NSCN-IM, or the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, is a Naga-nationalist separatist group operating primarily in Northeast India, with minor activities in northeastern Myanmar as of 2012. The group's main objective is to establish an independent Naga state called NAGALIM, comprising all areas inhabited by the Nagas in both India and Myanmar. Currently, the group is actively fighting for this cause. It was founded on January 31, 1980, and has had leaders such as Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S. Khaplang. Its headquarters are located in the Peren district.

<sup>36</sup> SULFA, or Surrendered ULFA, refers to former members of the United Liberation Front of Assam

of the northeast also try to seek opportunities and cooperation from the government. Nevertheless, the government is yet to announce a package concerning them. Rather than counseling other cadres to also surrender, the government is currently in the attempts of using them. This may lead to an outrage if the government fails to cooperate. The militants, who are mostly tribes, know their forest areas very well. This makes it difficult for the army deployed by the government to search the militants. Unless the militants who have surrendered cooperate with the army; it would be impossible to access these jungle areas. In such scenarios, the militants keep their activities unregulated, and the surrendered militants are often under extreme stress.

In the case of Assam, the movement has emerged as a minority versus majority conflict. The minority comprises of the inhabitants of Assam, while the majority consists of illegal Bengali migrants from Bangladesh. For decades, this movement has failed to reach a consensus. The government too has been incapable in providing a satisfactory solution in this regard. Instead, this has fuelled agitations in the state as Bengali continues to enjoy the status of state language; the government is alleged to have done so to keep the vote banks intact. The negotiations, peace talks, and cooperative measures taken up by the government have not been sufficient to satisfy the minorities and have instead instilled a sense of fear among them. The minorities remain under constant dismay of losing their land, culture, and language. The main objectives that the Assamese have taken up in their agitations are to protect their sovereign statehood and to seek for state solutions with integrity. The militants in order to secure these demands take up measures that they assume to be democratic. Assam established the Bodoland Executive Council in 1993 to coordinate with the demands of Assamese outfits.

However, the measures given by the council lacked people's participation and fell apart. Violence continued to prevail. The dominance that the enjoys over the minorities is the main cause of this ethnic conflict. Hence it is safe to say that demography had no role to play in this ethnic conflict. The deployment of the military and paramilitary forces has been able to tame the situation, but the militants

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(ULFA) who have surrendered to the Indian government. The Indian army has been working to increase the number of SULFA members since 1990.

have continued their agitations. Even though the intelligence officers claim that the militants have lost their shelters in Bhutan and Bangladesh, they continue to have access to cross-border linkages.

Assam is the land of all major insurgencies, and both the state and central governments are accused of being incapable of effectively controlling the situation in the state. The Assamese government has failed to bridge the linguistic and regional divide existent among the minority and the majority population. The government's inclination towards majority immigrants has alienated the minorities. The minorities have often sympathized with militants from the other states causing an increase in the insurgency situation in the state. Nevertheless, regulating the flow of immigrants in the state has been challenging for the state government. Although a peace accord was signed between the government and Assamese population in 1985; the regular influx of immigrants agitated the minorities arousing communal tensions in the region. The BSF have also failed to control the influx of immigrants from the sea and through the water routes. This is so because Bangladesh is connected with India through sea routes which are difficult to monitor. Immigrants follow these routes via the Ganga water channel, leading them to the Indian subcontinent. Moreover, the BSF are only answerable to the police administration who are in turn responsible to monitor immigration through these means. Once caught, the migrant must be transferred to the local police. The local police are often reluctant in cases pertaining to migration and bypass them by giving the offender a minor warning. This increases the number of infiltrators; who are members of the vote banks operative in the state.

The security and monitoring systems of both the state and central government have failed, and politicians hardly care about the crisis of north-eastern citizens, focusing instead on increasing their power and securing their positions. This nullifies the IMDT ACT<sup>37</sup> of 1983. As a result, illegal immigrants presently are occupying the land in the northeast and enjoy unregulated access to the resources of the state. This

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<sup>37</sup> The Illegal Migrants' Determination by Tribunal Act of 1983 was enacted by former Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi, but was struck down by the Supreme Court of India in 2005 following the Sarbananda Sonowal vs Union of India case. The act only applies in Assam, while in other states, the detection of foreigners is carried out under the Foreigners Act of 1946.

increases the gap between the majority and minorities of the north-eastern zone. The government has ignored these issue for decades, making things difficult for the indigenous population.

### **LOOK EAST POLICY AND ITS VARIOUS MEASURES IN NORTH EAST GOVERNANCE-**

The year 1990 is marked as a period of economic distortions for the Indian subcontinent and the world in general. This is so because this year witnessed the end of the Cold War era, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the initiation of the age of globalization. The era began with the rise of regionalism coupled with mutual participation, cooperation, settlement, and economic betterment of the states by removing territorial limitations among nations. India's main target was to actively participate in the rising economy of the Southeast Asian states through northeast India. The Look East Policy was a crucial step in carrying out this strategy of the Indian government. This measure created immense opportunities for development in major South and Southeast Asian states but had the least impact on north-eastern region of the country. Cross-border trade between India and Southeast Asian states played a major role in integrating northeast India. Keeping the failures of the first phase of the policy in mind; the second phase of the Look East Policy, known as the Act East Policy, implemented in 2014 by the BJP government, had quite a positive effect on the northeast. Although the entire northeast shares boundaries with other countries, the development of bilateral trade in this context has not proved to be sufficient. However in the case of Bangladesh; the Look East Policy has proved to be fruitful in fostering smooth coordination between the country and the north-eastern states, when compared to any other country. Though the relations were disrupted after the 1971 partition, Bangladesh and northeast still enjoy close relations. In the post-partition phase, the north-eastern zone which remained connected with the rest of India through a narrow 22km strip of land became entirely landlocked. The connectivity is however, still existent through the Kolkata port. The Look East Policy has revealed that the entire northeast lacks industrialization, even though the region is gifted with adequate natural resources. Northeast India currently transports coal and limestone to Bangladesh without any addition to its current value. The Look East Policy highlighted this lack of connectivity. The development of the state's economic and political policies is often linked with regional and global

cooperation. For the landlocked and underdeveloped north-eastern states the domestic and international policies form a window to the outside world.

The major reasons for implementing the Look East Policy centered around developing trade, security, cultural ties, geopolitics, and international cooperation in the region. The participation of the northeast in this process of engagement has proved to be essential for the Indian government. This has ushered trade, investments, and industrial developments in the north-eastern zone of the country. The major emphasis was on bridging the gap between India and Myanmar as the latter is the immediate neighbour to the Indian subcontinent and shares strong historical linkages with the north-eastern states. The Indian government wanted to take advantage of this relationship and equivalently work its way into strengthening relations with Southeast Asian countries. ASEAN also plays a major role as a significant regional grouping in the working of the Look East Policy. India's northeast act as a bridge between India and Southeast Asia. With changing world strategies, the relationship between the states has also changed. Regionalism coupled with effective implementation have contributed to developmental projects like the construction of the Moreh-Tamu Kaleya Road, the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, the Trans-Asian highway, India-Myanmar rail linkages, the Kaladan multimodal project, the Stillwell road, the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India gas and oil pipeline, the Tamanthi hydroelectricity project, and the optical fiber network between Northeast India and Southeast Asian states. The major portions of these projects have achieved their target, while some remain untouched. The major hindrance in having any kind of linkages through the north east is the volatile nature of the entire region and the role that Southeast Asian states play in the instability of the region. For decades, immediate neighbours to the northeast like China, Myanmar, and Bangladesh have had strong socio-cultural ties with population residing in the north-eastern states. This received a major blow due to territorial demarcation after independence. The Bangladesh issue is essentially a sensitive matter to the Indian government as the latter received a huge influx of refugees after the partition. The Indian government has failed to resolve this pertinent issue. Since then, the relationship has been unpredictable and precarious.

In the case of Myanmar, the transport of illegal arms, drugs, and unauthorized medicines occurring through northeast India to the rest of the world have been a practise since ages. All disputes arising from such relations have severely affected the entire north-eastern region. Apart from that, the growing sources of instigation among these states against the Indian government have worsened the situation in the northeast. Thus, the second phase of Look East Policy mainly focused on the development of north-eastern India, which suffers from the issues of insurgency, corruption, unemployment, smuggling, economic deficiencies, extortions, kidnappings, deployment of armies, and the total failure of governance in the state. The basic objective of the policy makers in the second phase of the Look East Policy was to establish good governance in the region with active participation of the civil society, non-governmental organizations and the media. This also involves strengthening ties with the immediate neighbours to facilitate cooperation in uprooting insurgency from the northeast. The economic engagement and connectivity that is required of the landlocked area of the northeast essentially requires several policy changes, as opined by various thinkers of the state. Unless a peace settlement is assured, the economic engagement of India with the South East Asian states will never be fruitful. Hence the second phase of the Look East Policy initiated in 2014 (later upgraded as the Act East Policy) emphasized the restoration of law and order in the north-eastern states so that all-round development could no longer be unimaginable in the region.

### **GOVERNANCE AND FAILURES**

After analyzing the brief history of the north-eastern states of India, the failure of the government in very many ways has already been highlighted. A vivid analysis of the failure of state apparatus in the respective north-eastern states is necessary in this context since it clarifies the fault lines that obstruct development in these states. The gaps in the implementation of the major policies and the faults in the working of the structures of local governance are some of the issues. The hill areas of the northeast comprise mainly of Naga and Kuki tribes, who form 90 percent of the total population in the area. The valley remains dominated by the Nagas and the Kukis. These areas also include the Meities. Major democratic policies which are urgently required to protect and promote these tribal communities are as follows:



- a) To enable the participation of the citizens through elections;
- b) Avoid tyranny of autocratic rulers led by the majority;
- c) To promote open and fair competition for power based on popular voting mechanisms;
- d) To provide a forum for rational discussion on the problems existent in the region; and to discuss the settlement of these conflicting by coordination through mutual social interest.

The majority of the north-eastern population comprises of tribes. The major governing principle in these forms of community is the rule of the wise heads of the grouping who receive cooperation from other members, in similar forms of partnerships. This form of governance differs from one community to the other. A major grievance put forward by such communities is the emergence of new reformed rules of the government which require them to forgo old traditionalistic means of governance. The National Development Council hence designates the northeast as a special category among the other states of the country. The financial flow to the northeast represents a down flow. This raises the question of decision-making process and the patterns of the resource allocation to these states. The main challenges faced by the policies that advocate good governance in the north-eastern region are as follows:

- a) **Lack of transparency**-It is the duty of the government to create mass awareness of the plans and policies that it formulates for the improvement of the region. Poor accountability is a major hurdle in improvement of services across these states. Bureaucratic complexities make it difficult for common citizens to understand the political system and raises questions as to how they should participate in these state structures. The lack of transparency and maintenance of secrecy in administration has been an essential characteristic of the entire system of the northeast since the colonial period. This has eventually led to corruption in these states.
- b) **Underdevelopment**- The impact of underdevelopment has been serious in northeast and poses a serious challenge to the citizens. After several surveys conducted in the region, it has been concluded that the degree of development that was expected by the government with regard to the northeast has been

obstructed by increasing levels of corruption and violence prevailing in the states. Much of the major investments in the northeast have indirectly ended up in financing insurgency and the militant groups due to an enveloping economy marked by extortion and collusion. On the other hand, after decades of negotiations only certain sections of the northeast has initiated cooperation and has given up the path of agitation. These parts of the northeast have attempted to seek cooperation, development and to secure establishment of peace in the region. However, it cannot be denied that the majority of the funds which were paid by the citizens of India, due to corruption and inefficient management of these resources have fuelled insurgency in the region.

- c) **Threats to Peace-** The effectiveness of governance can be measured by the level of security provided to its citizens and their property. Unfortunately, certain states in India, particularly those in the northeast continue to face significant threats of territorialism and naxalite disturbances, making the establishment of peace a daunting task in the region. Resolving such situations requires determination, reliance on law and order, the establishment of democratic policies, and persistent negotiations to reduce instances of violence. However, while a few of these measures have proven to effective, others have turned out to be mere false promises.
- d) **Criminalisation of politics-** Corruption among government officials, politicians, civil servants, and business houses in any political scenario negatively impacts citizens, erodes their trust and creates an atmosphere of lawlessness. Insurgency and terrorism are the major outcomes of corruption. The terrorism in the northeast needs to be tackled by democratically elected state governments. With the cooperation of the central government; the state government must adopt strong measures that can protect human lives and property. However, the north-eastern states face a challenging situation as the government itself is alleged to be full of corrupt officials. These officials use state legislative assemblies and the state apparatus to pursue corrupt practices. The funding that these officials provide to the parliament being sizeable in numbers hinders serious action against them. In coalition politics, the compulsions hold back the government to take independent decisions as the fear of losing vote of confidence on the floor of the House always lurks behind

such compulsions. This underscores the urgent need for a strong hold on law and order in the region.

- e) **Corruption-** Corruption in the northeast is higher than in any other Indian state. The funds allotted by the central government are often transferred to private entities, as development packages rarely benefit the citizens of the region. Financial packages typically only reach the elites, insurgents, bureaucrats, and other privileged sections of the northeast society. A large sum of money is also transferred to politicians and contractors involved in these activities. Corruption found in the elite strata of the northeast has caused citizens to lose trust in the government. High levels of corruption are a major hindrance to the development of good governance. Factors such as lack of law and order, an underdeveloped legal framework, lack of transparency, and weak citizen awareness of ongoing political turmoil further exacerbate corruption in the region.
- f) **Non- Responsiveness and Red Tapism-** Reluctance on the part of the government towards issues of development has produced a bad impression among citizens of the region.
- g) **Autonomy Movement-** The autonomy movement in the northeast has given rise to bad governance. Due to the existence of differential religions and cultural practises in the north-eastern state of the country; demands for autonomy hence also vary among them. Since the north-eastern states differ from the central government's approach which often calls for the creation of district councils. These differences often lead to calls for greater autonomy. Additionally, alienation experienced by the states since the colonial period and the desire for self-rule has fuelled demands for autonomy. These demands have compelled the government to take the matter seriously.

The government has experimented with several measures to address the ongoing troubles in the northeast, including attempts to foster transparency and justice, to create forums for public grievances, to make access to information easy and to develop mechanisms of e-governance. However, the majority of these measures are yet to be implemented. To make political actors into mature elite figures requires them to effectively contribute their wisdom and experiences into the decision-making process of the country. This formidable job demands tremendous spirit of sacrifice

and dedication. Only then can democracy flourish in the country's democratic institutions. In Manipur, the issue of identity has propelled insurgency in the state. The state itself has undergone crucial transformations in various domains of political existence. The attitude of the masses has also changed with regard to what seems befitting for the state's political environment. Manipur received its sovereign rights through nonviolent means in 1972 and became a part of the Indian state; although it did not have its own assembly at that time. After the progression of the third 5-year plan in India, Manipur attained statehood however matters of social, political, and economic justice continued to be elusive. These are all reflections of the existent democratic deficit in the state. The people of the northeast are currently fighting against structural injustices and constant deprivation that they have faced for several decades. This argument arises from the notions of the rational choice theory. However, the Government of India has not focus on redesigning democracy in the region with new policies. Due to the counter-insurgency operation a large number of north-eastern youth have fallen prey to drugs. Internal contradictions among ethnic groups have simultaneously increased. Even the peace initiatives taken by the government has failed to deliver social, economic, and political justice in the region. While the government has taken several democratic measures for the northeast, more needs to be done to address the region's unique challenges. Some suggestions in terms of policy measures have been discussed below:

- a) Strong constitutionally protected measures of the human rights
- b) Affirmative action measures to reserve the legacies of discrimination or to assure intercommunal balance.
- c) Horizontal accountability of the executive and legislature
- d) The embedded autonomy of the state bureaucrats
- e) Democratic control over the armed groups
- f) Plebiscite for the right to self-determination of independence
- g) Peace building for democratization.

These measures need to be implemented in the northeast region for the benefit of its citizens, whose voices often go unheard due to the region being landlocked and surrounded by foreign states. Ceasefires, peace talks, and agreements with various outfits are significant steps taken by the government in the northeast. These indicate

a shift from suppression to political accommodation in managing conflicts. This is the best way to resolve the insurgency problem in the region. The army and the Paramilitary forces have also recognized the need for political solutions to cater to the law and order scenario in the northeast. This would help address the underlying issues of insurgency. There is a huge gap between the expectations of the militants and the government capabilities leading to a solution-based approach. This creates a miasma of despair, which is unfortunate. However, negotiations go on for achieving peace. The agreements have also established the need for a mutually agreed, Joint Monitoring Group. The main function of the group would be to monitor adherence to ground rules and maintain effective working of the operations. The government with NSCN (IM), NSCN (K), ANVC, NLFT-NB, DHD, DPDS, and NDFB has signed such agreements. However there still exists a lack of communication from both sides. The government also needs to implement measures to protect citizens, to coordinate different government organs, and to control agitations under the framework of law and human rights. Representatives of the government should be transparent and logical in explaining their tasks.

There are several necessary developments for the citizens of the northeast in order to improve their living conditions. Some of these measures include increasing constitutional activities, inducing popular participation, promoting agriculture for permanent economic independence, improving community health, strengthening administrative setups, and addressing migration issues. Manipur, in particular, is the most backward state in the northeast. The state holds a ranking of being 21st among the Indian states with an index of 39.82 in 1991, compared to the all India average of 37.42. Its human development index in 1991 was 0.536, and it ranks 9th based on gender equality. The state has only 1.5 km of railway line, extremely poor water supply, and road density of 0.32 km /sq.km, with only 61.73% of roads surfaced, per capita consumption of 184.81kwh compared to the national average of 400kwh, and a per capita income of 64.10%. Unemployment in Manipur is at 4.5 lakhs.

Up until the eighth plan period, there was a lopsided approach to employment generation in the region. The approach entailed creation of government posts rather than generating employment in the private sector. As a result, the cost of governance became too high, leading to job cuts in the region. Data from the Directorate General

of Employment and Training, National Survey, and Indian Census show that the migrant generation from Ukhrul district of Manipur to the capital of India is quite high due to a lack of employment facilities in the northeast. Most citizens of Manipur accept private sector jobs in Delhi (compared to the nationals from the mainstream) 1993-1994 onwards. In 2012, about 96 percent of the employed in the organized sector of Manipur were working in the public sector, while only 4 percent worked in the private sector. It must be noted in the context of how the northeast showcased low employment in the private sector when the rate of private sector jobs was increasing in other parts of the country.

In Manipur, the number of female employees is the lowest. This is associated with a low level of education among females. The number of government jobs in Manipur has declined from 0.78 lakh in 2004 to 0.77 lakh in 2012. The same trend is seen in the context of opportunities provided by the central government, the state government, and in other forms of quasi jobs. Organized employment in Manipur is not growing at the same rate as other states in the northeast. In 2004, Manipur accounts for only 0.30% of the total employment in India, which further declined to 0.27% in 2012. Unemployment rates are especially high in rural areas, increasing from 1.9% in 1993-1994 to 4.2% in 2009-2010. The picture is almost similar for females.

In the urban areas, unemployment rates have increased from the years of 1993-1994 until 1999-2000. However unemployment has considerably decreased for females residing in the urban areas in particular. This shows the complexity of the relations between the availability of the jobs and individual aspirations. The main forms of unemployment seen particularly in the eastern and western sections of Imphal and Manipur are structural unemployment, under employment, disguised employment, open unemployment and financially frictional unemployment. This proves that the national policies pertaining to employment have not been propounded effectively. The major reasons leading to unemployment and poverty in the northeast are-

- a) Rapid population growth
- b) Lack of capital

- c) Lack of alternate employment opportunities other than agriculture
- d) Excess population pressure on agriculture
- e) Illiteracy
- f) Regional disparities
- g) Joint family system
- h) Indifferent attitude towards investments
- i) Lack of proper implementation system of the public distribution system.

One of the major troubles faced by the citizens in Manipur is the lack of progress in sanitation constructions, income-generating programs such as market sets and crop production-related works. There has been little headway in the construction of roads and in providing proper electricity facilities. Additionally, several temples are under construction in the state that has not received governmental approval and employs workers who are largely unorganized. Political parties usually attempt to intervene in political communication at every level; however citizens are unable to effectively express their demand. Local political leaders in the state do not seem sincere enough in addressing the ongoing troubles faced by citizens. Cooperation and coordination is absent among district-level officials and state authorities. The maintenance of local assets is far from satisfactory, as ongoing constructions lack proper funds and is often misused by political officials and insurgent groups. There are no checks on the funds allotted to departments at block levels, and no asset register is maintained. Internal road connectivity facilities are also deficient in the state. Primary school development is limited in Manipur, and there is no water supply for harvesting due to the lack of ponds. Poor construction materials are often used, which can be devastating in case of natural calamities. These troubles have hindered the establishment of democracy in the state.

A decentralized government has always been considered as a promoting factor of development. It is expected to facilitate people's participation, enhance transparency, and ensure greater accountability. A decentralised government would aid in establishing closer ties with the citizens of the northeast. It would also improve efficiency and foster competitiveness in the delivery of services at the grassroots level. This would encourage deeper understanding of the needs and demands of the citizens. Theoretically, decentralized government is assumed to

bring service providers and users into closer connectivity. This in the process would facilitate effective means of control on the citizens by the government. The process of decentralization shows results when the government initiates pro-poor policies and attempts to assist the poor population actively. Governments must be prepared to engage in local politics; both to challenge local elites and to ensure policy implementation. If the central government wants to commence policies of decentralization, it must be aware of the needs and the flaws of citizens especially the poorer sections of the society. Decentralization promotes pluralism. To recognize the needs of the local population, cooperation is necessary between the citizen and the government. When the cooperation between the two falters, the germination of corruptive practices becomes inevitable. Officials must give due importance to the demands of the citizens, while adhering to policies of decentralization. The three major pillars of a decentralized government are as follows:

- a) Peoples participation
- b) Accountability
- c) Transparency

These major principals are directly proportional to the quality of decentralization and development posed by the government. A decentralized government is expected to be effective when it delivers the following results-

- a) Effectiveness- an assessment of the quality of performance
- b) Equity- by looking at the participation in the organizational activities and the distribution of the developmental benefits
- c) Sustainability- this is measured based on organizational independence and continuity of the beneficial schemes.

Manipur, with a population of 30, 23,141 in the year 2002, had the highest per capita incidence of terrorist organizations not only in India but also in the world. Out of the 28 militant organizations branded as terrorists in India under POTA<sup>38</sup>, 10 are from the northeast, and 6 of them are from Manipur. The insurgency has not only

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<sup>38</sup> The Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) was enacted in 2002 with the objective of strengthening anti-terrorist operations in India. It was introduced in response to a series of terror attacks, including the attack on the Indian Parliament.



disrupted governance but has also obstructed the working of the civil society, marginalizing the voice of the people. There is no democratic space within the organizational structures and functioning of the insurgent groups, and the average citizen has no recourse in the face of insurgent violence. The unresolved insurgency and economic stagnation, which impedes employment and income growth, provides fertile ground for fortifying and sustaining insurgency. Moreover, the growing military and subsequent growth of the underground terrorist economy, backed by the coercive power of the militants, distorts and inhibits the legitimate processes of economic and development activities.

Civil society and a wide variety of economic activities that were integral to the lives of the people of Manipur have been criminalized, forcing otherwise law-abiding citizens into collusive relationships with militants within their areas of influence.

Furthermore, militant groups have gradually usurped a wide range of governmental functions, including the protection of life and property, and the provision of justice to communities. Successful decentralization requires not only building good political institutions but also developing the system of government at the local level.

In Manipur, the Panchayati Raj system was enacted in the year 1994, and since then, Manipur has notified three rounds of Panchayat Elections. The two-tier election process was held simultaneously across the entire state. Only 14% of Manipur's citizens claim that the elections are held regularly, and that they are aware of the yearly elections. Around 85% of Myanmar's citizens believe that the election process in northeast India is fair. Approximately 80% of north-eastern citizens, especially those residing Manipur, believe that their representation in the election process as a voter matters. However, many citizens are unaware or express discomfort with regard to the Gram Sabah elections held at the local level. With regard to election campaigning, 79.2% of villagers attended the election meetings, while only 20% participate in the campaigns. This indicates that only a few participate in the election campaigns, confirming that a large number of people are apathetic to the election process and do not feel the need to participate. This reflects a sense of alienation. Although Panchayats have been in existence for a long time, the longevity of the Panchayats in the state has not led to their institutionalization. Less

than 16% of the respondents confirmed that they attended election meetings. Panchayat elections have not been a regular phenomenon in these parts of the state. However, about 90% of citizens claimed to have casted their votes, in all seriousness, realizing that their votes matter. They accept that their vote is crucial in determining who wins and loses the elections. Given the political history of the Panchayats in the state, the voter turnout has been impressive. Additionally, a large number of people have persistently questioned the selection process of the gram panchayat. These scenarios prove that popular opinion regarding the election process is taken up with due seriousness. The citizens are hence eager to participate and envision the benefits of the election process. The citizens who visited the selection campaign however were only 16%. Citizens were questioned whether party leaders or MLAs visit their areas of residence for campaigning purposes; more than 98% of citizens responded negatively. Differences of opinion or perception are quite logical, especially when there is great diversity in the background of the respondents.

No outsider, MLA or other political leader visited the area of election since they would have gone unnoticed by the citizens of the area. The truth lies in the fact that the election campaigns have nothing to do with the gram panchayats. With regard to the election of the gram panchayats, the participation of the citizens has been around 90%. This drives the inclination of the citizens more towards the gram panchayats than the election processes held at the national level. It appears that the campaign for the panchayat election is a one-way traffic. People receive handbills, watch leaders coming to their villages, and are approached by the candidates, but they themselves do not take any initiative nor feel the need to participate in these campaigns. Some of the reasons for this is as follows:

- a) They are disinterested; since they feel that their participation would produce effects in the election processes.
- b) With the dominance of a single political party in the region. They assume that the election process provides no scope for alternatives.
- c) The ruling party is often alleged to not allow others to influence citizens in their areas of control.
- d) Panchayats have been claimed to be functioning under the sway of the ruling cadres. Other in the area often avoids instances of being associated with the ruling party. Popular opinion regarding the giving of handbills during the

elections is extremely divided. Half of the citizens approve of getting these handbills for the elections; while the other half does not approve of receiving them.

The most significant aspect to note here is that a minimal number of the citizens look upon the panchayati election as an important event; and have chosen to be involved in this. What is more interesting is that, about two third of the citizens believe in the promises made to them by the representatives of the government. The major promises made, includes the following:

- a) Construction of inter-village roads;
- b) Resolving issues of drinking water;
- c) Construction of a community hall;
- d) Creation of public ponds;
- e) Construction of crematoriums;

These are the promises made by the representatives of the gram panchayats. These are often bought into actions via the funds provided by the central government. The representatives believe that these promises are best for the citizens. However, in actuality these promises fail to see the light of day. This has been a common experience of the citizens of the northeast. The representatives of the gram panchayat like the state and central government are equally unconcerned about the needs of the citizens. Nevertheless, in certain scenarios the picture remains different.

The elected panchayat leaders and especially the high level representatives show constant public presence amongst the citizens who elect them. These representatives need not wait for the meetings held at the gram sabhas or visit the gram sabhas personally to interact with the citizens. People from anywhere in the village can approach the representatives. Even so, citizens of the northeast choose not to communicate with them deliberately. This happens when:

- a) The representatives or the leaders proves to be either powerless or ineffective;
- b) Or, when the citizens feel that the representatives are conceited and showcase highhandedness in communicating with the common people.

In the northeast, especially with regard to the Sarpanch or Pradhan of the villages; the citizens are aware that the majority of the representatives who came into power have been elected through reserved constituencies. In order to analyze the extent of their awareness, citizens were questioned about these representatives. They would either remain silent or respond saying that these leaders belonged to their constituencies. However, the coordination or cooperation of the Gram Panchayats was hardly noticed. The institution catering the subordinates is created separately. The recognition of the heads of the Zilla Parishad is also questionable; as they simply act as remote entities in the structural framework of decentralization, with no apparent links with the Gram Panchayats. Thus, the working process of these institutions cannot be monitored easily. It has been noted that the numeric strength of the Gram Panchayats is much greater than that of the Zilla Parishad. However it is interesting to note that people in the region do not give much importance to the office of the Gram Panchayat, and they have substantial reasons in doing so.

The Panchayats have failed to accomplish anything notable in the areas that fall under their territorial jurisdiction. Even in the fields that require most of their attention, the officials have not been efficient in providing clean drinking water, installing street lights in the area, improving IVRs facilities, and in addressing the grievances of the citizens. Only 3% of citizens acknowledge the contribution of the Gram Panchayats in their respective areas; the contributions made in their opinion accounts for improvements of the local schools, a 20% improvement in water supply, a 35% enhancement in the roadways, a 2% improvement in the street lights, a 15% for sanitation, and 10% for housing. The validity of their assessment is however questionable. The Panchayats should provide opportunities for the rural population, including women and the other marginalized sections of the society; and to encourage them to participate in making decisions that affect all their lives. The central government envisioned to empower the rural sections of Manipur and other interior areas of northeast India by delegating a great deal of powers to the Gram Panchayats. In fact, the Ministry of Rural Development issued a detailed description and set of instructions for the states, as to how social audit must be maintained by the Gram Sabhas. The Gram Sabhas possess the potentiality to initiate citizen participation at the grassroots level, in promoting transparency and accountability at the local levels. This would ultimately increase the quality and efficiency of local governance. The

Manipur Panchayat Raj Act of 2004 has provided for two meetings of Gram Panchayats every year; however this only remains as a matter of principle in the interior sections of the northeast.

### **ELECTIONS IN NORTHEAST:-**

The establishment of electoral democracy in northeast India; coupled with the sharing of political power among tribal chiefs, local politicians, and the central government, has always been a matter of serious discussion. The constant tug-of-war between what is illegal and what is legal has weakened the roots of democracy in the region. Among all the other states, establishing democracy in Nagaland and Mizoram has been extremely difficult. The entire zone is characterized with corrupt political representatives and the need to establish illegitimate control over the citizens has plagued these states. Illegitimacy has fostered corruption in these states, vitiating the political atmosphere in the process. The major issues in these state is the consistent increase in the number of disruptive popular movements and agitations, an all time evolving political culture, the need for sharing power among several power holders, persistent shifts in ethnic equations and growing alliances between recognized political parties and underground groupings. The greed to sustain and expand vote banks coupled with over ground-underground collaborations has made violent as an instrument of control and achievement. Party factions in the greed of grabbing more power often spew venom on each other by negotiating underground shadowy deals. This leads to instances of systematic violence among these factions. Every political party in the northeast have been associated with the dynamics of insurgency in the region and offer similar spaces of power and adopt identical means of achieving popular support and resources. There has been a mutual agreement among the local representatives and the insurgents regarding funding and vote banks. Therefore, even though the central government tries hard in obliterating the insurgency situations, it is very difficult to uproot them from their bases completely. The counter-insurgency processes have only proved to be a spectacle by the central government for the northeast and the rest of the country. It is alleged that the counter- insurgency operations of the government were mere eyewash with no serious intentions to address the ground realities of the issue. However, in some cases, the government has successfully convinced the militants to put down their guns and join the Indian

military for the sake of nationalism. The 1988 era witnessed the Bengali-dominated Congress rule in the northeast, especially in Tripura, where the government dealt with the demands of the anti- Bengali tribal volunteers who wanted to uproot the ruling left front government. The TNV killed approximately 114 Bengalis prior to a month of the state elections. The Congress government attempted to negotiate between the Bengali settlers of the region and the militants who demanded the deployment of the armies in the region. The Bengali settlers voted against the government as they felt that the party had failed to confer security in the state. The then Congress government at the centre mediated with the TNV. As a result, an accord was signed between them for effective settlement of the dispute amongst Bengali settlers and the militants. TNV then emerged as a strong political party. However, the major rehabilitation facilities were provided by the then Congress government. Between 1988 and 1993, the Left Front government promoted the ATTF<sup>39</sup> along with the TUJS<sup>40</sup>. The TUJS envisioned the end of insurgency in northeast India. In 1993, the Left Front government regained its power and negotiated with the militants, actively exerting them to surrender the militants belonging to the ATTF. This led to a clash between the indigenous section of Tripura which were being guided by the Congress government and the National Liberation Front of Tripura led by the Left Front government. Both parties maintained their own narratives to gain popular support and to maintain their vote banks. This was reflected in the alliance government between 2003 to 2008 elections. However, in both the cases the Left Front were successful in winning the hearts of the majority. They were able to forge operations against the militants and ultimately forced them to surrender.

BJP politics<sup>41</sup> conceived the ideology of Hindutva, which, in due course of time, became quite aggressive. The state of Nagaland which is associated with an all-round

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<sup>39</sup> All Tripura Tiger Force is an insurgent outfit in Tripura, founded in 1990 by a group of Tripura National Volunteers members under the leadership of Ranjit Debbarma.

<sup>40</sup> Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti was a political party in Tripura that existed from 1967 to 2001. The party was part of a ruling coalition with the Indian National Congress in the legislative assembly of Tripura.

<sup>41</sup> The BJP, or Bharatiya Janata Party, is one of the major political parties in India and has been in power at the national level since 2014.

Christ-based identity has no space to offer to the BJP ideology. The interference of the Congress government had been significant in this regard, and has made several attempts in negotiating with the Christian NSCN<sup>42</sup> and resolves their problems. Although NSCN responded to these negotiations, the responses were majorly half-hearted since they never formally gave up the demand for their independence.

In the 2003 elections, the Nagaland Regional Party joined forces with the BJP to defeat the Congress. This resulted with the Congress winning merely five seats and losing the election all together. The BJP hence formed the government and this opened the doors of Hindutva in the northeast, particularly in Christian dominated Nagaland. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Congress government came to power in 1999 by defeating the state's regional political parties. The party successfully shattered the control of the Khalang faction of NSCN active in Arunachal and Burma. The NSCN (IM), backed by the district council got hold of the Tirap- Changland group of legislators. Gegong Apang, the representative of the Arunachal government, was against conversions to Christianity and implemented an anti-conversion bill in Christian dominated areas of the northeast. Apang cooperated with NSCN in formulating anti-crime laws. With Arunachal Pradesh's Controlled Organized Crime Act, Operation Hurricane was stopped which was initially initiated by the Congress. Apang wanted to regain power in Arunachal Pradesh while the militants wanted soft, pliable chief ministers in the state for convenience and to keep their dream of Greater Nagaland alive. Apang promoted the Doyani Polo<sup>43</sup> faith in Nagaland. Thus, the politics of Nagaland became a mix of Congress politics with Sonia Gandhi at the centre, with Hindutva politics proposed by the BJP, and Doyani Polo culture introduced by the Arunachal Pradesh Congress.

The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) used the ULFA<sup>44</sup> as its support system during its rule. The revolts against the Congress government forced the central authority to

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<sup>42</sup> National Socialist Council of Nagaland is a militant Naga nationalist separatist group operating mainly in Northeast India.

<sup>43</sup> Donyi-Polo is the designation given to the indigenous religion of animistic and shamanic type, practiced by the Tani and other Tibeto-Burman peoples of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam in North East India.

<sup>44</sup> The United Liberation Front of Assam is a designated revolutionary rebel organization operating in the Indian state of Assam.

deploy the army in Assam. The AGP, the left hand of the Left Front government, won the 1996 election with immense support from ULFA militants on account of their sovereign rights. However, the Left Front allied with the central government after coming into power, which agitated the ULFA cadres. There were constant attacks, agitations, rallies, and strikes against the government. Under pressure, the state government began secretly killing ULFA cadres. The surrendered militants were bought under government control and were employed to search for the underground outfits. ULFA backed the Congress government in the 2001 and 2006 elections. The government in power began openly negotiating with the militants. The ULFA cadres lost their ideology, power, and motivation in this constant struggle against the government; hence eventually decided to cooperate with the government to fulfil their demands. Whenever the Congress acquired power in Delhi, the government made constant efforts for negotiations and ceasefire in the north-eastern region. Raising the issue of mass surrender during election periods have become a notable trump card for the ruling parties. The picture is the same for almost all parties that have occupied power in Delhi. Apart from cooperating with the militants of NSCN, the ruling party extended its hand of cooperation towards NLFT, ANVC, HNLC, Kuki National Front of Manipur and NDFB. The chief ministers of the respective states of the northeast were compelled to cooperate with the RSS<sup>45</sup> wing of the BJP as they played a major role in provoking the militants of Mizoram against the state authorities. The Congress government interfered in such situations and made significant attempts of negotiations with the militants. The collaboration of the BJP government and the major militant outfit helped the BJP win the 2003 election.

The plan of the BJP was to eradicate Congress's high-handedness from the northeast states. Apang joined the BJP and with 40 major seat holdings in the legislative assembly, the BJP and its Hindutva policy government received its first foothold in the northeast. The BJP government wanted to have as many states as possible under its jurisdiction to effectively exercise its power in the parliament.

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<sup>45</sup> The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is an Indian right-wing, Hindu nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organization founded in 1925.



The NSCN, on the other hand, wanted the government to cooperate with their Greater Nagaland project. It was quite clear that no matter who was at power in the state or at the centre, wanted to negotiate with the demands of NSCN. The 16-Point agreement was thus signed between the Nagas and the government, which included two major issues - the sovereign authority of the Nagas and the Greater Nagaland project. Dozens of accords were signed between militants and the government to cope with the demands of the tribal communities residing in the northeast. The failure of the government in meeting these demands resulted in the merger of several outfits. ULFA and ATTF merged with MNF with the intention of continuing anti-Delhi agitations, which proved to be successful to an extent. However, the variety of demands amongst the outfits became the source of discontent among them. The accords signed in the northeast pertaining to power-sharing and cooperation compelled the government to encourage counter-insurgency policies with the hopes of establishing legitimacy in the region. On the other hand, the cooperation, negotiations, and fund allocated, steadily contributed to the capability of the militants, in the process stimulating their distinct political ideology. However, whoever came into power and opted for settlements were manoeuvred by the militants to pursue insurgency in the state. It is safe to say that while certain negotiations proved to be vital, others were simply mind games. Their major demands centred on environmental security, protection of the traditionalist, cultural development, and infrastructure developments. The cooperation from the centre was minimal considering the persistent situation of the northeast. They majorly highlighted issues relating to the sharing of resources. With the rise of regionalism, the neighbouring states have reduced the support and shelter offered by them to the militant groups. The most significant responsibility of the government now lies in encouraging peace-building measures in the region. This requires the cooperation of all the states in the northeast with active involvement with the state's resources and position. The BJP government which is alleged to have the least amount of influence in the northeast did not face much agitation as the party avoided direct confrontations with the militants. The government was not substantially aware regarding the region, until it came to power. Thus, the focus of the government now solely relies on peacekeeping negotiations.

## **DECENTRALISED GOVERNMENT-**

Manipur is located in the eastern part of India. It is situated in a mountainous region covering an area of 22,327 sq. km and is geographically characterised by hills and valleys. The hills, surrounding the valley makes up for about 90% of the total area of Manipur. In 1952 community development programs were initiated for different subdivisions of the region. Two major community blocks were constructed with regard to these projects in the last 5-year plan. Eight new additional community developments programmes were commenced in the last 5-year plan, and four more were added in the 3rd plan period. As a result, the entire area till date has six community blocks in the valley and eight blocks in the hills. At the end of the 5th plan, there were 26 blocks of the same. Currently, there are 31 blocks in the state, with nine in the valley and 22 in the hills. Prior to the reorganization, the blocks were under the direct control and monitoring of the development commissioner at the state level, headquartered in Imphal. Subsequently, after the reorganization of the territory in 1969, the responsibilities of the development commissioner were transferred to the additional chief secretary general of Manipur, and the blocks were put under the direct monitoring of the deputy commissioner, rather than the development commissioner. The Directorate of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj was created in 1978 to replace the then Community Development Department. At present, the director allocates the funds for the development projects of the community development implementation for compilation and submission to the Secretariat Planning Administrative Department and Secretariat Finance Department of Manipur. The major community development projects include:

- a) Implementation works of agriculture
- b) Development of irrigation
- c) Animal husbandry
- d) Education
- e) Industries
- f) Health and sanitation
- g) Communication.

The main focus of the 3rd plan was community development, where funds were majorly allocated for this purpose. In the 4th plan, ₹ 32.00lakh was allotted for community development, while in the 5th plan ₹ 57.50lakh was assigned. The

objective of these plans was to promote a progressive outlook among the entire population, with greater emphasis on education, industrial development, fisheries, poultry, piggery, and drinking water facilities. For the 6th plan, the allotment was ₹45.15 lakhs.

The Panchayat Raj system in Manipur, has been in place since the state's autonomy. The Panchayat in Manipur is similar to village panchayats mentioned under the 1956 provision. This system has been instrumental in maintaining peace during situations of insurgency and has the power to impose fines for the well-being of society. The apex panchayat at Imphal adjudicates civil cases and appeals from village panchayats. It also looks at civil cases in the Imphal valley. Since 1947, village panchayats have acquired the power of the lowest court for the administration of justice in civil and criminal cases, in the region.

The modern Panchayat Raj system was introduced in Manipur in 1960; initially as a two-tier system in the Jiribam area. In 1972, with the achievement of statehood, the state government enacted the Panchayat Raj system in Manipur in 1975. The system comprised of the Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zila Parishads at the district level. The Panchayat Raj system covers an area of 2100sq.km in the rural tracts. Since 1975, it also receives financial resources from the gram funds through taxation, donations, and contributions. The state government also allocated funds for the development of this system under the 5-year plan.

In the first 5-year plan period, Manipur was under the north-eastern administration blocks with no provisions for the tribal areas. In 1956, Manipur became a territory under the union government, with the development commission handling the implementation of welfare for scheduled tribes and the additional deputy commissioner of tribal welfare overseeing it at the district level. In the 4th plan period, Manipur became a full-fledged state, and six autonomous districts were set up as part of the democratic decentralization process in the hill areas. Major programs were implemented to support this process, out of which some included:

- a) Post metric scholarship
- b) Tribal blocks
- c) Measures for the improvement of living and working conditions.

During the 5th year plan period in 1976, a directorate for the schedule tribes was set up to facilitate the district-wise allotment of funds in the region. Tribal sub-plans were adopted at the end of the 6th 5-year plan period to initiate infrastructural development in the tribal areas of Manipur. The total outlay for the state in the 7th five-year plan period was ₹430 cores, of which only 400 lakhs were allotted to tribal welfare. In the 8th 5-year plan period, majorly from the year 1992 till 1997, the total outlay of the state plan was ₹979 cores, out of which only 700 lakhs were assigned to tribal sub-plans. Special assistance was given to tribal sub-plan areas with an allotted fund of ₹227.50 cores, of which the actual expenditure was ₹239.10 cores. The 9th 5-year plan period had an outlay of ₹24, 24, 29 cores. The tribal specialized areas received an allotted amount of ₹1022.75 cores, which was about 42.15 percent of the original amount. Collective efforts were adopted for the tribal zones, with funds coming directly from the central and state governments. The 73rd Amendment Act of 1992 states that the Manipuri Panchayat Raj Act 1992 was enforced as an essential paradigm however was repealed in the year 1975. This gave rise to a two-tier system comprising of the Gram Panchayat and Zila parishad. The Manipuri Panchayat Raj Amendment Act of 1996 states that Gram sabhas must be formed in areas with a population of 3000-6000. A Pradhan can be removed based on his/her inefficiency, and a new Pradhan can be elected with two-thirds of the members of the gram sabha present and voting. One-third of the posts are reserved for women. The powers and functions are established by the 11th Schedule of the Indian constitution. The Zilla parishad must possess the powers to perform the major tasks assigned by the government. The sub-tribes are designated as the autonomous councils of the region and are characterised by homogeneity in their populations. Territorial demarcation being necessary; power exercised is categorized as per the districts or regional councils. Despite the proper organizational framework, local governance and tribal populations in Manipur are unable to take full advantage of the constitutional provisions practised by the local government. Confrontations between the district council and hereditary chiefs are a significant reason in this context. The newly created district councils diminish the power of the local chiefs, which in the process intensifies the situation. The power and cooperation of these organs are not fully functioning. Several efforts are being made to integrate the Panchayati Raj with the poverty elevation program.

The Gram Panchayats are fully involved in the implementation of the schemes posed by the central government. At the block level, the Panchayat Samiti functions as the block developmental official. In 1971 with the registration of the Manipur hill districts council, six autonomous district councils were established. These councils are different from the district councils found in other parts of India. These district councils do not have judicial or legislative powers. The district councils of Manipur are restrained on their spending and are dependent on the grants offered by the government. The district councils in other parts of the northeast are autonomously administered unlike the DCs of Manipur that are under the direct control of the state government. Although they function as an autonomous authority, yet no development prospects are visibly seen in the tribal zones. The institutional arrangements fail to facilitate mass representations of the tribal communities in the institutions of democratic decentralization operative at the state level. In a comparison to the DCs of the entire northeast, the DCs operative in Manipur is much less effective and powerful. They are mainly tied up in managing confrontation between the outfits and the local chiefs. A void has been created in the intermediate level and thus no organic link can be established between the central government, villages and districts. Thus since 1973 the communities of Manipur have demanded for an extension of authority in these zones. The All Tribal Students Union of Manipur repeatedly insists on the extension of the powers exercised via the 6<sup>th</sup> schedule. The hill area committees of Manipur are comprised of intellectuals, students, leaders and common masses. Government has failed in delegating powers to these groupings so that they can initiate democratization in the states. The government is of the claim that extending the sixth schedule could, to an extent, aid in establishing peace in the region; and that no development would be possible without it. The assimilation of tribal communities had failed. Although, the Bardoloi Committee<sup>46</sup> had taken up some responsibility by the process of democratization but that had not included the tribes. A new administrative form is hence necessary for the development of the tribes, particularly in the hill areas. The government current focus is hence on Vision 2020, the implementation of the Look East Policy and its second phase of Act East Policy to encourage economic development of the north-

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<sup>46</sup> The Committee which was formed on 27th February, 1947, extensively toured the Province of Assam, as it then was, which included visits to Lushai Hills District, North Cachar SubDivision, Mikir Hills and the Naga Hills District.  
[https://khadc.nic.in/acts\\_rules\\_regulations\\_bills/misc/Framing%20of%20the%206th%20Schedule.pdf](https://khadc.nic.in/acts_rules_regulations_bills/misc/Framing%20of%20the%206th%20Schedule.pdf)

eastern region. India shares economic ties with South and Southeast Asia; hence the government's major focus is on the development of national and regional bureaucracies, in resolving ongoing ethnic clashes and separatist movements, to develop an effective federal form of government, in improving the functioning of political parties and in making infrastructural changes.

The high-handedness of the central government toward ethnic communities requires a change in the manner in which issues are viewed in the northeast. What is necessary is a government that is empathetic rather than hasty in bring all issues faced by the north-eastern states under one umbrella. On the other hand, ethnic communities of the region should allow governmental involvement in their issues for their own good. They should play a pivotal role in this regard as most of their interests is tied up in the decisions that will be made by the government.

The northeast faces majorly three main issues, namely matters of identity, governance, and development. The issue of identity is one of the most significant problems in the northeast. The tribes attempt to maintain their individual identities rather than converging with the mainstream. The Nagas or the Mizos aim to preserve their individual identities while other organizations aspire for their own homelands. However, larger ethnic groups like the Nagas and Mizos fail to assert their individuality beyond their primordial boundary; and fail to create a shared identity with the rest of India. Ethnic groups in the northeast continue to remain as ambiguous identities for the rest of India. They are hostile toward settlers from outside the region and to their immediate neighbours, even if the settlers have resided in India for more than 10 decades. The attitude of the rest of the country towards the northeast is also significant in the maintenance of distinctive identity. The vision to create a nation-state with the rest of the country should be encouraged in the minds of the north-eastern citizens. They must feel and represent themselves as Indians first and then cater to their respective identity pertaining to their state. The citizens of the northeast have resisted the injustice posed by the Indian government for several decades and hence share sentiments of feeling more like northeast and less like Indians. The NSCN cadres have never put an end to student group identities or church identities. It is important that the government takes several measures to invigorate the northeast as a part of India. However the government has failed to

recognize tribal identities of the region. They did not have acknowledged the emerging identities in the northeast. The formation of the nation-state and the geopolitical identities of north-eastern citizens pose a serious challenge to the Indianization<sup>47</sup> of the northeast.

The next major trouble is governance. The crisis of governance in the northeast manifests itself in four major ways. Firstly, there is a lack of ethnic tolerance and a failure to manage plurality in the region. This leads to the breaking up of bigger states in the northeast; for instance Assam. This turns them into minority states.

Secondly, according to the citizens, there is an absence of ideological belief and administrative cooperation which leads to inefficient government control over political turmoil. Thirdly, constant cooperation between politicians, businesspersons, and insurgents erodes the process of integration of the north-eastern states with the national economy. Fourthly, there is a lack of regional development compels the states to take up any economic opportunity offered by neighbouring states. Apart from all these, there are several other reasons that keep the north-eastern economy underdeveloped. The states are heavily reliant on the grants offered by the central government. This has designated the entire northeast as *special category states*<sup>48</sup>. However, the states showcase little productivity despite receiving economic assistance and are characterised by increased unemployment and decreased production. Furthermore, inadequate investment in infrastructure has limited the state's economic independence. Corruption and mismanagement have further eroded citizens' hope for improvements in the governmental institutions. Poor business and trade relationships, coupled with a lack of connectivity, have closed many doors of development in the northeast. The ongoing insurgency exacerbates the situation. A major hurdle is the lack of connectivity, both within India and with neighbouring

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<sup>47</sup> **Indianisation of British colonial bureaucracy** was a process introduced in the later period of [British India](#) (early 20th century) whereby Indian officers were promoted to more senior positions in government services, formerly reserved for the British. In the Indian police, the rank of [Deputy Superintendent](#) was introduced to prepare Indian officers for promotion to higher rank. In the armed forces, the process referred to the replacement of British officers by Indians. The progress was slow and unsatisfactory to the Indian nationalist politicians, however events, mainly the [Second World War](#) and the partition and [independence](#) which followed it, overtook the programme.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indianisation\\_\(British\\_India\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indianisation_(British_India))

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/explained-what-is-special-category-status-accorded-to-states-1192611.html>

states. The government's vision of forming a separate nationality for the region complicates the situation, requiring high degrees of cooperation and understanding between the government and tribal communities. The trade routes involving the states of Bangladesh and Myanmar and the construction of the Trans Asian highway is one of the major policies of the government taken with regard to development in the northeast. At this point, the creation of any unnecessary territorial boundary would put the northeast into more crises. The attempts made by the government in the creation of a shared nationality among the north-eastern citizens, complicates the situation as development within the state requires exorbitant cooperation and acknowledgement of the tribal communities. This would essentially require a simultaneous increase in economic development. The idea of fostering inclusive growth that benefits all communities is not easy in the northeast, unlike other states in India. Any kind of reluctance, deteriorate the situations with more and more ethnic communities trying to break into smaller ones like that of Assam. Such split will upturn the balance and lead to volatility in the northeast. The merger of Naga-inhabited areas of the states may integrate the Naga community but will simultaneously categorise other states into minorities located in their regions. For example, Assam has been divided into three main communities: Bodos, Karbis, and Dimasas. In Tripura, Bengali Muslims demand their own state, which has made Tripuris into a minority community. In Meghalaya, Garos demand an autonomous state, threatening the state's identity and integrity. The BJP government have attempted to limit the geographical extent of the states to contain the Congress rule in Assam and Left controlled areas of Tripura. However, if the BJP regains power in Delhi, creating new states in other parts of India could upset the status quo in northeast India. Breaking up the states to gain influence in the region would prove to be futile and would put the dream of greater Nagaland at stake and weaken the Naga community.

If the status quo remains the same for Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram, then this would require an uplift in all these states. The central governments would hence have to create possibilities accordingly. ULFA dreamt of creating an independent and federal Assam. According to ULFA, the territorial boundary of a particular state determines not only its territorial limitations but also bounds its languages and religions existing in a diverse region. Apart from ULFA's demand, there are several



small ethnic groups in the northeast, such as NSCN, who claim that the creation of their sovereign states is their individual right. The autonomy of the state and central government heavily influenced these groups. These groups are majorly characterized by bravery, dynamism, tolerance of decent management, fearlessness in combating Nagas, and the capacity to survive. The territorial integration of Assam, Manipur, and Tripura would form areas that would fall under the state government's somewhat stable hands, while others would fall under strict monitoring of the central government. The plurality of the above-mentioned major states needs to remain constant for the stability of the central government. Coordination between the central and state governments is a prerequisite for stability in the region, and this stability needs to be undeviating. The disintegration of states will disrupt the region and change the equilibrium.

Thus, instead of breaking up, the integrated areas of Manipur and Nagaland need to create territorial councils. This however requires economic assistance from the central government. This integration is also necessary to form a democratic model in the northeast. The smaller community of Nagas, for example, residing in almost every state of the northeast, will have more territorial integration. Greater Nagaland is nothing but a nightmare for the northeast and a bane for the stability for the rest of the country. Apart from Nagaland, Arunachal, and Manipur, there are several small separatist groups in the northeast that need to drop their guns and join hands in negotiations. This would help in developing a special *federal relationship* in the northeast and aid the state and central government to deal with the major crisis of the region efficiently. In Assam, small tribes and nationalists demand more autonomy of the local self-government. The government of Assam must possess control in handling these small groups and club them into the state because disintegration would only lead to a delay in the establishment of democracy.

In the case of Assam, India's policymakers make most of the major decisions regarding conflict resolution in the state. It is only the state government that engages in direct negotiations with the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). The state government has employed numerous strategies to improve conflict-laden situations in the northeast, taking into account the aspirations of smaller nationalities and tribes

who do not identify with the Asomiya mainstream. The state also considers the security and aspirations of these smaller tribes, while keeping the intentions of the Asomiya power holder groups in mind. Accommodating the aspirations of different tribal communities under one umbrella is challenging and requires several strategies, including a constitutional workout with the political structure of individual states to integrate these small tribes. Government negotiations with these tribes should not be viewed as compromises but rather as actions taken for the greater good of the state and community which should showcase transparency. Developing conflict zones through concessions and economic assistance is not a long-term solution for northeast citizens. Isolating smaller tribes can make them weaker and more susceptible in merging with the government. Therefore, security concerns must be taken into account, along with the sowing of nationalist sentiments in the minds of citizens. The negotiation process should involve strong cooperation between the state and central governments and intelligence agencies. In Tripura, the state has acknowledged the small tribal communities by halting the construction of the Dumbur hydroelectric project, which was the source of immense agitation among the citizens. The tribal community possesses a strong sense of attachment to their land, and the natural importance of the forest and land restricts them from cooperating with the government in the construction of the dam. The major reasons for the withdrawal of the government from the project are like the investments towards the dam may not give the expected results due to constant agitations in the region. Additionally, the amount of electricity produced in the dam would not prove to be sufficient for the country. This would eventually make India or the state of Tripura to seek for other support systems. Despite the region being extremely prone towards jhum<sup>49</sup> cultivation, the increase of private enterprises would decrease the possibilities of agriculture. This, coupled with resentment amongst the communities against the use of land, will make things difficult for the government to handle. Allowing the dams to take over the fertile land would result in the destruction of

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<sup>49</sup> Jhum cultivation is a traditional farming method where first the land of trees and other vegetation is cleared, burned and then cultivated for a limited number of years. Potash, present in the burnt soil, increases the nutrient content. Jhum cultivation is also known as shifting cultivation and slash and burn cultivation. It is one of the oldest systems of cultivation.

This cultivation is still being practiced in the North-Eastern hilly regions of India. It is also being practiced in the other hilly regions of India and Bangladesh.

agricultural lands and homes of numerous tribes, affecting thousands of people. These are some of the reasons because of which the government withdrew the project. The Tripura government is highly motivated to implement these strategies at the earliest, in order to prevent polarization between the majority Bengali immigrants and minority Tripuris.

Arunachal Pradesh is the powerhouse of India in hydroelectricity production. However Arunachal is an earthquake-prone area. Additionally, the construction of these projects has an impact on the residential areas of Arunachal. Therefore, the government needs to prioritize both agriculture and industrialization. This would require cooperation from individual councils, as well as the development of marketing divisions to attract more customers for value-added marketing. The councils have identified agriculture, fisheries, and dairy farming as the most important areas for development in Arunachal and other parts of the northeast. The key priorities in these areas include the development of the rural economy, the growth of the food processing industry, and an increase in exports.

In addition to the aforementioned areas, tourism is another crucial aspect of development in the northeast region. The development of tourism in the northeast requires cooperation from the West Bengal government as well. Tourist destinations such as Calcutta, Darjeeling, and Sundarbans can be integrated with the major attractions of the northeast, which would boost the local economy and decrease anti-outsider sentiments in the region. The promotion of regional industries is also important for economic growth, and the five-year plans for economic benefits in the northeast can play a significant role in this regard. For instance, Mizoram could capitalize on its ginger production and create a healthy drink to participate in the regional market. It is essential for the entire northeast region to emerge as both a production and trade hub of India. This would enable the north-eastern states to achieve economic independence and also attract neighbouring states, such as Bangladesh, China, and Myanmar, to invest in industrialization and build economic ties with the region.

In order to achieve growth and peace settlement in the northeast, the central government must prioritize cooperation and understanding with the citizens of the

region. Illegal infiltration from neighbouring states is a major issue that requires the government's attention. To address this, border security must be tightened, and the land and properties of tribal communities must be protected. Autonomy must be given to the tribes to control their policymaking process, while ensuring that every citizen is empowered and aware of their constitutional power. If displacement occurs due to industrialization, proper rehabilitation facilities must be provided quickly; with active considerations of the interests of the local citizens and their employment. Security measures, particularly in AFSPA-laden areas, must be implemented while keeping humanitarian grounds in mind. The deployment of the army must be considered after several rounds of discussions among state and central authorities. These discussions must involve representatives from the common masses. The northeast also requires an organization like the North Eastern Council (NEC) to revitalize the region. The NEC, as a planning body, was transferred into the Institute of Privatization of Project Reports for International Finance Development, which helped integrate the NER into the South Asian Regional Economic Zone.

The revitalization of the NEC was done to cater to the growing trend of the northeast towards global economic integration and to increase dependency on foreign direct and private investors. Vision 2020, which is based on maximizing self-governance and capacity building in people and institutions, is being implemented in the region to establish effective governance and promote peace and harmony. This would also empower citizens and develop the private and public sectors in the northeast. Issues identified by the makers of Vision 2020 for the betterment of the northeast include the removal of restrictions in border trade through Moreh, development of other entry points, removal of trade restrictions with neighbouring states in agricultural and meat products, and activation of land custom stations. The Vision Document was also prepared in the context of globalization.

Improving connectivity is one of the biggest challenges to good governance in northeast India. To address this issue, several connectivity summits have been coordinated, bringing together senior government representatives, foreign delegates and diplomats, state government representatives, and industry leaders to discuss the economic conditions and trade potential of northeast India, as well as the region's

environmental conditions, energy development, and skill development. Better coordination between India and Southeast Asian states via northeast India can enhance connectivity and improve the region's economic conditions.

Good governance in northeast India requires coordination between the central government and state governments to monitor the implementation of each project. The key departments that need to work in sync are infrastructure, connectivity, tourism initiatives, education, energy, water resources, agriculture, and natural heritage. Each ministry of the central government contributes 10% of its budget to the development of the northeast. However, much of this funding remains untapped due to the lack of cooperation between the state and central governments in formulating and implementing development projects. Any inquiry into the lack of development in north-eastern India must address this issue of coordination between the state and central government inspite of allotment of funds.

A major strength of northeast India lies in its tourism industry. The region's unique tribal cultures, numerous tea estates, gender developments, rich bamboo resources, and skilled handloom and weaving industry provide an excellent opportunity for development. Unfortunately, the state government's focus on conflict resolution has led to delays in project implementation. Additionally, the landlocked geographical location of the northeast, coupled with the lack of proper connectivity, has hindered its development. The ongoing issue of miscommunication and distrust between the central government and the states has exacerbated the situation. The state governments are facing multiple challenges such as the depletion of their resources due to overuse, reduced profits caused by illegal activities, disputes over land allocation, and continuous migration that only benefits a particular section of the North East society, rather than the entire population.

To promote good governance, the state government must focus on setting up hotel industries, developing connectivity, increasing national and international exhibitions, expanding circuits beyond northeast India, and improving amenities such as emergency responses, medical facilities, and internet services. The industrial sector also requires attention. With a need to facilitate land for small hydro projects, encourage the use of solar eco-trains in environmentally sensitive areas, strengthen

the intra-regional transmission and distribution capacity, and develop oil and gas authority specific to northeast India.

Small-scale industries such as handloom and handicrafts also require focus, including the development of self-help groups for commercial purposes, increased training for artisans, and cooperation with non-governmental organizations to enhance opportunities. The central government needs the cooperation of the northeast state governments in implementing projects related to sericulture and silk industries through the catalytic development program. The handloom and handicraft industry also requires technological upgrades and stable governance in the northeast.

A crucial aspect that remains intertwined with all forms of developments in the northeast is its infrastructure. The government needs to give special attention to roadways, railways, and airports that are in dire need of significant improvements. This requires active participation of the northeast in the Delhi-Mumbai economic corridor. By doing so, the central government can focus more on each node of connectivity with regard to the northeast and design a comprehensive master plan accordingly. Additionally, the state governments in the northeast must cooperate in setting up a river development authority to implement an extensive inland water transport system. The government has identified six major airport projects, namely Rupsi, Kamalpur, Kailashar, Khowai, and Tezu that require long-term development in the northeast. Despite the region's high literacy rate compared to other states in the country, the education system in the northeast needs more attention. Unfortunately, conflict situations often disrupt the education system, with regular strikes and bandhs affecting the functioning of government offices and schools.

The development of the education system in northeast India is a major focus for the government. Initiatives such as the establishment of eight knowledge hubs, at least one engineering college in each district, technical and medical institutions, and the revitalization of IIT courses require cooperation of the state governments. Plans are also underway to set up 29 medical colleges, a skill development university, and centers of excellence to focus on important skill areas. While there are several quality institutions for higher education in the region, their up gradation has not been satisfactory. The primary and secondary education system in the northeast is

underdeveloped. The system lacks qualified and trained teachers and is characterised by inadequate infrastructure causing a dearth of opportunities for the educated youth. The courses taught in colleges are outdated and require constant monitoring by the state government. Despite having 40 universities and 800 colleges in the region, the education system has not reached its full potential due to the absence of effective means of management and monitoring. With a total training capacity of 5860 candidates per year, with approximately 63 major IITs in the northeast with 28 in Assam alone, the majority of seats remain vacant. There has been a lack of encouragement for further course development. The government's plan to build 14 more IITs signals a renewed focus on the development of the education system in the northeast.

The lack of skilled labour in Northeast India is a major hindrance to its development. The ongoing inter and intra ethnic conflicts have made the region a challenging place for any kind of progress. Addressing this issue requires the state government's unwavering commitment to enforcing law and order. The Shieja Hospital project in Manipur has also been affected by the absence of law and order in the region. Established in 1985, the hospital has been providing free medical treatment to patients from north-western Myanmar, an initiative known as "Mission Myanmar." The hospital's popularity has grown due to its cost-effective services, which are much lower than other hospitals in Southeast Asian countries. However, the lack of visa facilities for Myanmar citizens and insufficient healthcare manpower has led to a decline in the number of patients since 2013. To address this issue, the state and central government are working to improve the infrastructure of the Shieja Hospital project and implementing other healthcare organizations. Additionally, several well known national hospitals like those of Apollo, Max Health Care, and Narayana Super speciality have opened their branches in the northeast. Nevertheless, the state government must prioritize the development of skilled labour to ensure the success of such projects and provide adequate job opportunities for educated youth in the region.

The environment of the northeast region adds on to the enormous potentiality of the region as a health care destination. However, there is a pressing need for an adequate number of health care professionals to meet the increasing demand of health related

tourism. The central government has proposed to increase the number of medical colleges in the region to at least 40, with the aim of having one medical college per 10 lakh population. This also includes nursing and paramedical training institutes. It is crucial that the Medical Council of India upgrades the courses and provides proper infrastructure facilities for both treatment and learning to ensure the betterment of health care services in the region. The northeast region is characterized by the highest number of endemic plants and animal species, making it a prime area for biodiversity resource utilization. However, the region's impenetrable and dense forests have made it difficult to access these resources. Cooperation between the state and central governments is necessary to develop technological facilities and establish biodiversity hubs in the region. Tribal communities, who have intimate knowledge of the forests, must be involved in these efforts. It is crucial to enhance the quality of existing forests, upgrade forest infrastructure, and monitor rare species that can survive in rare climatic conditions are essential for the region's ecosystem. Conservation of the forest and restoration of the grasslands is needed. This requires the support of the central government and the state governments; which is only possible if the government in the regions symbolize stability. This will also benefit the tribes who depend on forests for their livelihood. The government is working to link forests through corridors to facilitate species migration and to prevent illegal hunting. Agencies have been formed to restore forest resources and win the trust of ethnic communities in the region. Poverty reduction in the north-eastern states is a direct benefit of these efforts. In 2008, the Government of India launched a National Action Plan on climate change to address the impacts of climate change in the region. The national strategy for climate change under the guidance of the Ministry of Environment includes eight national missions to adapt to the changing climatic conditions in the region. The focus is also on agriculture and takes into account the unique climatic conditions of each state.

Disaster management is another important sector, which the government is giving serious focus. The entire northeast is earthquake prone zone, with excessive rainfall. Special monitoring mechanisms coupled with the strengthening of disaster management strategies are the main focus of the government. Sensitization of the masses by the government will play a vital role in helping the citizens adapt to climatic changes and accept the implementation of the machineries promoted by the



government and other multinational agencies. Water management strategies are also been taken into serious account. Though majority of the north-eastern zone receives plenty of rainfall, there are many regions of northeast, which suffers from scarcity of rainfall. Efficient management of the water resources is necessary for food security and agriculture. This encourages propagation of the forest and social forestry initiatives to capture soil erosion and preserve the water retention capacity. The collection and utilization of rainwater could significantly benefit the agricultural industry. In support of eco-friendly practices, the government has implemented various initiatives aimed at promoting green infrastructure, encouraging the use of environmentally friendly vehicles, adopting eco-friendly technologies in power generation, and restoring wetlands. Government has addressed livelihood issues by focusing on modernizing the agricultural sector, by encouraging rainwater harvesting, drip irrigation, post-harvest infrastructure and many other development schemes. All the states of northeast are encouraged by the central government to form a consultative group for the discussion about the environmental and forestry initiatives for the improvement of the north-eastern states. The same has been done for water resource management, fisheries and hydropower. A proper synchronization of the state and the central government will certainly help in the implementation of the policies. It will also help in the enhancement of small-scale industries.

India's ranking of 134th among 189 countries in terms of ease of doing business highlights the need for the state and central governments to work together towards the development of the north-eastern region. The northeast is strategically located as the gateway to Southeast Asian states, making its development crucial. While the central government has planned major projects for the region, effective implementation requires coordination with state authorities. B.G. Verghese emphasizes the need for improved relations between the northeast and Southeast Asian countries, with cooperation from Indian policymakers. This would not only benefit the northeast, but also contribute to the overall development of India's economy, creating job opportunities for the region's youth. B.K. Roy Burman suggests a multi-layered parliamentary system with proper representation of ethnic groups could help address the concerns of the northeast's civilians, who have actively participated in their struggle for independence. Similarly, Udayan Mishra believes it is the responsibility of both state and central governments to change their

attitude towards the region's development issues<sup>50</sup>. The poor state capability of the northeast is reflective of the government's reluctance to focus on the region.<sup>51</sup>

However, there is a pressing need for institutional capacity development in the Northeast. In particular, in many of the tribal villages in the region, settlement of disputes is largely dependent on customary laws. There is an urgent need for in-depth research on these customary laws and the local administration responsible for their execution, to understand the challenges in detail. Another major issue is the complete absence of records regarding land grants, which leads to immense disputes between landowners and lenders, and even in cases of taking loans for land development. A proper system to keep records of land allotments needs to be developed immediately. While a "Look East" policy is justified for the country as a whole, it is crucial for the long-term growth and strengthening of ties with South East Asian states that the state governments of the Northeast cooperate and participate in this initiative. The government must also clearly distribute responsibilities among the union ministries to address major gaps that are hindering the development process in the Northeast.

### **CONCLUSION:-**

The above analysis indicates that achieving good governance services in north-eastern India has been ineffective and coercive. Furthermore, the region has failed to establish good governance due to inefficiency, resulting in widespread poverty, unemployment, and socio-economic dissatisfaction across urban and rural areas and among different tribes. To prioritize overcoming these issues, the region must implement strategies to increase productivity and distribute resources equally. This requires administrative upgrades for the implementation of major developmental schemes. The focus should be on eradicating inequality among the administrative systems of north-eastern states and winning the trust of civilians by making state administration more cooperative. This will help reduce both political and economic atrocities, which have been the main drivers of insurgency in the northeast.

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<sup>50</sup> Mishra Udayon- *Indias north east –identity movements, state and civil society*, Oxford University press, 2014(pg-290-348)

<sup>51</sup> Mishra Udayon- *Indias north east –identity movements, state and civil society*, Oxford University press, 2014(pg-290-348)

In the post-independence era, the importance of civil society and individual participation in administration has gradually been recognized as a step towards democratization. It is essential to have participation from every section of society, including civil society organizations, media, students, and women, to understand the drawbacks of the northeast and find permanent solutions. Without civilian cooperation, this would be impossible. The major decisions of policymakers towards northeast development have remained unsatisfactory in the past due to a huge gap in understanding between the government and the civilians. The non-participation of women in the northeastern administrative zone has kept a large section of society away from the democratization process.

In the bigger picture, we have witnessed a drastic change in mainland India with the participation of women in every sector, and a similar change can be achieved in Northeast India as well, given that northeastern women are known for their hard work. History shows that women from every tribal community in the northeast have played a significant role in demanding their rights from the government and taking steps to reform the society, such as launching anti-alcohol campaigns, protesting against severe human rights violations by the army, bridging the gap between the government and insurgent groups, and securing the safety of women and children from the violent AFSPA tortures. All of these examples prove that women's participation in the administrative sector of the northeast could lead to the establishment of peace in the region.

Establishing good governance is only possible with everyone's cooperation. This also requires the upgrading of institutions for the implementation of policies and proper monitoring of their execution. Therefore, proper policies and developed institutions with appropriate infrastructure form the base of good governance in any state, and this is applicable for the Northeast as well. The nature of the major institutions based on individual states and their implementation procedures of policies must be flexible enough to change based on the needs and demands of the civilians. Democratization of the states is intertwined with the major institutions of the individual states, which act as representatives of the central government and help in implementing projects and policies for state development. There must be proper synchronization between both state and central government administrative institutions.

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## CHAPTER - 4

### LOOK EAST POLICY –CIVIL SOCIETY AND PEACE IN NORTH EAST -

#### IMAGINE

*Imagine there's*

*no country,It*

*isn't hard to do,*

*Nothing to*

*kill or die*

*for,And no*

*religion too,*

*Living in*

*peace-*

.....*John Lennon*<sup>52</sup>

The north-eastern states of India have been plagued by instability and turbulence, which necessitates the involvement of both the state and society to effectively respond and establish lasting peace in the region. This compact region, known as the "Seven Sisters", now including Sikkim, has been grappling with ongoing unrest and turmoil for decades. In fact, a seminar paper has been dedicated to exploring the disturbances in northeast India.

*.....recurring bouts of violence have damaged the whole fabric of civic governance and culture in( the region).Normal processes of all the three wings of governance has been suspended at best and subverted at worst. The army has taken over functions of policing in many areas, even as there have been widespread violations of human rights.....communities are at war, valued social relationships have been ruptured , interpersonal as well as intra community trust has been*

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<sup>52</sup> John Lennon was an English singer, songwriter, and peace activist who gained worldwide fame as the rhythm guitarist of The Beatles.

*destroyed , quite often by government and security forces as well as by opposition armed groups .....questions of cultural and national identity, quite often in conflict and competition , dominate the intense public discourse in the region.....(Agarwal,1999)*

The most significant issue regarding the northeast for the past decade has been the increasing rate of violence in the region. In 2003, there were approximately 1,107 militancy-related deaths in the region. This figure dropped to 882 in 2004, as a result of the heavy-handedness of the government. The Ministry of Law and Order has stated that the deaths and discrepancies in the northeast have always been due to active revolts of insurgent outfits, with very little engagement from the Indian militants. Research regarding the turmoil in the northeast usually arises from the government's inability in incorporating the demands of the tribal communities of the region, while insurgent outfits represent their demand via various means. There are about 13 active insurgent groups in the northeast, along with many other militant groups. To restore peace in the region, the government's major step has been a counterinsurgency policy, which determines the militant outfits as unlawful associations or terrorist organizations. The deployment of armies with special powers was the best possible solution according to the government. This was expected to be successful in taming the situation. However, it has been observed that the paramilitary forces have failed to fulfill the demands of the north-eastern states, and in the majority of cases, peace processes have proved to be mere false promises. A deeper analysis of the situation reveals a lack of infrastructure, unemployment, and absence of good governance in the region. The government has catered to the grievances of the north-eastern states, but expected solutions are hard to come by. This accentuates the crisis. The current situation suggests that the government's actions towards the states are merely a temporary solution to the ongoing turmoil. Political stability, security for civilians, and the enforcement of law and order in the states have not been effectively achieved. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the reasons why establishing political order in the northeast has remained a daunting task for the Indian government for more than 66 years.

For ages, the Indian government has treated the problems of the northeast as a single unit, despite the region's diverse ethnic groups and unique histories. Unlike other

Indian states, the northeast shares borders with states with which India has had difficulty establishing cooperative relations with. The porous borders of the region have allowed for the easy movement of arms, drugs, and other illegal products. The high rate of HIV-positive cases in the northeast has only added to the tension. The entire region is linked to the rest of India by a narrow strip of land, the 22-kilometer Shiliguri Corridor, due to partition and border demarcations. This separation, along with economic distress, has led to a feeling of isolation and forced the region to become more insular in protecting their traditional customs and practices. This sense of separation has made it challenging for the northeast to cooperate with the central government on nation-building policies, resulting in an increase in insurgency related violence. From 1992 to 2004, Assam saw 5,708 deaths in ethnic and separatist violence, Manipur had 3,606 deaths, Tripura had 3,267, and Nagaland had 2,068<sup>53</sup>. In recent years, Manipur has experienced a constant level of violence and has been dubbed by the national media as the most demonstrative example of violence still existing in the northeast. Many view the violence in the region as a result of identity politics and nationalism. Political parties and civil society organizations are using it as a major turning point in the Northeast's history. Some specialists in the region believe that Delhi's policies towards development, democracy establishment, peace negotiations, and army deployment have been the main reasons for all the discrepancies. Little has been said or done about the breakdown and rising of violence in the North East, especially in Manipur. It has been researched that the integrative capabilities of the Congress party have not affected the status of the Northeast. This chapter delves into the major peace processes and negotiations that involve the government, outfit groups, and civil society. Its aim is to seek a permanent solution to the disturbances in the Northeast that have persisted for decades by identifying what has been lacking in establishing peace.

## **BACKGROUND**

Northeast India was the first group of states to show severe signs of political crisis after the attainment of independence. This crisis eventually turned into organized violence, including both ethnic and separatist conflicts. Whenever we discuss the

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<sup>53</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-40271353> (accessed 4<sup>th</sup> May 2020)

northeast, it is often in the context of these agitations rather than discussion relating to any positive developments in the region. The first rebellion was initiated by the Naga hill district in Assam in 1949. The revolt organized by Naga leader, Angami Phizo<sup>54</sup> was in response to the central government's attempt to take over their lands, over which the Naga people had held sovereign authority since the pre-British period. The rebellion quickly spread to other Naga-inhabited areas in the northeast causing the Mizos to also join the movement. On 28 February 1966, the Mizo National Front declared an armed rebellion for the establishment of an independent Mizoram government or "*sawrkar*." The government responded by transferring all authority to the army. In addition to the counter-insurgency strategies, the army also implemented measures such as the Village Group Operation, which involved relocating villages to camps and cutting off all connectivity routes. Although these measures were intended to benefit citizens, they had the opposite effect; causing further agitations among the population and exacerbating the situation. In the rest of the northeast, there were instances of organized violence for long time post independence. The revolutions in Assam, Manipur, and Tripura soon spiraled into severe crises and rebellions. In the Meitei-dominated areas of Manipur, youth organizations initially used peaceful means with the government to settle down and establish their interests.

However, when their efforts failed, they adopted violence means against the government. In the 1980s, several armed groups with separate demands emerged in the northeast, fuelled by severe unemployment, bureaucratic domination, and a lack of basic infrastructure for civilian development. The major grievance came from the displacement of civilians due to ethnic clashes. With the growth of militant groups in the Manipur valley, the Naga outfits also rose, demanding the creation of *Greater Nagalim*, a territory combining Naga communities from every state to establish their sovereign authority and supremacy. Their demand to merge the Naga districts of Manipur with other Naga tribes in the northeast would potentially lead to Manipur and other states becoming a minority; posing a threat to their integrity. The Kukis, who are inhabitants of Manipur, became wary of their future in the formation of

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<sup>54</sup> Angami Phizo was a Naga nationalist leader with British nationality who led an armed resistance after the implementation of AFSPA by the Indian government in 1958.



Greater Nagalim. This insecurity led to constant clashes between the two tribal communities and the outfits supporting them, culminating in the infamous Naga-Kuki clash of 1992-1996, which resulted in the destruction of civil rights, liberties, and property.

The government's intervention, through the signing of a cease-fire agreement with both tribal communities, contributed to stabilizing the situation. Nevertheless, the Naga community's top priority of demanding a greater Nagalim dealt a severe blow to the majority Meitei community in Manipur state. The cease-fire agreement triggered contestations between Meitei and Nagas as well. The state of Tripura witnessed a similar scenario as it was engulfed in a wave of extreme ethnic violence from 1979 to 1980, which resulted in the unfortunate loss of nearly 1,800 lives and destruction of countless properties. The violence also spread to other parts of the northeast, including North Cachar Hills and various areas in Assam, resulting in a large number of refugees seeking assistance. Statistics show that between 1,50,000 to 2,00,000 internally displaced people from various tribal groups were affected by the conflict.<sup>55</sup>

A larger movement towards armed nationalist separatism was witnessed in Tripura, Assam, and Meghalaya due to the inter-ethnic conflicts they faced. Two major outfits, the Naga public organizations and the Meitei ethnic groups, were particularly effective in this regard. The Meitei ethnic groups and Naga public organizations instigated economic blockades in the Manipur valley, severing all connections between Manipur and other states. The state government's inability to address the situation further aggravated the crisis, compelling the central government to deploy the army with special powers. A recurring theme in the northeast was public curfews, blockades, and noncooperation with government agencies by youths, primarily students, which persisted for decades. The outfits backed by civilians targeted the state and its agencies. Poor performance of government offices, loose enforcement of law and order, and immense corruption exposed the weaknesses of the government, ultimately fuelling the unrest. The entire northeast region has been

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<sup>55</sup> <https://c-nes.org/539/the-impact-of-insurgency-activities-in-northeast-india-on-socio-economic-development-and-its-solution-thereof/> ( accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2019)

designated as a disturbed area, leading to a dependence of individual states on government funds for basic living. Individual states fail to provide economic security to citizens or support their own maintenance. Poor financial management and the states' failure to raise taxes contribute to the region's low financial capabilities.

According to Government of India statistics, in the 1990s, the tax share in the gross state domestic product (GSDP) was alarmingly low in Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya, and Assam, ranging from a mere 1.4 percent to 3.58 percent. This, coupled with high corruption, has eroded citizens' trust in government agencies. As a result, the north-eastern states are heavily dependent on central government funds for survival. The central government has taken advantage of this situation and used it to manipulate the citizens and increase its vote banks. This has caused a great deal of resentment and agitation among north-eastern civilians, leading to increased deployment of paramilitary forces with special powers. The north-eastern state governments have become mere ceremonial agents of the central government, with the Governors holding substantive authority and nullifying the autonomy of individual provinces. Despite this, the central agencies have been reluctant to address the basic developmental needs of the states, such as infrastructure, communication, and employment opportunities. As a result, the representatives of the central government have established their supremacy in the north-eastern states but have effectively paralyzed the states individually. This has been a major setback for the citizens of the northeast, leading to frequent revolts.

The north-eastern insurgencies have been extensively researched, with cultural differences between the people of the region and the central government being identified as the primary cause of the conflict. However, the actual reasons behind the revolts are far more complex and require a deeper analysis of the psychological differences between the people of northeast and the government. While cultural differences do play a significant role, the nationalization of northeast without the consent of its citizens and the government's neglect of their problems have been major justifications for their revolt. The majority of Northeast's citizens have given their approval, considering the insurgents as rebels fighting for a cause. The history of nation-building in northeast by the central government has been deemed

disrespectful by many north-eastern writers. The central government's decision to assume control of the northeast from colonial rule immediately after independence disregarded the aspirations and hopes of the region's inhabitants. As a result, the idea of an alternative to Indian rule took root, establishing the justification for anti-India sentiments and a parallel government in the northeast. Nation-building initiatives in the region have resulted in a varied response from the northeast citizens towards the central government. The implementation of these efforts has frequently been a primary cause of discontent and uprisings in the northeast, as the preservation of distinct tribal traditions is considered a fundamental democratic right. Some groups have called for complete independence from Indian rule, while others have demanded self-governance through separate administrative units. The government's lack of clarity about the ongoing revolts has complicated the situation further, leading to attempts to address the difficulties under one umbrella. However, finding a solution to the turmoil is not as straightforward as it seems.

For example, the merger of Manipur into India in 1949 generated a profound sense of alienation among the Meitei communities, which persists to this day and has fuelled ongoing grievances against the government. The government has observed that several anti-state organizations are capturing a significant portion of the development funds intended for the north-eastern states, which has prompted the government to reconsider its funding decisions. Additionally, it has been reported that these groups are extorting salaries from government employees and payments from various contractual services, further highlighting their influence and control over the region. According to Varghese's research (1996:49), the insurgency in the northeast draws on resources from both the underworld of narcotics and smuggling as well as the government exchequer. Studying the nature of the conflict provides insights into the primary causes of these tensions. It is also essential to examine how the conflict's nature and policies have evolved over time while keeping the underlying ideologies in mind. Research has shown that labelling the rebels in the northeast as criminals without understanding the root causes of their actions is unlikely to lead to a permanent solution.

Many scholars, activists, politicians, and civilians in the region believe that the government's lack of interest in addressing the region's issues is a significant factor

behind the prolonged conflict. It is crucial to recognize that the state has the power to trigger or mitigate these issues. To find a permanent solution, it is crucial to understand the reasons for the rebels' actions rather than merely categorizing them as criminals.

The rapid modernization in the northeast has led to a significant shift in the nature of conflicts, which has been further exacerbated by the influx of people from neighbouring states and other parts of India. The different approaches taken by the government in different states have resulted in conflicts in places like Nagaland and Mizoram. The underlying reason behind these conflicts is the existence of stateless societies, where individual tribal communities perceive the state authority as a hindrance to their demand for greater autonomy and subordination towards other tribes. This has destabilized tribal societies and highlighted the need for more stable political institutions. The tribal societies in the northeast have demonstrated their unique forms of democracy in numerous ways, surpassing those of any other "civilized" society in the region. This has caused some controversy among both the state and tribal communities, as the latter assert their independence and sovereignty as distinct communities within the larger state structure. It is important to consider the views of the tribes before labeling them as terrorist groups, which can help the state in establishing its legitimacy. Many civilians in the northeast believe that the current turmoil in the region is primarily due to the failure of individual states to address the issues facing their respective communities. Furthermore, the perceived lack of interest on the part of the central government has widened the gap between the northeast and the rest of the country, leading to political instability and ongoing violence. The inequalities in resource management across social, political, and economic spheres have further accentuated cultural differences among various communities, resulting in deep-rooted contradictions that continue to persist.

The failure of the state is multifaceted, encompassing not only the inability to meet the needs and expectations of citizens but also the failure to enforce law and order to maintain the security of the states. The conflicts in the northeast region cannot be reduced to simply inter or intra-ethnic tribal conflicts, as they also highlight the state's inability to perform basic functions as outlined in the constitutional norms, analyzed through various theoretical frameworks. The state's failure in these areas has led to a situation aptly observed by Zartman as:

*Organization, participation, security and allocation fall into the hands of those who will fight for it-warlords and gang leaders, often using the ethnic principle as a source of identity and control in the absence of anything else.*<sup>56</sup> ( Zartman: 2007)

It is evident that the root cause of the major turmoil and contradictions in the northeast can be attributed to the poor capabilities of the individual states in the region. By analyzing the ethnic and separatist conflicts separately, we can discern that Manipur has seen the least political mobilization compared to other north-eastern states. However, when we examine the bigger picture, the fundamental differences lie in the divergent views and demands of state authorities and individual outfits. Nevertheless, the underlying cause of such turbulence is deeply rooted in the failure of the state and its agencies. The state has been unable to protect its citizens and has been reluctant to cooperate with central government authorities in subduing the citizens, which has compelled outfits, primarily the youth, to resort to armed rebellion. Consequently, Manipur has the least legitimate authority, and the state authorities are frequently criticized by media, political opposition, and civil society groups for their reluctance to act. There are numerous other reasons why the state of Manipur is criticized.

Compared to other north-eastern states, Manipur's political condition is the most deplorable, with frequent protests, street marches, blockades, and attacks on government offices. In the book *Durable Disorder*, Sanjib Baruah has aptly highlighted this issue, stating that the majority of ethnic conflicts in the region stem from public policies promoting self-governance for specific communities, which, in turn, have encouraged competitive mobilization among other groups who have not been granted the same privilege. This has resulted in a constant cycle of conflicts, leading to the emergence of armed groups and ethnic assertion (Baruah, 2005: 3-27). Baruah also points out that the gap between state actors and non-state actors has created opportunities for rebels to continue their actions, leading to severe turbulence. The state government's failure to address the degrading conditions in the northeast reflects the mismanagement of both the state and the central government. The excessive reliance on military tactics by the state poses a threat to civilians, and

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<sup>56</sup> Zartman.I.William, *Negotiation and conflict management:esseys on theory and practice:* Routledge:2007

some have been forced to take up arms against the state. Ultimately, the state has failed to monopolize the security of individual north-eastern states.

The root of the issue lies in the fact that while the other states in India enjoy the security umbrella of their respective state and central governments, citizens of the northeast find it hard to believe that their state governments are weak and heavily reliant on the central government for security policies. This is largely due to the federal structure of the Indian government, where most interactions with the public are not independent enough. The state governments are heavily dependent on the central government for such issues, resulting in actions that are often coercive and non-cooperative. Furthermore, the north-eastern society, mainly tribal and introverted, has compelled the government to rely on third-party intervention in formulating policies for the region, which has impeded the establishment of peace in the region. This has paved the way for the central government to interfere in the state policies of the north east, dominating their reactions. As a result, a large section of the north-eastern citizens have been compelled to take up arms and establish their own security, owing to this "stepfather-like" attitude.

The capacity to plan policies and implement them effectively, while enforcing law and order, could have changed the perception of civilians. Intellectuals from both the northeast and mainland India agree that in the nation-building process, the state and central governments could have cooperated with state agencies to understand north-eastern grievances and develop policies that best suit its citizens. However, the current scenario shows how reluctant the government is towards the development in the northeast, with a focus solely on their interests and gaining benefits from the region's civilians.

### **LOOK EAST POLICY IN NORTH EAST INSURGENCY**

The Indian government's post-Cold War foreign policy, known as the Look East Policy, holds great importance in the establishment of peace, stability, and development in the north-eastern region of India. This was initiated to form a gateway of India towards Southeast Asia. This policy, launched in 1991 by the Narsimha Rao government, aimed to increase political contacts across borders, to induce economic integration, and foreign security cooperation. It marked a

significant shift in India's global perspective, seeking to establish itself as an important factor in Asia-Pacific strategic studies and analysis. Despite being a late realization, the policy's implementation was a serious step towards opening up India to economic ties with South and Southeast Asian states through northeast India. The region has vast resources that can be utilized to improve the socio-economic conditions of the area, but due to a lack of connectivity and the wake of independence created a sense of agitation and anti-Indian sentiment among the tribes. Although the implementation of the Look East Policy was mainly intended to enhance economic ties with neighbouring states, the state-centric security approach has isolated and underdeveloped the north-eastern states.

In recent years, the focus has shifted towards the development of the northeast region; because the region acts as a bridge between India and major South-East Asian states. This development would certainly lead to the betterment of the Indian economy and strengthen strategic ties with immediate neighbours. As a result, the second phase of the Look East Policy emphasizes more on integrated relations with ASEAN states, which is also linked to the economic and security interests of the north-eastern region. The policymakers have considered the geographical proximity of the region to Southeast Asian nations, along with its economic and security interests, while aiming to establish such relations. Research indicates that the inclination of the northeast towards Southeast Asian states has always impacted its growth and development, and the implementation of the Look East Policy can address this issue. The policy also has the potential to solve major problems faced by the northeast, such as insurgency, corruption, smuggling, and illegal immigration through regional cooperation. The end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in growing interdependence among states through regionalism, involving economic, trade, politics, and military issues.

The belief that a state's development is closely tied to its relations with neighbouring states led to the emergence of regionalism. Following the establishment of the UN, research indicated that regional integration became crucial for states due to shared problems and experiences. The 1980s saw the introduction of new forms of regional integration, resulting in the formation of blocs such as NAFTA, MERCOSUR, and ASEAN. India faced a similar scenario, where participation in

regional integration became necessary to facilitate economic development in the aftermath of independence, requiring the implementation of new policies.

The Indian brand of regionalism initially aimed to collaborate with the SAARC states, which was established in 1985 after Bangladesh's proposal for regional cooperation in South Asia. However, conflicts between member states hindered the organization's progress, with the Indo-Pak disputes and domestic issues being major contributors. As a result, India began shifting its focus towards intense economic cooperation with Southeast Asian states. During 1990-1991, India faced social unrest, political instability, and a dire economic situation; while in the years 1965 to 1990 East Asian countries were experiencing highest economic growth rate leaving behind many economically stable states. This success story inspired India to embrace global economic policies and break free from economic isolation.

In an effort to integrate India with the economies of Southeast Asian nations, the Look East Policy was introduced by former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. As a result, the northeast region of India serves as a bridge between India and the Southeast Asian states. However, the entire northeast region has been plagued by several problems since the colonial period, resulting in mass agitation and insurgency. The region suffers from democratic deficiencies due to its limited connectivity with the mainland and growing issues such as secession, autonomy, high rates of corruption, the implementation of the draconian AFSPA, severe human rights violations, and illiteracy. The constant instigation by neighbouring countries, especially China, is fuelling the insurgency situations. The insurgency situations in the northeast have been exacerbated by the constant instigation from neighbouring countries, particularly China. In light of this, Indian policymakers sought to establish trade ties with Southeast Asian states through the implementation of the Look East policy, with the northeast region serving as a connecting point. Development of India is only possible if troubles in northeast are resolved peacefully. The state and central governments must work together to establish law and order in the region. Developing a conflict profile for each state would provide insight into the needs of the northeast and promote economic growth for the rest of India.



A cease-fire agreement with the NSCN, an existing insurgent outfit in *Tirap* district, has brought peace to Arunachal Pradesh in the current stage. The state's major conflict centred around the use of Hindi as its state language (1950). Disputes also arose over the settlement of the *Chakma* community from Bangladesh seeking refuge, which has reduced the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh to a minority in their own state. The state continues to face growing troubles of unemployment and income disparities. The state of Assam has been grappling with the issue of illegal migration of Bangladeshis since the partition. Despite efforts by the state and central governments, deportation has been largely unsuccessful, leading to growing agitations. Additionally, there are tensions among religious and linguistic groups, as well as tribal communities seeking autonomy. The most prominent insurgent group in the state is ULFA, which is fighting against issues such as unemployment, corruption in governance, illegal migration, domination of non-Assamese over tribal communities, and exploitation of Assam's natural resources.

ULFA has been active in Assam since the 1980s. Both the union and state governments are actually earning votes by not deporting migrants, which has been the belief of Assam's citizens for decades. In addition, every community has its armed group ready to fight against the government on behalf of their demands. Currently, Manipur is the most insurgency-prone area of the northeast, with almost 15 active insurgent outfits representing the tribal communities of the state. Even the funds allotted by the government towards the state's development are actually financing insurgency through increased corruption and a lack of law and order. About one-fourth of the entire state is inhabited by the Meitei community, and their leaders rule it. Resentment grew with the government's offer for the tribe to join the union, and other tribal communities of the state followed the agitation. This slow rate of impact affected the states of Mizoram and Nagaland as well. The cease-fire agreement between the union government and NSCN has reduced the insurgency rate in Nagaland, but the new tension they are facing is their demand for greater Nagaland, which includes four major regions of Manipur.

The government's allocation of funds for the state's development is inadvertently fuelling the insurgency due to the high levels of corruption and lack of law and order. It's worth noting that almost a quarter of the state's population is from the

Meitei community, and their leaders hold significant power. The government's offer for the tribe to join the union created resentment, which then spread to other tribal communities in the state. This agitation has slowly affected neighbouring states like Mizoram and Nagaland as well. While the cease-fire agreement between the union government and NSCN has led to a reduction in insurgency in Nagaland, there's a new tension brewing due to the demand for greater Nagaland, which includes four major regions of Manipur.

The government's assurance of territorial security has brought a comparative peace to the Meitei- dominated region. However, it's common knowledge that the insurgents of Manipur run a parallel government, which erodes people's faith in the official machinery. Unlike other states in the northeast, Meghalaya is relatively free from violence. Nevertheless, the state is not without its problems, which include violence against Bengali-speaking immigrants, increased inter-tribal rivalry, and tensions between the 6th schedule district councils and the government. In Mizoram, history tells us that insurgency arose due to government noncooperation. However, the situation has improved following the signing of an accord between the government and the Mizo National Front, which established peace in the region. The only political trouble that the state faces now is the reservation facilities provided to tribal communities, which has agitated the general citizens. In Nagaland, a cease-fire agreement was signed between the NSCN and the government.

As mentioned earlier, the demand for greater Nagalim has been a major source of rivalry between the government and the outfits, constantly keeping the state's peace situation tense. Since independence, Tripura has faced difficulties due to the massive influx of migrants after partition, which made the indigenous Tripuris a minority in their own state. However, effective decentralization in the non scheduled areas, which brought the tribal areas under the custody of the autonomous 6th schedule, successful land reforms, and the promotion of the agriculture sector have helped to sort out the agitations. Nevertheless, the changing religious compositions have affected the peace and led to increased disturbances, which the government is currently working on. In addition to this, the slow acquisition of forests and their limited participation in government decision-making has made the forest dwellers more anti-government.

## **Civil society in the northeast**

The success or failure of a state largely depends on the self-awareness and effectiveness of its civil society. In contemporary theory, civil society is often treated as a residual category, representing a verifiable collection of consciousness and development that the state authority lacks. It retains a distinct character to the extent that it is made up of areas of social life, such as the domestic world, the economic sphere, cultural activities, and political interactions, which are organized through voluntary arrangements between individuals and groups outside the direct control of the state. Similarly, in the context of sub-Saharan Africa, Chabal (1986) emphasized the importance of civil society as follows:

*What is not of the state becomes civil society so that civil society in so far as it can be defined, consists not just of what is obviously not part of the state but also of all who may have become powerless, not just villagers, fisherman, nomads, members of different age groups, village councilors or slum dwellers but also professionals, politicians, priests, and mullahs, intellectuals, military officials and all others who are or feel they are , without the access to the state.<sup>57</sup>*

Neera Chandhoke(1995), considers *civil society as the sphere where the rational self- determining individual enters voluntarily into social relationships with others. Included in this sphere would be family, churches, third party organizations( such as domestic and international organizations), membership organizations(such as trade unions, farmers association, credit groups, water user-associations), political parties, mafia arrangements, religious affiliations(formal and informal) and firms( that is organizations that engage in competitive economic exchange).The values of these relationships precisely rest on the fact that they are based upon reasoned calculations that no human being can achieve his goals without help of others. The realizations bring individuals together in areas of wide –ranging common concerns-economic, social but primarily political<sup>58</sup>.*

Civil society requires a system of meanings only when related to the state. The state cannot be comprehended unless it is seen as a sphere through which the state

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<sup>57</sup> Patrick Chabal:*Political domination of Africa*( African studies series 50)1986

<sup>58</sup> Chandhoke Neera:*state and civil society: explorations in political theory*, Sage publication,1995

determines to control society, as well as the area where the power of the state and the major contradictory classes against the government can be taken into account. The aspect of civil society is the place where groups organized based on their class, race, ethnicity, and environment remains confined within the political and ideological contradictions. It is the arena of the organized political system, not only based on the ways political and social movements are carried out, but also by the sense in which public opinion goes under the process of crystallization. The sphere and meaning of civil society differ from society in actuality. While society consists of the entirety of social practices, both public and private, that determine the coordination of civil society in the public sphere, it is also the location of processes by which the experiences of individuals and communities are properly channeled and the gap of thoughts is bridged. It also forms the buffer between the opinions of citizens and the state. The accountability of the state is dependent on the abilities of civil society in the negotiation process in many ways.

A well-functioning civil society is crucial for effective governance and societal harmony. The state cannot be fully understood unless it is viewed as a domain where the government exercises its control over society, while also considering the power dynamics among the various opposing classes in relation to the government. Civil society operates as a space where different groups, such as those based on class, race, ethnicity, and environmental issues, can engage in political and ideological debates. It is not just a platform for social and political movements, but also a place where public opinion is formed and solidified. Although civil society is distinct from society as a whole, it plays a crucial role in coordinating social practices in the public sphere. It serves as a means through which individuals and communities can express themselves and bridge the gap between differing perspectives. Additionally, civil society serves as a buffer between citizens and the state, holding the state accountable and serving as a mediator in negotiation processes.

Civil society serves as a platform where the state and its citizens can engage in democratic dialogue, with the ultimate goal of promoting the betterment of the state. In this arena, ideas are expressed, debated, and refined to provide constructive feedback. The citizens of India enjoy the right to freedom of association and individual ideological space, which are essential components of civil society. These

rights are intertwined with the very foundation of civil society. As Andre Beteille aptly stated,

*The well-being of a modern state is dependent on the diverse forms of mediating institutions that linked different individuals to each other on the one hand and on the other, negotiated between the citizens and the state. This is because a society with only individuals at one end and the state at the other are not only difficult to live in but difficult to conceive. The presence of mediating institutions therefore, has been a universal feature of all human societies, which resulted in making up of the civil society.*<sup>59</sup>

India operates as a parliamentary democracy, where decision-making is entrusted to a small group of elected representatives. However, this system may result in a government that is not truly representative of the people it serves. The growing privatization of traditional government functions has only widened this gap, further distancing the often inefficient state from the private sector. It is in this context that civil society emerges as a vital third sector, playing a crucial role in bridging this gap. In Manipur, the democratic space has been eroded due to the actions of both the state and militant groups, with civil society struggling to have its voice heard. Good governance requires proper representation, which is why free and fair elections and respect for human rights are essential. Three fundamental elements in this regard are:

- A) Freedom of expression
- B) Freedom of association
- C) Free and the pluralistic media

Good governance is built on fundamental principles, one of which is a partnership between civil society and governance. This relationship has shed light on the various roles that civil society can play in either strengthening or weakening government institutions. However, in Manipur, the Nagas have been united by their identity and interests, leading to fifty years of insurgent violence and the killing of civil society leaders. As a result, the government deployed military forces to the entire north-

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<sup>59</sup> Andre Beteille *Society and Politics in India :Essays in a Comparative Perspective*, Routledge, 1991( pg 141-185)

eastern region, including Manipur. The Naga insurgents even forced civil organizations to work for them, particularly the NSCN-(IM), the strongest outfit in the northeast. Going against the verdicts of the NSCN is difficult, and members of the legislative assembly were even forced to resign due to command from elsewhere. Political parties without Naga approval cannot exist peacefully in either Manipur or Nagaland.

The resignation of the MLAs represents a clear surrender of the citizens and public representatives to insurgent groups, particularly the Kuki outfits who have been unable to maintain their power in the face of Naga domination. The major political outfits, including KNA,KNF, and KLA, have failed to effectively defend their own territories and lack coherent ideologies. As a result, they have not been able to understand their own interests, leading to government policies that are perceived as being against them. This has resulted in revolt. Furthermore, inter- and intra-ethnic conflicts have created the need for third-party intervention in settling disputes. The Kukis, a significant tribal community, are attempting to establish their dominance over minority and other communities in the northeast, which has made civil society participation essential. Despite the government's efforts to brand these groups as terrorists, civil society is bridging the gap between the government and the outfits. The use of violence as a means of communication is not a viable solution and fails to provide a permanent resolution to conflicts. Unfortunately, this approach legitimizes the tribes' actions and provides funding for further revolts against the government. Consequently, the government is forced to resort to the "law of the jungle" to maintain control, resulting in the misguided youth of the northeast becoming a threat to the government, civil society, and the general public.

The Meitei community is composed of several major outfits, including the PLA, UNLF, KCP, and PREPAK, which are still active in the Imphal Valley of Meghalaya. Similar to Kuki insurgent groups, Meitei groups have turned insurgency into their business and occupation, allowing them to control and erode government authority while rendering administration and law enforcement agencies inefficient. The Meitei population, with their individual ideologies and goals, are under the authority of the majority insurgent outfits and are forced to pay taxes and follow their instructions in exchange for support. The progressive withdrawal of civil

governance and the cohesive arrangement with militants has led to widespread illegal economic activities that support insurgency efforts to establish an ideological state by threatening the government, extorting money on a large scale, smuggling, and other illegal activities.

It is a fact that the ideologically different factions in the northeast, particularly Manipur, have generally preferred low-intensity conflicts against the government, which are often referred to as 'turf wars'. These are intended to achieve supremacy in cross-border illegal trading by keeping the government occupied. The growth of underground outfits backed by China and Myanmar (which has an age-old territorial dispute with India) has disrupted the legitimate growth and development of individual states in the northeast.

The civil society that cooperates with these terrorist groups has been labelled as criminals because they are forced to work with the outfits at the expense of their ongoing strategy to bring the government and the outfits to the negotiating table, which could ultimately lead to a ceasefire or peace negotiations. The development of underground outfits is a significant hindrance to the government's development policies for the northeast. Moreover, militants have taken over government functions, including stopping security policies that give justice to local communities. The militants' monopoly on controlling civilians' lives has caused economic and administrative problems in north-eastern states, especially in Manipur. The emergence of a parallel government controlled by the militants has resulted in neglecting both the state and central governments and has been viewed with complacency by the rest of India. As aptly pointed out by Ajit Doval<sup>60</sup> during a lecture, "*it is difficult for the civilians of mainland India to accept the northeast tribal in getting chances for their development.*"<sup>61</sup> Thus, the tribal communities, especially the outfits representing them, have gained the power to snatch their rights. Their kidnappings and seizure of offices and officials have been justified to them for

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<sup>60</sup> Ajit Doval is the fifth and current National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of India. He previously served as the Director of the Intelligence Bureau from 2004 to 2005, after spending a decade as the head of its operations wing.

<sup>61</sup> *If you fail to enforce laws, democracy fails: NSA Ajit Doval* <https://www.youtube.com/hashtag/theprintuncut>

decades. The government finds it challenging to get a grip on the ongoing turmoil and establish its nation-building policy.

Each outfit in the Northeast has not limited itself to its own area of operation, but has inspired or influenced the development of several other outfits in different areas with similar goals. Each of these outfits has resorted to violent means to assert its rights, causing immeasurable collateral damage on both sides. Manipur has thus become home to the maximum number of terrorist groups. The government's response has been to deploy the army under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act (1911), the Punjab Security of State Act (1958), the Foreigners Protected Areas Order (1958), the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (1967), the National Security Act (1980), the Code of Criminal Procedure (1983), and the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Act (1985). However, for the people of Manipur, these legal measures and administrative arrangements have only alienated them further. The main grievance of the people of the northeast is the extreme special powers granted to the army, who can act with impunity. Civilians have filed numerous cases against the army, citing arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial executions, involuntary disappearances, and other abuses. Women and children are particularly vulnerable in this unsafe situation.

Each of the outfits in the northeast is not limited to their own area of action, but rather has inspired or influenced the development of several other outfits in different areas of the northeast with similar goals. Each of these outfits has resorted to violent means in order to acquire their rights, resulting in immeasurable collateral damage on both sides. Manipur has thus been listed as having the maximum number of terrorist groups. The government's response to this has been the deployment of armies with the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act (1911), the Punjab Security of State Act (1958), Foreigners Protected Areas Order (1958), the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (1967), the National Security Act (1980), the Code of Criminal Procedure (1983), and the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (1985). However, these legal and administrative arrangements meant to protect the citizens of the northeast have resulted in alienation for the civilians of Manipur. The main concern of the citizens of the northeast is the special empowerment given to the army deployed in the



northeast, allowing them to do anything at the cost of their power. Civilians have filed numerous cases against the army's discrepancies, including arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial executions, involuntary disappearances, and many other issues. The most vulnerable groups in the northeast are women and children.

For decades, the citizens of the northeast have suffered from widespread violations of human rights, impeding civil society's efforts to bring the outfits and government to the negotiating table for reconciliation. Civilians have been affected in this ongoing conflict, and the increase in discrepancies has only led to more conflicts. This has caused immense tension in the security scene, both at the state and central government levels. The outfits have disregarded all legal boundaries, engaging in kidnappings, strikes, and extortions, thereby endangering the safety of the northeast's residents as well as India's economy and industrialization. This highlights the importance of civil society institutions in the region that remain under immense pressure from the outfits and the government to establish peace in the northeast.

The northeast region is beset by numerous struggles, including its geographical location, multi-ethnic population, and political and economic instability, which are compounded by the state's failure to provide adequate security for its citizens. Moreover, civil society institutions have not been active participants in the region's affairs, which is evident in the functioning of the state and major institutions. The traditional hierarchies in tribal communities have reinforced the authority of tribal chiefs, making it difficult for the state or civil society to intervene. The involvement of women in decision-making and the development of literacy rates would enrich the effectiveness of civil society, but the introverted nature of the tribes has kept organizations at bay. Despite efforts by civil society organizations to establish their presence since independence, it has been challenging to win over the hearts of tribal communities due to the government's constant atrocities against them. Had civil society been more involved, peace could have been established in northeast much earlier than expected.

The civil society organizations have been trying to make their voices heard in the northeast since independence. However, winning the hearts of the tribal people has always been a challenge due to the government's constant atrocities against them.

The church is the most significant civil society organization in the region, and it has contributed greatly to the modernization of individual states. The church has been instrumental in the development of healthcare and education since the colonial period. Moreover, it has played a crucial role in creating awareness among citizens of the northeast and promoting a better quality of life. In this diverse region, the church has helped to establish common platforms by sharing norms and values, which serve as an alternative to social capital for collective action and development. Among all the civil society organizations working in the northeast, Assam is the most significant. It has been effective in blending the traditions and modernity of tribal association.

The Asom Sathiya Sabha and Bodo Sathiya Sabha were the first major civil society organizations in Assam that provided a strong foundation for the preservation of cultural heritage and tribal identity, as well as a platform for public opinion. Over time, these organizations have addressed numerous issues to facilitate resolutions between the government and the rebels in Assam fighting for their rights. Similarly, in Nagaland, there is the Naga Hoho, Naga Mothers Association, and Young Naga Association which play a significant role in solving political disputes between the Naga outfits and the government. Additionally, there are several student associations working in the northeast that actively address socio-political issues to make northeast a better place to live. The most effective organization among all these groups has been the All Assam Students Union (AASU). The major agendas of this organization are the issue of illegal migration, issue of economic development of 1979-1985, and negotiations with the government. AASU held the centre stage in promoting these issues, and the government was forced to negotiate with AASU. In 1983, the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi realized the need to fulfil the demands of AASU; otherwise, the agitation in Assam could have never been resolved. The deportation and detection of the migrants eventually occurred in Assam. AASU came into negotiations with the government and signed an agreement in 1985. Then, the entire AASU formed a regional political party namely, Asom Gana Parishad, with eminent persons from AASU as their heads. However, it became less effective than before and did not remain a student-oriented organization anymore. The organization was infested with corruption and lost its ideology.

Despite this, the government remained consistent in its stance on immigration. However, by 1980, illegal immigration had become the least important issue for the federal government, as their focus shifted towards winning votes. The government's reluctance towards illegal immigration was largely attributed to the issue of partition, as claimed by the government at the time. In 1990, the Hindutva-based government took a hardliner approach and revoked the infiltration card of AASU, a move that was not supported by the party. Another organization, that deserves special mention, was ABSU or All Bodo Students Union. They demanded the creation of a separate Bodoland. The relation between both organizations was their way of revolt. Both organizations were extremist in nature. In 1993, a settlement agreement was signed by the Bodos, which provided for autonomy under the Bodo Peoples Action Committee. However, despite the agreement, the Assam government obstructed the process of granting territorial autonomy or supremacy, which prevented its implementation. After twelve years of constant fight, the issue of autonomy was finally accepted by the Indian government. Prior to the acceptance, the All Bodo Students Union had relinquished its cause to the Bodoland Liberation Tigers Force and the then government. Despite this, the ABSU has continued to be a militant group in the northeast, particularly in Assam. In contrast, the All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU) was formed to counter the demands put forth by AASU. Over time, it evolved into the United Minorities Front (UMF), which held significant influence during the Assam Accord of 1985. This was overtaken by AUDF. It remains as a strong outfit with pertinent demands and ideologies. There are several other prominent organizations in the northeast that are working on issues related to the region. These include the Young Mizo Organisation, the Khasi Students Union of Meghalaya, the Tribal Students Federation of Tripura, the Mizo Zirlaipawl, and the Naga Students Federation.

Civil society organizations have been working to address various issues in Northeast India since independence. However, winning the hearts of the tribal people has always been difficult due to the constant government atrocities against them. The Church is the most significant civil society in northeast India, which has cooperated extensively in modernizing the individual states by supporting the development of healthcare and education since the colonial period. The Church has also played a vital role in creating awareness among citizens of Northeast India to build a better

life. Given the diverse cultures in the region, the Church has helped develop common platforms by sharing common norms and values, forming an alternative to social capital for collective action and development in Northeast India. Among all the civil society organizations working in Northeast India, Assam is the most significant, effectively blending the traditions and modernity of the tribal associations.

These organizations represent the common people and are primarily focused on the development of the north-eastern economy, environmental protection, and better utilization of resources of the northeast by the rest of India, and recognition of the state languages. However, many people consider them extra-constitutional organs. For ages, their influence on the insurgency situation on the northeast has been quite strong. The primary demand of AMSU is the recognition of the Manipuri language and its inclusion in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution. In 2001, this agitation moved towards Manipur along with Nagaland. The existence of social capitalists throughout north-eastern India has created a close association with ethnic groups, resulting in low bonding between citizens of the region and the rest of India. Miscommunication regarding government nation-building projects has led to citizen unrest in Northeast India, and the implementation of these projects to improve conditions in the region has dominated the demands of tribes, making them a minority in their own country. The much-desired integration of state-sponsored nationalism and citizenship has yet to take root. In November 2004, the then Prime Minister of India, Manmohan Singh, received a letter from Indira Goswami, a professor at Delhi University and a litterateur from Assam, pleading to hold negotiations between the government and the Naga insurgents.

The leader of the ULFA outfit, Arabinda Rajkhowa, responded to this call for negotiation, and the first peace process meeting was held in Guwahati. ULFA's demand for sovereign rights in Assam included a plebiscite. The main participants in the meeting were the Peoples Committee for Peace Initiatives, ULFA cadres, and government representatives. The meeting agreed to address several issues in the region and approved the formation of groups to negotiate on behalf of ULFA and other militant outfits in Northeast India. However, both the state and central government rejected the issue of a plebiscite. The Assam chief minister argued that democratic elections had already taken place in Assam, and there was no need for a

plebiscite when citizens had already accepted the election results. Nonetheless, the issue of sovereignty was not granted, and ULFA cadres refused to attend any further meetings unless the government agreed to negotiate on the sovereignty of Assam. In 2004, Indira Goswami made a second attempt to negotiate with the government about the issue of sovereignty. This time, the government asked ULFA to lay down their weapons, as peace processes and conflicts cannot coexist. Paresh Baruah, a leader of ULFA, and Goswami tried to convince the government to consider the issue of sovereignty, but it was not fruitful. Other peace process communities in Assam also took similar steps.

After Arabinda Rajkhowa, the leader of ULFA outfit, agreed to negotiate, the first peace process meeting was held in Guwahati. ULFA demanded a plebiscite for the sovereign rights of Assam. The meeting included representatives from the Peoples Committee for Peace Initiatives, ULFA cadres, and the government, and addressed various issues affecting the region. However, both state and central governments rejected the plea for a plebiscite, citing the democratic election process already in place. The issue of sovereignty was not granted, causing ULFA cadres to refuse further meetings unless it was discussed. In 2004, Indira Goswami made a second attempt to negotiate with the government about sovereignty, but the government asked ULFA to disarm as peace and conflicts cannot coexist. Despite attempts by Paresh Baruah and Goswami to convince the government to address sovereignty, the negotiations were unfruitful. Similar steps were taken by other peace process communities in Assam.

The Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chhatra Parishad (AJYCP) initiated a conclave for a unilateral ceasefire by the government and urged ULFA to lay down their arms. However, both parties remained firm in their positions. Research organizations in Assam held several meetings following this initiative. Although the ULFA cadres rejected the government's peace offer, Goswami persisted in her quest for peace in Assam. She pleaded with the government to call for further negotiations with the outfits. Goswami met with prominent ULFA cadres in Guwahati jail to secure their approval for negotiation. She also urged the government to reconsider ULFA's demand for a UN representative to be present in peace meetings. However, the government rejected both demands. In an interview with Nava Thakuria, Indira

Goswami said that *“the issue of sovereignty per se should not be seen as a precondition....I understand that he(Prime Minister) will have to find out some middle path and some solution after consulting all parties and experts. However, without the sovereignty issue, the ULFA leaders are unlikely to come”*.(Thakuria 2005)<sup>62</sup>. Despite the challenges, Goswami worked tirelessly to keep the peace negotiations alive, and her requests were often granted due to her non-political background and the respect she had earned from her career and concern for the citizens of Assam. Her continuous efforts for peace settlement in the northeast compelled the government to seek solutions to the ongoing challenges in Assam. She claimed that, *“the government should listen to the boys. Why have they taken to the path of violence? They are our boys, with guns in their hands. We have maintained the armed struggle for the last quarter of a century. Therefore, we cannot simply ignore them”*<sup>63</sup> Although the government and the cadres had accepted her many times, she was aware that her actions were limited to the negotiation table and that the urge for peace settlement was on the parties involved to consider. At this point, a consultative organization was formed with 11 members who were mainly civil society activists. This group was known as the People’s Consultative Group, and ULFA cadres accepted it as a representative of their demands in front of the government. This was the first time when the cadres of ULFA had accepted the views of civil society. It was necessary, especially in the case of sovereignty, to consider the opinions of every section of society. This was also helpful for the cadres, as they did not have to negotiate directly with the government.

The PCG is the most significant civil society organization that has attempted to bring both the government and cadres to the negotiating table. However, both parties failed to come to any concrete solution. The members of PCG found it challenging to cooperate with both parties as they were active with their respective atrocities during the negotiation period. The then-defence minister of India, Pranab Mukherjee, believed that there were several individualistic motives behind PCG's cooperation with the government and the outfits, and that it lacked legitimacy. The members of PCG belonged to different parts of society, which was controversial to

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<sup>62</sup> <https://indiatogether.org/assam-women>( accessed on 23 rd June 2020)

<sup>63</sup> <https://indiatogether.org/assam-women> ( accessed on 23 rd June 2020)

the government, as their views could not be framed under one umbrella. The government disliked the involvement of a third party in the negotiation process, and the bypassing the role of the civil society in this regard, was a hindrance in establishing peace. The outfits found it difficult to communicate with civil societies because of their community and ethnic barriers. The civil societies faced mistrust from both parties, which was unfavourable for any permanent solution. As the government wanted direct involvement of the outfits in the negotiation talks, and vice versa, the situation was at a stalemate.

The situation in Assam deteriorated with the brutal killing of Hindi-speaking Biharis by ULFA cadres. These Biharis had migrated from different parts of India and had been living in Assam for over a century. The Inter-Services Intelligence agencies of Pakistan made serious efforts to keep the ULFA insurgents away from negotiations and peace talks offered by the government or any such rehabilitation facilities. This astonished Goswami, who believed in her negotiating approach towards the cadres. In a press report, she mentioned a meeting with Paresh Barua, who claimed that he had the will to collaborate with any community or country. However, the Indian government continued with the process of negotiations with the cadres, offering them safe passage from any country to India for direct communication and peace negotiations. The then Home Secretary, V.K. Duggal, openly invited the cadres to come forward with their demands and settlement issues. This was the government's strategy to show cadres that the citizens of northeast India were the top priority and deserved a peaceful state to live in. Even the armies extended their hands to form a communication medium between the cadres and the government.

However, it was later discovered that the ULFA cadres had their own plans to execute against the government, which resulted in them losing the support of the majority of Assamese people. The surrendered ULFA, also known as SULFA, who had cooperated with the government in counterinsurgency operations, became serious targets of the remaining ULFA militants, who maintained a constant connection with terrorism, politics, and crime. For decades, the ULFA cadres have been using the porous borders of north-eastern India to maintain their international connections and keep the internal tensions high. This is a clear indication that Assam and other north-eastern states are not safe enough and require constant monitoring by strengthening the security framework.

In the case of Nagaland, the Naga National Council challenged the government and declared independence before India gained its independence. Since the British policy was to keep tribes away from the mainland to prevent them from participating in the freedom movement, it was seen as their legitimate right to claim independence and establish their own parallel government. The Naga Club, a civil society organization composed of elites and policy makers of the Naga tribe, initiated the proposal to keep Nagaland separate from mainland India. Since 1929, the entire Naga tribe has remained secluded and enjoyed the privilege of running their own government under British administration. However, this has led to a lack of progress since independence and is the source of all the troubles in the region. The Naga National Council's first initiative was to gather Naga tribes from all other states of the northeast and create their own sovereign Nagalim or Greater Nagaland. This demand remains the foremost issue and the main reason for all discrepancies in the region. Angami Zapu Phizo, who consistently fought for independence and sovereignty, led this initiative. In 1947, Phizo appealed to the British government to establish an interim government for almost ten years, after which the Naga tribe could choose their own government. Phizo's actions turned this civil society organization into a rebel outfit, imbuing its members with the idea of independence.

The same proposal was transferred to the new independent government of India. Nevertheless, due to government's refusal to all demands of NNC, the paths of negotiations were all shut. The Hydari Agreement initiated by the then Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari was to break this deadlock. The Naga National Council declared the independence of Nagas and their right to formulate their own government with full safeguard of their rights. The NNC accepted the terms with a specified period of ten years and an extension according to the free will of the Nagas. At the end of the ten-year tenure, the proposal for the formation of a Federal Government of Nagaland was initiated by the NNC. The government of India proposed the sixth schedule for the Nagas, which provided for the establishment of Autonomous District Councils for the tribal communities of northeast India with an open plebiscite for an independent Nagaland. The Naga National Council (NNC) believed that the majority of Nagas supported the creation of an independent state. However, the Election Commission rejected the proposal, citing difficulties in reaching the remote Naga tribes during the election. Consequently, NNC cadres



manipulated the votes, which were deemed unacceptable by the government regarding independence. In response, the Nagas boycotted the government in every possible way. The church intervened as a negotiator to help resolve the conflict between the government and the NNC cadres. In 1957, the Federal Government of Nagaland negotiated with the government of India, with the church acting as an intermediary, with the primary objective of opposing violence. The second election occurred with almost the entire participation of the Naga tribe, and a faction of the NNC approached the government of India with a proposal to approve independent Nagaland by considering the constitution.

However, the issues remained unsettled, and the resentment continued. In 1958, the Liaison Committee was formed to find a permanent solution to this issue. This resulted in the formation of the Sixteen-Point Demand, which aimed to establish Nagaland as a state under the union of India. The demand was finally approved in 1959, and it became known as the Delhi Agreement, with certain modifications made to the demands. This helped in the formation of the state of Nagaland within the jurisdiction of the Indian union, which also guaranteed non-interference in the culture, tradition, rituals, ownership, and transfer of land unless the majority of the tribe refused it in the Nagaland Legislative Assembly. However, this negotiation bypassed the Naga's dream to build Nagalim, incorporating Nagas from the other adjacent states. Thus, the NNC, under the strong leadership of Phizo in 1961, came back with its demands, and the mediator was the London-based missionary, Reverend Michael Scott. The government took the initiative to negotiate to stop the ongoing hostilities, which was directly declined by Phizo residing in London at that time as the terms weren't satisfactory to the issue of Greater Nagalim. The militant control of the ongoing hostilities became an essential decision, and no permanent solution was seen on any side. The civil life was extremely disturbed, disrupting the peace situations of the other tribal inhabited areas of the northeast.

Civil society participation was again a necessary need for the civilians of the northeast. The Council of Nagaland Baptist Churches, precisely CNBC, took the initiative of a ceasefire agreement of the outfits with the government in 1964. This was supported by the chief minister of Assam and the civil society chiefs who ensured the implementation of the peace agreement, withdrawing militants and

hostilities on both sides. After several rounds of discussions between the government and the outfit generals, a rigid understanding was reached regarding the unification of Nagaland with India as a union territory with several special characteristics that were absent in the case of any other state in the region. However, Nagaland's idea of sovereignty was quite different from that of the other states, especially concerning the Indian government. They demanded a separate constitution with their own government, which was difficult for the Indian government to accept. The FGN rejected the idea of the government making Nagaland a union territory of India, and peace missions were initiated because of such resentment. During the negotiations, the Naga outfit sought to have the freedom to choose their own laws to govern their state and interests, while the government tried to find ways to settle the dispute and improve relations for political gain, and to satisfy the aspirations of the Naga citizens to gain their support in elections. Unfortunately, neither party was able to maintain stability and uphold the results of the peace mission. The Naga outfits continued to demand their rights through peaceful means, which proved to be an extremely difficult challenge for the Indian government to meet.

Negotiations between the government and the Naga outfits have often failed to reach a permanent peaceful settlement, leaving the negotiators feeling helpless and becoming a soundingboard for complaints from both sides. Despite this, it is always a positive step when either party takes the initiative to engage in negotiations. However, meeting the demands of both sides is a difficult task, and as a result, the parties involved often lose faith in the mediators. Nonetheless, the need for a permanent solution requires continued negotiations, and both the government and outfits have revisited their demands. The second round of negotiations began in 1966 and although the proposed solutions did not fully satisfy the Naga insurgents, the Congress government consoled them with a constitutional amendment as a way towards a Naga solution. During this time, intertribal rivalries led to the fragmentation of the NNC, which was not conducive to the political climate in India. The 1971 liberation war in Bangladesh and India's active participation in it further distracted the government from the Naga uprising.

India's collaboration with Bangladesh during the war caused the Naga outfits to lose their safe haven in Bangladesh. The Indian government's counterinsurgency policies

in Nagaland were severe and involved strategies such as blocking communication routes between the Naga outfits and Chinese/Pakistani outfits, uprooting major guerrilla squads from the Naga hills, constant negotiation with tribal chiefs and civilians to pressure cadres to surrender, instigating controversial issues to push outfits into internal fragmentation, and providing significant developmental funds to Nagaland to prevent any accusations. After Pakistan's defeat, the Naga rebels had to rely on China for training and arms. However, the church, acting as a mediator, intervened to establish peace. This led to the creation of a Liaison Committee composed of representatives from both the Naga outfits and the Indian government in Delhi. Eventually, the signing of the Shillong Accord in 1975 determined the final settlement.

Both before and after the accord, there were crackdowns on Nagaland's civil society, and the issues of independence and complete sovereignty remained unresolved. Instead, the government offered the rebels the opportunity to discuss any issue except independence, turning the accord into a negotiation for surrender by the rebels. During this period, the NSCN was formed, aiming for a greater Nagaland and using violence to advance its demands against the government. To address this, the Council of Naga Baptist Church called for negotiations between the government and the outfit's representatives, inviting the participation of various organizations, such as the Nagas, Naga student federation, people's movement for human rights, the Naga women's organization, Naga HoHo, Naga Vigil, and others working towards a settlement. They were brought together onto one platform to consolidate their demands for the betterment of the situation. This move helped to put an end to ongoing disputes between the government and the rebels, with the primary objective being the unification of all Naga rebel groups to achieve peace with the government. In November 1997, about 120,000 Christians in Nagaland ensured their commitment to the establishment of peace, understanding, and cooperation.

CNBC organized a similar meeting again in 2009 for the establishment of peace and security. The church played an active role in promoting peace talks between the then Prime Minister I.K. Gujral and the NSCN to address their demands and strategize for long-lasting peace and stability. The church even took into account the perspectives of insurgents from other northeastern states. However, despite ongoing negotiations,

the government extended its ceasefire agreement without addressing critical issues such as the integration of Naga-inhabited areas or the question of self-rule.

Thus, the situation remained intense, with internal clashes between Naga outfit factions and the government dealing with both issues severely. Civil society organizations failed to communicate effectively with the outfits, and lacked civilian cooperation in peace initiatives, making negotiations with the government difficult. The primary concern of the Naga civil society organization was to settle disputes among the outfits first, and then with the government. Consequently, the ceasefire, initially limited to Nagaland, was extended in 2001 to include Naga inhabited areas of other northeastern states of India, which received a negative response from Assam, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh. To handle the disputes, the government of India was forced to coordinate meetings with the chief ministers of the individual northeastern states, particularly the ones with the most protests, and subsequently limited the ceasefire to Nagaland territory. However, the Naga outfits opposed this decision, and the issue of the ceasefire remained unresolved. Most discussions, meetings, and conferences regarding peace negotiations were held outside India, with only one taking place in Delhi in 2003.

The two major issues that remained at the forefront were territoriality and sovereignty. These controversial issues have always hindered the establishment of peace or any permanent solution. Instead, they have slowly created situations that could potentially destabilize the entire northeast region. The issue of forming *greater Nagalim* implied that all the other northeastern states would become a minority, losing their identity as sovereign states with territorial integrity. As this issue was entirely domestic, it was difficult for the international community to intervene. Finally, the government acknowledged that restoring the internal self-determination of Nagaland, as a separate and independent entity outside of Indian territory, was a remote possibility. However, the government proposed several structural arrangements to address the situation. Both the government and the NSCN leaders recognized that an independent Nagaland was a far-fetched dream.

Therefore, in order to hold a comprehensive dialogue, the civil society of Nagaland began involving all the factions of Nagaland. The entire civil society believed that

the internal disputes amongst the factions needed to be resolved first, before cooperative issues could be brought forward. In March 2009, a platform was created for the reconciliation of the factions of Nagaland, which resulted in a collective bargaining position for the Naga-Indo political talks. With these constant initiatives of cooperation, the NSCN finally cooperated with the Indian government, which was quite controversial for the media, as they hardly portrayed it in their actions. However, with the change of scenario and the change of government, the picture of northeast India has changed in due course with the acceptance of democracy. In the prospect of peace, the impact of trouble has seen a decreasing rate. The main objective of the government is to increase the integration of the north-eastern states with the Southeast Asian states, which in due course of time decreases conflicting situations and helps to establish peace in the north-eastern states of India.

Mizoram got its independence in the year 1947. It had several options: to remain in India, be a part of the British authority, join Burma, or declare itself as an independent state. The Mizo community was in a dilemma of whether to be a part of India or an independent state. In such a situation, a committee was formed with the cooperation of the constitutional assembly. The committee, coordinated by Gopinath Bardoloi, eventually cooperated with the tribes to select their options. The committee demanded the integration of the Mizo communities and termed their territory as Mizo rather than Lushai hills, where their actual residence is. They also demanded special privileges for the tribes to have their own internal administration and proper financial assistance from the government. It was also raised that the Mizos differed from every tribal community of India, which is quite familiar with that of Burmese tribes. Thus, integrating the Mizo community with the Indian Territory would turn the tribes into a minority community. To restore their rights, the United Mizo Freedom Organization was formed in 1947. By then, the entire Mizo community was suffering from the troubles of their community chieftains. Thus, their main motive was to get a torture-free territory, may it be merged with India or with Burma. However, with the constant dilemma of getting a permanent solution, the year 1958 gave a serious blow to the Mizo community through famine, where thousands of people died a devastating death.

The Assam government refused any kind of cooperation as it had several other responsibilities to take care of, which were quite similar to those of the central government. The Mizo community built their own organization to cope with such a natural calamity, named Mizo National Famine, which later became Mizo National Front with a strong ideology of having an independent state for the Mizos. The year 1960 was a devastating year for the entire Mizo community. Until 1966, in the post-famine period, the Mizo community carried on their insurgency against the government to attain their independence as a separate state, which was difficult for the government to control. Finally, with air attacks by the then Congress government, the insurgents agreed to cooperate with the government. The cadres who had escaped and found safe haven in Bangladesh finally surrendered after the Bangladesh liberation war. However, peace with the Mizos was extremely difficult for the government. The first initiative started in 1972 from MNF, which did not prove to be fruitful, but the government was satisfied enough to see this peace initiative. The next initiative was taken up by MNF in 1976. This was mostly an understanding than any sort of negotiations or agreement. The leader of the Mizos, Laldenga, coordinated these negotiations. In 1977, the government found him to be untrustworthy by analyzing his demands.

The Assam government refused to cooperate with the Mizo community, citing several other responsibilities that were similar to those of the central government. In response, the Mizo community formed their own organization, the Mizo National Famine, which later became the Mizo National Front with a strong ideology of achieving independence as a separate state for the Mizos. The year 1960 was a devastating one for the entire Mizo community, and until 1966, in the post-famine period, the Mizo community continued their insurgency against the government to attain their independence. This proved difficult for the government to control, and finally, with air attacks by the then Congress government, the insurgents agreed to cooperate with the government. Cadres who had escaped and found safe haven in Bangladesh finally surrendered after the Bangladesh liberation war. However, achieving peace with the Mizos proved to be an extremely difficult task for the government. The first initiative for peace was started in 1972 by the MNF, but it did not prove fruitful. Nonetheless, the government was satisfied to see this peace initiative. The next initiative was taken up by the MNF in 1976, which was mostly

an understanding rather than any sort of negotiation or agreement. The leader of the Mizos, Laldenga, coordinated these negotiations, but the government found him to be untrustworthy in 1977 after analyzing his demands.

In 1978, Laldenga proposed that the Mizos surrender their arms in exchange for statehood. However, the cadres did not find this proposal rational. In 1979, a new round of cooperation was initiated when Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India. Under her supervision, a cooperation agreement was finalized that took into consideration the demands of the Mizo community. The government granted Mizoram statehood and established a separate state university, but all other demands made by Laldenga as the representative of the Mizos were rejected. Despite this, the Mizo community continued their demands through insurgency, but the army pressure launched by the government in 1982 finally settled the disputes. The church played a strong role as a mediator, and the Mizo Accord was signed, which was accepted to the entire community. Like the Mizos, many non-Mizo tribes, such as the Hamars and Reangs, attempted to establish their own states under their own sovereign authority. However, the government did not consider any of their demands, but both the state and central government worked to safeguard their culture and traditions.

### **Conclusion-**

Concisely, it can be said that students are not the only ones who actively participate in establishing peace and security in the north-eastern states. It has been observed that several student organizations have turned into insurgent outfits, creating threats for both citizens and the government. The book "The Bag" by Arup Kumar Dutta provides clear evidence of how a student slowly turned into a dangerous representative of ULFA under pressure<sup>64</sup>. Almost all tribal communities in the northeast have their own outfits representing their needs and demands, but the majority have turned against the government and prioritized their own purposes. These outfits often have strong bonds with other tribal outfits and feel safe in being in insurgent camps in other north-eastern states. The Assam literary society mainly composed of intellectuals, hardly cared about development and sparked ethnic riots

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<sup>64</sup> Arup Kumar Dutta *The Bag: A Novel* , Niyogi Books Private Limited, 2018

in many parts of Assam, pressuring the government to make Assamese the official language. Thus, not much effectiveness can be seen from the intellectuals of Assam in controlling the situation in a peaceful manner, and the entire community has steadily turned into an insurgent outfit.

When mentioning the civil society, it is necessary to mention the Church, which has often acted as a negotiator between the government and the insurgents to spread the ideologies of peace and cooperation. The Baptist Church had a significant impact on the northeast during the British period, leading to a predominantly Christian population in the region. The Church also played a key role in educating the tribal communities. While some may have viewed Christianity as a monopoly of European culture, the contributions of the Church to the region cannot be overlooked. The Church played a crucial role in settling the Naga insurgents with the Indian government, which helped in restoring their traditions and culture. Although civil society initiatives aimed at peace processes may not have been successful in bridging the gap in some cases, they were helpful to the government in maintaining control over the situation.

The People's Consultative Group of ULFA or the Naga People's Convention tried hard to cooperate with the government to make the states insurgent-free and establish peace. Better way of saying it: The Naga Mothers Association has also been a strong organization in bridging the gap between the government and outfits, similar to the Naga Women's Union of Manipur. Civil society organizations have taken up several issues, such as anti-alcohol initiatives, initiatives against increasing HIV rates, illiteracy, and human rights violations against women and children, demonstrating that their initiatives extend beyond insurgency. The main motive was not confined within the communities but extended to almost all the states of northeast India. Integrating communities was also a major initiative, but besides this sole issue of integration and settlement of peace; civil society initiatives were far-reaching and successful to a certain extent.

Civil society organizations, in addition to restoring peace and stability, have also focused on creating a violence-free and dispute-free northeast. They have cooperated with the government to prevent brutal murders of army personnel by insurgents and



mass killings in the name of independence. While many of these initiatives remained unfruitful, their cooperation has made the government aware of the upcoming strategies of the outfits. These organizations have also helped the government in surrendering cadres and providing rehabilitation facilities to bring peace to the society. The organizations have strongly protested against the ruthless killings of the outfits by holding protest marches and filing cases against them. Initially, the entire Assam and surrounding states cooperated with ULFA cadres in bringing independence and securing basic rights for the Assamese people. However, over time, as corruption became their basic ideology and the main targets of the cadres shifted, the civilians revolted against them and cooperated with the government in making the cadres surrender. Additionally, civilians have collectively aided the intelligence agencies of the government.

In the present scenario, it has become a norm for the insurgents to cause disruption during Independence Day celebrations in Assam. However, the civilians are vigilant and make the administration aware of the insurgents' intentions beforehand. The government's inefficiency in providing adequate resources and opportunities to the citizens has been a major reason behind the insurgents' revolutionary ideology. Although this is a valid concern, resorting to extreme violence that affects the civil life is unacceptable to the citizens. The civil society organizations acknowledge that an eye for an eye approach will not bring peace to the region and thus strive to act as mediators between the government and the outfits. It's important to note that while civil society organizations may not have a magic solution to restore peace in the region, their direct participation and initiatives have acted as icebreakers between both parties. These initiatives have made both the government and the outfits aware of their individual grudges, and have sometimes even brought them on one platform. However, in some cases, the involvement of civil society organizations has instigated internal conflicts and made the situations more vulnerable. Nonetheless, their efforts towards peace have been significant in maintaining official policies and, in certain cases, unofficial approaches.

The government's decisions regarding negotiations were sometimes unsatisfactory, such as with the Shilling Accord. Despite this, the bridge builders made significant

efforts to negotiate with the government on behalf of the outfits. Operation Rhino, which the government coordinated with the assistance of civil society, aimed primarily to bring the cadres together for discussion. Similarly, the government's decision to fragment the outfits and weaken their internal strength was met with objection by civil societies who believed it would harm the integration of the entire tribe. In cases where issues revolved around territoriality, negotiations between the government and outfits became a zero-sum game. However, the cooperation and understanding of civil society organizations helped to facilitate constant negotiations from both sides (Nagas and Kukis). There were several instances where civil society initiatives were rejected by the outfits because they did not take into account their demands. Despite the negative effects that peace initiatives had on outfits, the democratic space between the government and outfits expanded. The state and central media also cooperated in establishing the peace process. However, in order to establish peace, both the state and central governments must collaborate, otherwise the contributions of civil society will be in vain. The current government at the center is strongly committed to communicating with militant groups in order to bring peace and settlement to the region. The home minister is leading efforts to accelerate negotiations. Even with the promotion of tourism and the development of communication, the government is actively working to relax restrictions in restricted areas for the greater good of the citizens, by providing more communication and other developmental facilities, which is a bold step. It is hoped that these intentions will lead to an improvement in the situation in northeast India.

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## CHAPTER -5

### CONCLUSION-

*Jo taur*

*hay*

*duniyaka ,*

*Us taur se*

*bolo,*

*Behron ka*

*ilaqa hay,*

*Zara zor se bolo.....RAHAT INDORI*

Northeast India is known as the land of the 'Seven Sisters', comprising of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram, and recently added Sikkim. The region is characterized by 250 tribal communities and more than 175 languages. It is connected to mainland India through a narrow strip of land, the Siliguri Corridor, or Chicken's Neck, which is 22 km long. Strategically, the region shares international borders with neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, China, and Nepal. Hence, it is evident that the cultures, languages, rituals, and traditions that the people of this region follow show similarities with those residing in the Border States.

Unfortunately, the histories, cultures, traditions, and literature of northeast India have often been portrayed as homogenous, is given minimal recognition and their relevance is confined only within the northeast. This reminds us of J. B. Bhattacharjee's work *Roots of Insurgency in Northeast India* (2007), which made generalizations about the 'real' and 'made-up' insurgencies and suggested a homogeneity of troubles in the region. However, some north-eastern writers, such as Indira Goswami, Temsula Ao, Mitra Pukhan, Mamang Dai, Easterine Kire, and Sanjay Hazarika, have provided serious accounts of the troubles faced by the northeast with a strong focus on the initiatives taken by the government for its betterment. The present research seeks to analyze and reinterpret the way northeast

has been historically portrayed to the world. Thus, the study counters the hegemonic discourses that have been instrumental in stereotyping northeast and intends to focus on various individual and peculiar voices emanating in different forms from this region. It intends to take into account both the colonial and post-colonial interpretations of northeast India along with the major initiatives taken by the government in order to improve the Indian economy along with the all-around up gradation of socio, economic and political structures in the northeast.

North-eastern writers from the northeast make a concerted effort to educate mainland authors and citizens about the ground realities of the region. They seek to raise awareness about the military presence, devastation, and severe human rights violations, including criminal atrocities committed by various armed groups that have turned the entire northeast into a hub of corruption, with the government's failure to control the situation. Through their major research works, readers are exposed to the horrors and complexities that often remain obscured by the facade of "heavenly peace." The conflicts and issues facing the people of northeast India have been discussed many times. However, the reluctance of the government and mainland academicians to delve into the grassroots causes of these conflicts has been a significant challenge. Headlines in newspapers, sudden acts of army personnel disrupting fundamental rights, and the problem of homogeneity and indifference towards the people of the northeast only serve to deepen misunderstandings and create false impressions about the region and its people. This has led to a worsening of the conflict situation, with the Indian state suffering the most. It is essential to note that conflicts can never define the identity of a particular state. To address these issues, a proper study and analysis of the roots of the problems must be undertaken.

Therefore, the majority of the problems in northeast India revolve around exaggerations of facts. While reviewing works that deal with the roots of these problems, I have attempted to highlight the source of the acute problems and focused on potential permanent solutions that may advocate for peace in the region. This research takes an analytical, theoretical, and expository approach, including textual interpretations and information available in the public domain, along with analysis given by personalities from different fields in northeast India. The study has illuminated the age-old problems faced by the people of the region, who have

sacrificed their lives for achieving peace and stability, but have only achieved sympathy without a major solution. If we dive into the history of colonial India, when the authorisation of states started under the British administration, we see how the Independence movement of India did not affect the northeast. After India gained independence, there were attempts by the people of Nagaland to secede from India, divided opinions among the people of Mizoram, and strong resistance from groups in Manipur to join the Indian Union. As a result, the administration was compelled to seek a permanent solution to these issues.

Several reorganization procedures for Bengal and Assam in 1874, 1905, and 1911 created immense atrocities, as portrayed by J.B. Bhattacharjee in his book, *"Roots of Insurgency in Northeast India."* Bhattacharjee critically observed that the separation of Assam Division from Bengal in 1874 which included a large indigenous Bengali population. The merging of Garo Hills and Lushai Hills to this province, created the initial pitch for future conflicts in this multi- ethnic and multi-lingual province. Bhattacharjee clarified the after-effects of the partition of Bengal in 1905 and excessive immigration, and how the "*colonization scheme*" continued even after the partition was somewhat balanced. He argued that the British colonialists planted the seeds of future discord, which is an important root of insurgency in the post-colonial period<sup>65</sup>. However, Bhattacharjee's observation has loopholes. He only highlights colonization policy as responsible for the initial disturbances, without portraying the sources of the Naga conflict and Gopinath Bordoloi's attempt to keep Assam in India as the basic history of insurgency development.

To gain a clearer understanding of the facts and fiction surrounding insurgency in northeast India, we can turn to two other critical observers in this field, Sanjay Hazarika and Subir Bhaumik. In his book *"Writing on the Wall"* (2008), Sanjay Hazarika extends his critical observations beyond the colonial stage to the post-colonial stage. He analytically traces how Gopinath Bordoloi played a crucial role in shaping Assam. Hazarika notes that Bordoloi's greatest test came in 1946 when the Cabinet Mission was mandated to hammer out a compromise formula for Indian

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<sup>65</sup> Bhattacharjee J.B. *Roots of Insurgency in Northeast India* Akansha Publishing,2007

independence. After weeks of discussion, the mission announced its plan, which would have handed Assam on a platter to future East Pakistan by clubbing Muslim-majority Bengal with Hindu-dominant Assam. However, Bordoloi and his team, backed by Mahatma Gandhi, campaigned firmly against this proposal, even against Jawaharlal Nehru and Patel. Consequently, the mission collapsed. Furthermore, Bordoloi was the person who drafted the Sixth Schedule, which provided legal protection for the traditional and political rights of small hill groups<sup>66</sup>. For a thorough analysis of the roots of insurgency, we can also look to Subir Bhaumik's works.

Subir Bhaumik's book *"Troubled Periphery"* (2015) sheds light on the persistent conflicts that arose since the British partitioned the land, creating problems related to language, culture, tradition, ethnicity, and development. Bhaumik critically analyzes these issues, but the book falls short in providing a thorough examination of the crisis during World War II and the impact of the Japanese invasion on Nagaland. In contrast, *"Love in the Time of Insurgency"* (2005) by renowned author Birendra Bhattacharya, provides a more nuanced exploration of the Nagas' differing views on seceding from India. Bhattacharya skilfully portrays the contrasting perspectives of Rishang and militant leader Videssellie. He convincingly answers pertinent questions about the secession movement, making his work a valuable addition to the literature on this topic. *'Are we Nagas a separate nation or not?' 'No!'* Rishang said, *'the Nagas are as much Indians as the Assamese or Manipuris. We live in a common territory and under the same administration, and share the same economy. Our present and future are bound up with the fate of the country as much as our past was.'*<sup>67</sup>

In the captivating work of fiction, two characters with opposing views engage in a dialogue to uncover the root of their differences and the truth behind their intentions. During this conversation, Rishang questions Videssellie about the benefits he can provide to his people in exchange for resorting to violent acts. In response, Videssellie states:

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<sup>66</sup> The Indian Journal of Political Science  
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<sup>67</sup> <https://www.friedeye.com/bookclub/love-in-the-time-of-insurgency-book-review/>



“I have nothing to give to the people at this moment except freedom.’ “And what is this thing called freedom?” asked Rishang  
 ...“I want an independent Nagaland where a Naga can feel that he is somebody and can be his own master. Life will then be worth living.”  
 ...”You are obsessed with the idea of a separate Naga Nation”, Rishang said. “The Nagas are a distinct group no doubt, but they belong to a great family, I mean the Indian Nation.”<sup>68</sup> .<sup>68</sup> .

The tone of aggression in the post-independence era is also evident in Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wormwood* (2011). However, it does not entirely align with Rishang's voice. Instead, we find strong support on the side of Videssellie. The Nagas are represented here as supporting a separate nation and expressing discontentment when Nagaland is not separated from India at the time of Independence. When the protagonist Mose, the child of the conflict, tries to explain to his grandmother Khrienuo that Nagaland cannot be separated from India, she responds incredulously, “We have never been a part of India before. Why should we join them now?”<sup>69</sup> The anger of the people is palpable when they are tortured for their demands without proper understanding.

“That man Nehru”, the man had shouted, “Do you know what Nehru said when he got his copy of the Naga plebiscite? He shook his fist and shouted, ‘Whether heaven falls or India goes to pieces and blood runs red in the country, I don’t care. Nagas will not be allowed to become independent.’ How can we live under such a man? Can we live under such a government?”<sup>70</sup> .

The question whether people of the northeast region should be a part of India or not, is the source of confusion. It resulted in continuous violence that jeopardizes the peace of this beautiful, yet unexplored paradise. The seed of conflict sown by the British, and exacerbated by the Japanese, has now grown into a fully-fledged menace, with its poisonous branches spreading day by day. Sanjeeb Kakoty provides a valuable analytical observation in his essay *Tree Sans Roots? The Story of the*

<sup>68</sup> Bhattacharyya Birendra Kumar, *Love in the time of Insurgency* Katha Books, 2005(pg 205-206)

<sup>69</sup> Bhattacharyya Birendra Kumar, *Love in the time of Insurgency* Katha Books, 2005( pg 160-161)

<sup>70</sup> Bhattacharyya Birendra Kumar, *Love in the time of Insurgency* Katha Books, 2005( pg-200-206)

*Khasi-Jaintia Borderlands*," where he examines the underlying causes of conflicts and disturbances in the northeast region. He delves into how the demarcation of land and hills was poorly executed, leading to the present-day reality of flawed international borders.

He examines with great detail the circumstances surrounding the Mon Khamer group in Meghalaya, who have resided in the hills and cultivated the valleys below for years, only to discover suddenly that their cultivated lands have now become a part of East Pakistan. Additionally, he considers the plight of the 34 houses in the village of Amlempiang, Meghalaya, of which only 5 remain in India, with the rest 29 now located in Bangladesh. Furthermore, he observes how pillar no. 1267 at Lyngkhat has created a division between two halves of a football. He observes how the avarice of the border demarcation contributes to the chaos, as he listens to the aggrieved man who recalls, "*recounted the time when the survey team sought a bribe of Rs 20,000 ...in order to bestow to the villagers the right to till their own lands for perpetuity. Their inability to pay them the demanded amount led to the peculiar demarcation that split the village, and divested people of their lands.*"<sup>71</sup>

This illustrates the multiple and complex factors that underlie the insurgency, rather than a single cause. The frequent conflicts create a perpetual state of uncertainty and danger for the people of the region. In addition to political and historical factors, there is also a sense of alienation felt by the people of the northeast due to their distinct cultural identity from mainland India.

The 'scheme of colonization' perpetuated feelings of alienation among the people of the region. It is the missionaries who offered relief and solace through religious means. The history of insurgency in the region has largely centred on issues of integration and alienation. The process of integration began with the arrival of the British in the northeast, who established their supremacy through force. The colonial authority viewed the region as strategically important due to its proximity to Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, and Myanmar, which make up approximately 99 per cent of its international borders. Additionally, the northeast's abundant minerals, oil, timber, and other resources made it an attractive target for colonial expansion.

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<sup>71</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/38823219/Border\\_ii](https://www.academia.edu/38823219/Border_ii) (accessed on 6th January 2020)

According to Ratnadip, a prominent journalist from the northeast, the region's geopolitics is closely linked to its internal politics, and the state's performance has been almost non-existent.

The idea of development in the region is often regarded as a myth, despite the government's promises and initiatives. Each state in the northeast has significant differences in language, culture, rituals, and politics, which makes it challenging to address their problems collectively. Therefore, attempts to solve all these issues on a single platform may not yield the desired results. This problem has been persistent since the post-colonial era, and the changing political landscape has made it worse by exposing it through social media. When the media manipulates the truth, it creates an environment where corruption thrives, miscommunication increases, and disconnection grows stronger. The development and nurture of insurgency in the northeast is a complex issue that requires in-depth discussion. Ethnic insurgencies, like those in Afghanistan and other states or areas, are very specific and have similarities with the north-eastern region. In the beginning, small clans in the northeast were represented by separate outfits, with a population of around 15,000 people per clan, and each outfit consisted of approximately 50 people. The question arises, how can a relatively small clan sustain an armed outfit with proper military training to represent their aggression towards the government and civil society?

The government has been working on these gaps for decades, as they involve India's international relations, especially with South East Asian states. However, the policies that the government has implemented for the betterment of the northeast, such as the Look East policy, have remained as promises and have not been fully realized. While there have been some improvements in basic needs such as food, shelter, electricity, and water facilities in remote areas of the northeast, advancements have occurred in bits and pieces, and policies have not been fully developed. The government has portrayed an absurd idea to citizens that Assam could never be like any European state, despite the lack of infrastructure development. Due to a lack of connectivity, the cost of everything in the northeast is quite high, and the productivity of the north-eastern states remains low. Furthermore, the constant influx of people crossing the unprotected borders of Bangladesh has been a persistent problem in the northeast for decades.

India's policies have made the northeast region extremely vulnerable and volatile. Dr

Indraneel Bhaumik from Tripura University's Economics department has discussed a different aspect of Tripura, specifically how the state's development has decreased political turmoil. The people of Tripura initially lacked basic living rights, which correspondingly changed with economic development. Citizens of Tripura are now receiving basic facilities, and while the aspect of development is relative, if we compare the situation to before the Manik Sarkar government, there has been significant improvement. This can be considered an absolute improvement compared to other states in the northeast. According to statistics, Tripura has experienced the highest economic growth in comparison to other states in the northeast region. However, the state has also faced the devastating effects of insurgency, which has left it in a state of torment until a change in political power was seen. In recent times, the resurgence of insurgency has been linked to the complex issue of illegal immigration from Bangladesh. This calls for the tightening of border security and the development of foreign policies, particularly towards Southeast Asian states. Suraj, an associate professor at the Department of Political Science at Dhanamanjuri University in Manipur, shares a similar perspective. He highlights the delay in the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Project, which could have been a strong means of connectivity, due to Myanmar's involvement. Despite the opening of the Indo-Myanmar border trade at Moreh-Tamu in 1995, there has been no significant change in the state's economy. The first phase of the Look East Policy (LEP) brought about high expectations, particularly with the opening of the so-called Eastern Gate. However, it is only recently that some positive changes have been observed in the direction of the LEP/Act East Policy (AEP) with a realization on the part of policymakers regarding the ground realities of the region. For many decades, New Delhi has been unable to go beyond a security mindset in dealing with any issues related to the region, resulting in a vicious circle of law and order issues associated with AFSPA. Therefore, trade with Myanmar, particularly from the north-eastern region, is minimal in the absence of proper connectivity. Most of India's trade with Myanmar is done via the sea.

The northeast has been limited to border trade with Myanmar, and unfortunately heavily favours Myanmar. However, in recent years there has been progress in terms of law and order, as well as economic growth, although the oppressive AFSPA law still remains. India is actively working towards strengthening its ties with Myanmar,

with initiatives such as the Land Visa system and accelerating connectivity projects like Trans-Asian railways and Trilateral Highways, which will improve connectivity with the region's roads. Despite these developments, the northeast is still playing catch up to the rest of the country due to its geographical isolation and the government's tendency to view issues in the region only through a security lens. The perspective of the authorities in Delhi and the national media of always viewing any issue related to the region through a security lens has contributed to a feeling of alienation among the people of the northeast. Furthermore, expressing grievances against the system has often been labelled as anti-national, which is a significant mistake that only serves to further alienate the people.

Sanjib Banik, a faculty member at Tripura University, shares similar beliefs with Dr. Indraneel Bhaumik about Tripura. According to Sanjib, Tripura's insurgency began in 1980 during the Manikya Dynasty. The state's economy was mainly based on shifting agriculture and suffered from revenue deficiencies, leading to the hiring of Bengali (then Bangladeshi) agricultural techniques. The dynasty administration favoured Bengali technology and farmers, causing insecurity among the Bhumiputras of Tripura, who eventually rebelled. The acquisition of tribal land by Bengali-speaking migrants also fuelled the rebellion. Additionally, the official language of Tripura, Kok-Borok, was changed to Bengali over time, and the tribal language was relegated to secondary status. Most tribal people are illiterate and lack government employment, with Bengalis holding higher positions in government jobs. The Gana Mukti Parishad was formed to advocate for land reforms, and the Communist Party of India focused on grassroots issues, gaining support from tribes who felt deprived of their rights throughout India. The political agenda of the Communist Party gradually gained a strong foothold in Tripura. Today, there have been significant improvements in the state's law and order and economic growth.

Beforehand, Congress was the sole power of the central and state governments that tried hard to win the hearts of the north-eastern people. However, with their support for Bangladeshi immigrants in the 1970s, they lost their hold in Tripura. After the 1980s, with Manik Sarkar's cooperation and state police coordination, insurgency was uprooted from Tripura. The government's policies did not work out well in Tripura due to the lack of its own economic stability. The major manufactured goods

of the northeast, such as handicrafts, woven items, teak, tea, and rubber, are exported at much lower values, which cause the manufacturers to be excessively deprived. Tripura is the second-largest manufacturer of synthetic rubber, but it lacks labor, and thus advanced technology needs to be hired from other states, which automatically slows down production and makes it more expensive.

The major focus of the government lacks in educating the labor force in Tripura. The state's limited connectivity with the rest of India has made it unproductive. Perhaps the biggest hurdle for any policy to be effective in the region is the non-reconciliation of issues involving identities and citizenships. Significant communities such as Bengali Muslims, Hindu Bengali 'Doubtful' voters, Chakmas, Adivasis, and Brus have faced open hostility from the local hierarchical power systems based on questions such as 'who came first' with varied notions of indigenesness. Regarding the issue of well-made roads, which is a significant aspect of the Look East Policy, it has been observed that Arunachal Pradesh is flooded with Chinese goods, and there has been little infrastructure development where half of the state is in favour of China. In this case, improving road connectivity will strengthen their claim towards Arunachal Pradesh. Connecting northeast India with Southeast Asia, which is one of the basic goals of the Look East Policy, became somewhat fruitful when the Indian government initiated car rallies with Southeast Asian states via northeast India. It gave hope to the region to break free from isolation, but due to the lack of road infrastructure facilities, the ultimate target of connecting northeast India has yet to be achieved.

On conducting research on major works in the context of the northeast, particularly in the case of Manipur, Meghalaya, and Tripura, it is clear that the civil society in this region is dissatisfied with the government's attempts to provide them with a peaceful life. There is ample dissatisfaction among the citizens regarding employment, electricity, water, transport, and other aspects. My extensive research has uncovered a striking fact: the troubles and crises of northeast India are portrayed in vastly different ways by the rest of the country. While writers from the region offer a nuanced and firsthand perspective on their struggles, those from mainland India have seldom delved into their issues from a grassroots level. This significant

mental gap has already separated them from the rest of India. In addition to these issues, they feel they are independent of the colonial period and thus have justified points in demanding a separate state, anthem, flag, and constitution. On the other hand, the Indian government has always tried to club the issues in the region as tribal, which has always agitated the situation rather than bringing it to a permanent solution. It is indeed true that the government administration has tried to reach out to the region for decades, but it is evident that no permanent plan has been implemented. The civil society has always been deprived of participation in governmental decisions, and governance, which has always been doubtful to the civilians, is not effective enough to restore peace.

Furthermore, the cooperation of tribes in the border areas of neighbouring states has emboldened them to continue their rebellions. The government has failed to strengthen these border areas, making it easy for rebels to move across. Surrendered militants lack the resources to confront active militants, as the government does not support them. According to prominent individuals in the region, intelligence agencies rarely fulfil their duties and are easily bribed when it comes to economic assistance. After engaging in discussions with individuals from diverse fields in northeast India, it has become evident that the majority of civilians feel exasperated by the government's failure to comprehend the region's challenges and work towards the betterment of its people, instead of merely focusing on securing vote banks.

Infrastructure underdevelopment is affecting every profession in the northeast, and unfortunately, it hasn't been a priority for the government. The extraction of resources from the region has benefited the country's economy, but the states themselves have seen little benefit from it. The inner line permit issue is complex and requires ongoing discussions with civil society to find a solution that satisfies both the government and the tribes. The government must take the work of voluntary peacekeeping organizations seriously, as they have been successful in communicating between the government and the militant outfits. It's been observed that army generals are often forcefully transferred to northeast India, and only a few perform their duties willingly, which has hindered the army's ability to connect with the local people.

This can only be resolved through ongoing discussions that involve an active civil

society. The state's voluntary peace restoration organizations must be taken seriously by the government, as they have always played a strong role in communicating between the groups and the government. It has been noted that army generals are often forcefully transferred to the northeast, and only a few perform their duties willingly. As a result, the military often fails to reach out to the common people.

One cannot bring peace by triggering fear. The northeast is extremely important for the government as it serves as a gateway to Southeast Asian countries and shares the maximum international borders. It is imperative to note that any efforts towards development in south-eastern India must take into account the region's interconnectedness with the northeast. Therefore, several administration officials have highlighted to the government to keep a constant eye on the northeast. Besides, China has already strengthened its foothold in Arunachal Pradesh. News articles clearly reveal that the armies from Chinese jurisdiction have a strong impact on the people residing in the remote villages of the northeast<sup>72</sup>. In case the fire of insurgency continues to burn, it is quite evident that the neighbouring states have always been cooperative, taking advantage of the Indian government's reluctance towards the northeast. In such a situation, if the northeast separates from India and merges into any of the Border States, the territorial integrity of India will surely be severely affected.

My research has aimed to identify the specific areas that require the government's focus for the development of northeast India. Winning the trust and support of the region's tribal communities is crucial for strengthening the nation-building process. It is surprising that despite several initiatives by academics to bring the issues of the northeast to the forefront, much of their work has gone unrecognized and unacknowledged. Moreover, the lack of authenticity in the available data on the region is a significant challenge. Nonetheless, my thesis represents a modest attempt to carry the torch and provide some potential solutions for the government to address the issues of the northeast.

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<sup>72</sup> <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/indias-northeast-most-neglected-says-china/article5883212.ece> (accessed on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2020)



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