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Sociology of Northeast India

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SOCIOLOGY

BLOCK: 2

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

This is the second block of the course titled 'Sociology of Northeast India' offered in M.A. Fourth Semester Sociology Programme of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University. The block consists of six units (Unit 8-13) of the course and mostly gives us an understanding of the contemporary scenerio of the region. By going through this block, we will have an understanding of the various issues and concerns of the region.

Unit 8 explains the meaning of Border dispute and discusses some major border disputes in the region. **Unit 9** discusses an very pertinent issue of the region i.e immigration. By going through this unit, the learners will have an understanding of the issues and concerns relation to the problem of immigration in Northeast India. **Unit 10** discusses the traditional land management system in Northeast India. This unit will enable the learners to have an understanding of the traditional land relations and land holding patterns of Northeast India. **Unit 11** discusses the changing patterns of traditional land holding system. After going through this unit, the learners will be able to critically analyse the changing land holding patterns among the people of Northeast India, issues of land alienation so on and so forth. **Unit 12** will help the learners develop a critical understanding regarding the development discourse in the region. This unit discusses the various issues and concerns pretaining to development of the region and learners will learn how most often than not development has not taken place in the region as it should have. **Unit 13** is the last unit of the course and deals with the State -Society relaionship in the region. The learners will be able to understand the nature of State-Society interaction through the lens of ethnicity.

While going through the units of the block, you will find that unit is further divided into certain sections and sub-sections, wherever necessary, for your better understanding. Again, the units carry certain *activities* after a particular section where needed. These "ACTIVITIES" will provide you the opportunity to practically apply your own thoughts based on the knowledge gained from reading the text in a particular section. Besides, in order to give you additional information on certain relevant topics, you will find a category called "LET US KNOW" after the sections in each unit. Another category that has been included at the end of each section of a particular unit is "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS". The purpose of this category is to help you to asses for yourself as to how thoroughly you have understood a particular section. You may then match your answers with "ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" given at the end of each unit. The section "FURTHER READING" in each unit contains the names of a few books which you might want to consult if you are intereted in learning more elaborately about the concepts discussed in a particular unit. Furthermore, the category called "POSSIBLE QUESTIONS" is intended to give you a hint of the type of questions you are likely to get in the examination.

UNIT 8 : BORDER DISPUTES IN N.E. INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Concept of Border and Territory

8.4 Assam-Nagaland Border Dispute

8.5 Assam-Meghalaya Border Dispute

8.6 Assam-Arunachal Pradesh Border Dispute

8.7 Let Us Sum Up

8.8 Further Reading

8.9 Answers To Check Your Progress

8.10 Model Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will able to-

- describe the concept of Border more elaborately
- describe the concept of Territory
- explain the historicity of border conflicts in North East India
- discuss the Assam-Nagaland Border Dispute
- discuss the Assam-Meghalaya Border Dispute
- discuss the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh Border Dispute.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

Border areas have their own problems and peculiarities and are more often vulnerable to illegal infiltration of population, which adds pressure on their economic and environmental resources. In the previous block we have learnt that the North-East region of India comprises eight states, namely Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim.The people of north east India are largely of Tibeto-Burman/ Mongoloid stock and closer to Southeast Asia than to South Asia. It is ethnically, linguistically and culturally very distinct from the other states of

India. It is interesting to know that the cultural and ethnic diversity per say are not causes for conflict but the process of delineation of state boundaries which ignored the ethnic and cultural specificities in the 1950s, giving rise to discontentment and assertion of one's identity.

After independence, regions across the country started demanding exclusive political spaces so as to protect their respective cultural identities, languages and resources from the influence of outsiders. The same undercurrent was also witnessed in Northeast India with different ethnic groups appealing for a means to maintain their distinct identities. It was a tough ride for the Government of India as there were other politicalsettlements to meet. The States Reorganization Act of 1956, which was the driving force for reorganizing the boundaries of Indian states, saw the creation of separate states in India based on linguistic lines but in the case of Northeast India it was the call for sociocultural identities on the basis of ethnic groupings. In the process of such state-making, borders were drawn to allocate distinctive spaces and places to the people of the states.

It may be recalled that the States Reorganization Commission (1956) had recommended that the other political entities in the Northeast be merged into Assam. The following decades saw a reversal of this recommendation. Not surprisingly, Assam today occupies the central node in these disputes. Nagaland occupies a unique position for different reasons.

In this unit, we shall discuss about Border Disputes in Northeast India which is an issue of serious concerns.

8.3 CONCEPT OF BORDER AND TERRITORY

Borders are geographic boundaries of political entities or legal jurisdictions, such as governments, sovereign states, federated states, and other subnational entities. Borders are established through agreements between political or social entities that control those areas; the creation of these agreements is called boundary delimitation.There are a wide variety of different conceptions of the border and these are subject to continual change, as they have been in the past. Traditionally the border concept has mainly been related to topography, and has been the particular domain of

geography and law, though philosophers and mathematicians have also developed concepts of the border, or more specifically, the limit. The geographical concept of border as first developed in the 19th Century envisages borders as physical and visible lines of separation between political, social and economic spaces, often charged with nationalistic energy.

The concept of border is one of the most overemphasized and controversial topics of political geography. It can be stated that it has become a popular field of study from that aspect. Considering the fact that today's world has been composed of structures called states and areas of sovereignty which have been registered by them, it is understood that the borders are very important elements regarding these sovereignty areas.

The existence of borders has been occasionally discussed and they are certainly one of the most important elements of today's world. It is possible to encounter borders in a wide range from ownership of territory in a small scale to the boundaries of states on a large scale and the borders which separate the areas of sovereignty belonging to the states. Some people consider that border is a concrete and visible physical structure.

In the last decades a historical shift has occurred in academic study, both producing new conceptions of the border and giving the border new and different areas of application. Borders can have political, historical, ethical, psychological and artistic implications and connotations. Borders are increasingly seen as dynamic phenomenon that can emerge, disappear, and re-emerge, as having a transitional character, as being internal zones of negotiation. Borders are no longer necessarily seen as barriers, but are often thought of as points of contact. The spatial turn within the field of cultural studies aims to connect topographical spaces with the medial spaces of culture. The focus has moved to local, urban, intimate and subjective spaces physically distanced from the more traditional borders of nations.

A border is a line that separates the areas of benefit and dominance. Considering another view, borders are proofs that states have sovereignty over an area of land or that they are national markers. They are the indicators of authority, ownership, existence, and property.

Based on the above discussions a border may be:

- Agreed by the countries on both sides
- Imposed by the country on one side
- Imposed by third parties, e.g. an international conference
- Inherited from a former state, colonial power or aristocratic territory
- Inherited from a former internal border, such as within the former Soviet Union
- Never formally defined.

A territory is a portion of terrestrial space envisaged in its relationships with the human groups that occupy it and manage it for the purpose of meeting their needs.Understanding a territory involves evidencing interactions between the different components, rather than considering them as successive layers which, taken as a whole, might be called territory. Human settlements, the variety of projects and enterprises, and the variable ability to reach objectives will, on different scales, shape and develop a territory. The many interactions between different actors following up different or even conflicting strategies contribute to the process whereby territories are formed.

For C. Raffestin, these processes of territorial organization should be analyzed on two distinct levels, which nevertheless interact in their functioning: the level on which societies act on the material substrates of their existence, and the level on which systems of representations are formed. Since it is ideas that pilot human interventions on terrestrial space, the shaping of territory results from a "semiotisation" of a space, which is gradually "translated" and converted into a territory. Thus the territory is a conceptual edifice based on two complementary mainstays, often presented in geography as being antagonistic: the material and the ideational.

Territory is a geographical concept; however, it also contains political denotation. Territory is considered as an integral part of sovereignty: a sovereign state must possess a geographical area on which the sovereign establishes its authority and exercises its power."Territory" with many translations or etymological derivations gave birth to the political technologies used to attempt to constrain sovereignty within confines of land boundaries that the term itself created. The term evolved in geographic and political vocabularies to such a degree that it got grounded in geography and political



theory, rather than the reverse.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How does a border come to exist?

.....

.....

Q 2: What is a territory?

.....

.....

8.4 ASSAM-NAGALAND BORDER DISPUTE

Throughout the plains and right up to the Naga Hills border, transactions between foothill dwellers and the hill people used to take place. And this was formalized by the Ahom king long ago to avoid the depredation of the hill people into the plains. For example, in the foothills of Wancho and Konyak areas, Ahom kings had certain tracts of land called Naga Khat. They were assigned to the Nagas who cultivated betel leaves and areca nuts which would not grow in certain altitudes. So these areas were given in order to contain and also allow them access to the plains for ceremonial trade in places like Sonali and Jorhat markets. Most of the clothes and implements the Wanchos wore earlier were made in the plains of Assam. The seeds of Assam-Nagaland border dispute were sown in this historical arrangement.

The dispute between Assam and Nagaland is currently the most prominent with a history of violent clashes between border communities. Both states have accused each other of illegally occupying each other's territories. Assam claims that more than fifty thousand hectares of its territory has been annexed by Nagaland.With the demand for unification of all Naga inhabited areas in the background, the dispute has acquired an enlarged dimension. On 12 April year?, reminiscent of the June 2001 uprising in Manipur, a 40,000-strong congregation representing various communities in Assam vowed to counter any territory grabbing by the NSCN (IM). The problem is further compounded by the involvement of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants

settled in the area. Assam accuses Nagaland of conniving with these immigrants but Nagaland asks who gave them citizenship.

The present flare up has compelled the Supreme Court to ask the Centre to institute a boundary Commission, although two such previous commissions have failed to settle the dispute. The Sundaram Commission (1971) report, submitted in 1979, was accepted by Assam but rejected by Nagaland. The Shastri Commission (1985), too, could not settle the dispute. Further, there has been a battle between law and politics. Whereas Nagaland prefers a dialogue from a "political and historical perspective," Assam insists on a "constitutionally defined boundary" and hence on abiding by the decision of the Supreme Court.

Referring to ethnic contiguity across the borders, Nagaland contends that the 1925 notification transferring forests from Nagaland to Assam was biased, and they ought to have been returned in 1947 as promised by the then Governor of Assam, Akbar Hydari. This issue was raised at the time of signing the 16 Point Agreement in 1960 that created Nagaland. Nagaland's complaint is that the political promise has not been converted into a legal right. If political principles are to claim ascendancy over legal rights, Assam might have to concede to Nagaland; by the same logic however, decades after the promise was made, when the political landscape has itself changed, Nagaland will also have to appreciate that no political principles possess unquestionable validity.

Assam claims that more than fifty thousand hectares of its territory has been annexed by Nagaland. Whereas the Nagaland State Act of 1962 had defined its borders, according to the 1925 notification when Naga Hills and Tuensang area were integrated into a new administrative unit and made an autonomous area. Nagas did not accept the boundary delineation and demanded that Nagaland should comprise the erstwhile Naga Hills and Naga dominated areas in North Cachar and Nagaon districts, which were part of the Naga territory.

Assam and Nagaland share a 434-km boundary. Assam says that Nagaland has been encroaching upon over 66,000 hectares in Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong districts. This includes over 42,000

hectares in Golaghat alone. The encroached area also includes over 80 per cent of reserved forests. Assam says that Nagaland has set up three civil subdivisions on Assam territory. Nagaland, on the other hand, insists that more tracts under Assam "occupation" belong to Nagaland. The NSCN (IM), incidentally, wants the entire Assam tract south of the Guwahati-Dibrugarh railway track in these four districts in "Greater Nagalim".

Since Nagaland did not accept its notified borders, tensions between Assam and Nagaland soon flared up resulting in the first border clashes in 1965 at Kakodonga Reserve Forest. Since then, violent clashes along the Assam-Nagaland border have become a regular feature, with major armed conflicts reported in 1968, 1979 and 1985.There has been a series of violent incidents since Nagaland was created. Two major incidents took place in 1979 and 1985, leaving at least 100 persons dead between them. On January 5, 1979, 54 Assam villagers were killed in a series of attacks by armed men from Nagaland in Chungajan, Uriamghat and Mikirbheta of Golaghat district, while over 23,500 persons fled to relief camps. In June 1985, a major flare-up at Merapani, also in Golaghat, left 41 persons dead on the Assam side. These included 28 Assam Police personnel. In both incidents, Assam claimed that the attackers included Nagaland Police personnel.

The two states have held a series of meetings at various levels, including that of the chief ministers. The Centre, in August 1971, appointed K.V. K Sundaram, then chairman of the Law Commission, as adviser in the MHA on matters related to Assam-Nagaland. Sundaram suggested a joint survey of the border, which Nagaland did not agree to. The two states, however, signed four interim agreements in 1972 to maintain status quo. On January 25, 1979, the prime minister wrote to the Nagaland chief minister to take firm action against miscreants on the Nagaland side of the boundary.

The tea plantations along the border have become sites of conflict in recent times. The Nagas ransacking these tea plantations, especially the newly emerging small plantations, has been quite frequent. There has been also a new aspiration among a section of the Nagas to begin plantations for which vast amount of land is required which is available only in the foothill border. The issue of land thus has become a source of conflict between

Assam and Nagaland in the inter-state border areas. Besides, the Nagas have engaged not only ex-tea garden workers as labourers in their agricultural land but also immigrant Muslim population. The latter especially act as cheap labour for the Nagas.

In March 1981, the then union home minister asked both chief ministers to resolve the issue through discussion while strictly adhering to basic constitutional aspects. In 1988, the Assam government filed a title suit in the Supreme Court to determine and delineate the constitutional boundary of each state. In September 2006, the apex court set up a three-member local commission headed by a retired SC judge to identify the boundary. The commission has submitted its report to the court, but a final decision has not yet been made.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What is the Naga Khat system?

.....

.....

Q 4: What is the length of the boundary between Assam and Nagaland?

.....

.....

8.5 ASSAM-MEGHALAYA BORDER DISPUTE

The states of Assam and Meghalaya have been embroiled in a border dispute for decades now. It first started when Meghalaya challenged the Assam Re-organization Act of 1971. Meghalaya claimed thatparts of Mikir hills givento Assam vide the Act were actually parts of United Khasi and Jaintia hills. However, there are regular clashes between both the sides along the border, which has resulted in the displacement of a large number of inhabitants and loss of life and property.

There are 12 areas along the Assam-Meghalaya border that are under dispute: Langpih, Upper Tarabari, Gazang Reserve Forest, Hahim, Borduar, Boklapara, Nongwah, Matamur, Khanapara-Pilangkata, Deshdemoreah Block

I and Block II, Khanduli and Retacherra.

The boundary dispute between Meghalaya and Assam is a long standing issue between the two north eastern states as Meghalaya was formerly a part of Assam. This border extends on three sides involving the three Districts of RiBhoi, West Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills, and two Districts in Assam,Kamrup and MikirHills.

Meghalaya became a full-fledged State in 1972 and accepted the boundary on the basis of the new Districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. The United Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills Districts of Meghalaya shared contiguous areas with Kamrup, Mikir Hills (now KarbiAnglong) and Goalpara Districts of Assam. The people residing in these areas were mostly tribes from Meghalaya and had for long favoured inclusion with Meghalaya giving rise to tension and problems between the two States. The contiguous areas in RiBhoi District were transferred to Kamrup District; Block 1 and II of Jaintia Hills to Mikir Hills (Karbi Anglong) District and areas in Garo Hills to Goalpara District.

When Meghalaya was in the process of attaining statehood, these areas showed intention of being included in the new State. Therefore, a plan was drawn up regarding the areas to be included in the proposed Hill State. A decision was reached whereby the Autonomous Districts of the composite State of Assam will form part of the proposed Hill State including the contiguous areas inhabited by the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos, at the meeting in Haflong convened by the APHLC and attended by all leaders from the Hill Districts of Assam. This plan never materialized as the Government of India did not concede to this demand.

The areas which suffer from boundary problems with Assam are:

a) The contiguous areas of Khasi Hills District, in particular RiBhoi District, which shares a common boundary with Kamrup District of Assam.

b) The Jaintia Hills District, in particular the Block I and II areas, sharing a common boundary with Mikir Hills (today Karbi Anglong) District.

c) The Garo Hills District which has a porous border with Goalpara District of Assam.

But there was no clear cut demarcated boundary between Meghalaya

and Assam. As a result, this has been a contentious and vexed issue which had createdproblems for successive governments in Meghalaya since 1972. This hasdominated the political scene in Meghalaya time and again as successive governments, both in Assam and Meghalaya, have not been able to resolve theboundary problems.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Which are the 12 areas along the Assam-Meghalaya border that are under dispute?

.....

.....

Q 6: In which year did Meghalaya become a full-fledged state?

.....

.....

8.6 ASSAM-ARUNACHAL PRADESH BORDER DISPUTE

The Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh was formed on 20th January, 1972. Later when Arunachal Pradesh was carved out of Assam in 1987 as a state under the North-East Re-organization Act, 1971, the people of Arunachal Pradesh accepted their notified borders with Assam. However, subsequent to this, there has been the issue of Assamese encroachment.

In the 1914 notification of the Foreign and Political Departments, the government of British India, a new North-East Frontier tract was created under the jurisdiction of the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur. The three tracts were Central and Eastern sections, North East Frontier tract; the Western section, Frontier tract; and the Lakhimpur Frontier tract. Basically, the frontiers converted to tracts during the colonial days. AssamArunachal boundary skirmishes of the present day reflect the creation of the tracts to separate the hills from the plains, the plains that by then were considered to be an integral part of British India. The same year witnessed the drawing of Mac Mohan line defining the outer most boundaries of the North East Frontier. North East Frontier was also known as the Chief Commissioner's Province,

which was Assam in 1874 when it got separated from the Bengal Presidency. The inner boundary of the Central and Eastern sections, North East Frontier Tractincluded the tracts comprising the hills inhabited or frequented by Abors, Miris,Mishmis, Singphos, Nagas and Khamtis. The tract was separated from Lakhimpur district and included former Dibrugarh frontier tract, the strip of country south of Brahmaputra that included five villages inhabited by the Assamese. This section was renamed as Sadiya Frontier Tract by a notification of 20 March 1919 which was later divided into Abor hills and Mishmi hills.

The Western tracts were inhabited by Bhutias, Akas, Daflas (Nyishi), Miris and Abors. It was separated from Darrang and Lakhimpur districts from Subansiri River westwardsto Dikrong River which was also later renamed as Balipara Frontier Tract (ibid, 62-63). As such the hill areas were separated from the Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of the province of Assam to form the North East Frontier Tracts. The Tracts were again renamed during the post-colonial period: Kameng Frontier Division, Subansiri Frontier Division, Siang Frontier Division, Lohit Frontier division and Tirap Frontier Division.

The state of Arunachal Pradesh before becoming a full-fledged state was initially divided into tracts. It was divided into tracts by the British officials for easy administration. The province of Assam which was largely plain was separated from the tracts that consisted of the hill areas. The division was clearly a geographical division and had nothing to do with the socio-cultural boundaries. As such the whole of the region were divided into hills and plains territories.

In the case of the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border, clashes were first reported in 1992 when the Arunachal state government alleged that people from Assam are building houses, markets and even police stations in its territory. Since then intermittent clashes have been taking place making the border tense. In 2005, for example, during an eviction drive by the Assam government, some 100 houses in East Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh were allegedly set ablaze by Assam Police and forest officials. Again in 2007, tensions flared up along the Assam-Arunachal border when villagers from across the border fired at a peace meeting in Assam injuring eight people.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: When did Arunachal Pradesh become a Union Territory?

.....

.....

Q 8: In which year Arunachal Pradesh became a full-fledged state?

.....

.....

Q 9: Name some tribes inhabiting Arunachal Pradesh?

.....

.....



8.7 LET US SUM UP

- Assam is the common strand that connects all these border disputes. The root cause of all these inter-state border disputes can be traced back to the decision to carve out new political entities out of Assam. It is necessary to point out that this decision was taken under compelling circumstances. The prevailing external and internal situation in the region during the 1960s highlighted the urgent need to effectively integrate this sensitive frontier area with the Indian Union. The 1962 border war with China and numerous ethnic insurgencies that plagued the region threatened the unity and integrity of the country. In this context, the Government of India decided to carve out new political entities, with the dual aim of consolidating its hold over this remote region as well as to fulfil the aspirations of various ethnic communities involved in separatist movements.
- Thus, the reorganisation of Arunachal Pradesh into a Union Territory in 1972 and its upgradation to full-fledged statehood in 1987, can be seen as a strategy of the Indian government to consolidate its position

vis-à-vis China in the border negotiations. Similarly, the granting of statehood to Nagaland in 1963, Meghalaya in 1972 and Mizoram in 1987 were steps to accommodate the territorial aspirations of the Nagas, Khasis, Garos, and Mizos.

- It is a moot point whether granting statehood has adequately addressed the issue of ethnic identity. But it surely has had a negative fallout in the form of various border disputes between Assam and these newly created states. It is important to note that these states were hurriedly carved out of Assam without paying much attention to the realities on the ground. And therefore, these freshly created state boundaries did not strictly conform to the ethnic boundaries of the region.



8.8 FURTHER READING

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2) Elwin, V. (2005). The North East Frontier Agency. Discovery of North East India, Volume II.
3) Mackenzie, A. (1973). History of the relations of government with the hill tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal.
4) Rao, V. V. (1999) A Century of Government and Politics in North East India.
5) Reid, R. (1942). History of the Frontier areas bordering on Assam from 1883-1941.Assam Government Press.

8.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Borders are established through agreements between political or social entities that control those areas; the creation of these agreements is called boundary delimitation. There are a wide variety of different conceptions of the border and these are subject to continual change, as they have been in the past. Traditionally the border concept has mainly been related to topography, and has been the particular domain of geography and law, though philosophers and mathematicians have also developed concepts of the border, or more specifically, the limit.

Ans to Q No 2: A territory is a portion of terrestrial space envisaged in its relationships with the human groups that occupy it and manage it for the purpose of meeting their needs. Understanding a territory involves evidencing interactions between the different components, rather than considering them as successive layers which, taken as a whole, might be called territory.

Ans to Q No 3: In the foothills of Wancho and Konyak areas Ahom kings had certain tracts of land called Naga Khat. They were assigned to the Nagas who cultivated betel leaves and areca nuts which would not grow in certain altitudes. So these areas were given in order to contain and also allow them access to the plains for ceremonial trade in places like Sonali and Jorhat markets.

Ans to Q No 4: Assam and Nagaland share a 434-km boundary.

Ans to Q No 5: Langpih, Upper Tarabari, Gazang Reserve Forest, Hahim, Borduar, Boklapara, Nongwah, Matamur, Khanapara-Pilangkata, Deshdemoreah Block I and Block II, Khanduli and Retacherra.

Ans to Q No 6: Meghalaya became a full-fledged State in 1972.

Ans to Q No 7: The Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh was formed on 20th January, 1972.

Ans to Q No 8: Arunachal Pradesh was carved out of Assam in 1987 as a state under the North-East Re-organization Act, 1971

Ans to Q No 9: Bhutias, Akas, Daflas (Nyishi), Miris and Abors.



8.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: What is the concept of boundary in the modern world?

Q 2: How is territory in line with space in its interaction with humans?

Q 3: What is the history behind the 'Naga-Khat' system?

Q 4: Which are the areas that are under dispute between Assam and Meghalaya?

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: In what ways did the Assam-Nagaland border dispute flare up post-independence?

Q 2: How did the border dispute between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh come to exist?

Q 3: What is the history behind state formation of Arunachal Pradesh?

Q 4: Suggest measures to de-escalate border disputes in North East India.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 9 : ISSUE OF IMMIGRATION AND THE SOCIO POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN NORTHEAST INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Historicizing the immigration process in the North East region

9.3.1 Demographic and Economic Consequences of Immigration

9.3.2 Politics around the issue of immigration

9.4 Let Us Sum Up

9.5 Further Reading

9.6 Answers To Check Your Progress

9.7 Model Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- describe the historicity of the process of immigration in the northeastern region
- explain the demographic transformation of the region due to immigration
- discuss the issues and politics centred on this problem of immigration.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

Against the context of the universal notion of Human Rights, as enshrined in the UN charter of Human Rights, economic and political migration is deemed as a basic right. This outlook is however premised upon the position that the host nation or region is far superior- both economically and demographically - and therefore is under no threat from such migrations. This condition however is not always a reality. And the case of the north eastern region of India is an adequate proof of this. India's North East shares

its borders with four countries. To its North are China and Bhutan, to the east is Myanmar and to the west is Bangladesh. The North East accounts for 7.6 percent of India's land area and 3.6 percent of the population, but it makes up 40 percent of India's land borders.The region of North East India has been a land frontier attracting large-scale immigration from the rest of the subcontinent, even before the post-China war era.The partition of India and its state of diplomatic relations with the neighbours had turned the North East frontier into a 'sensitive border region' that required special attention based on national security concerns. Restrictions such as the Sixth Schedule and the Inner Line were mostly policies to set some limits on the unstoppable demographic transformation of the region. However, in spite of these rules of exclusion, the demographic transformation of the region continued, most evidently in those parts of Assam and Tripura that were not designated as tribal areas. This demographic change in turn affected the pattern of land ownership, the linguistic balance and the nature of social and political leadership in the area. While immigrants have come from all parts of south Asia, the largest numbers have come from East Bengal. After partition, not only did the flow of economic migration from East Pakistan continue, but Hindu refugees leaving Pakistan also joined the flow as political migrants.

In this unit, we shall discuss the issue of immigration in Northeast India from a historical perspective. Further we shall analyse the consequences of immigration in this region.

9.3 HISTORICIZING THE IMMIGRATION PROCESS IN THE NORTH EAST REGION

The population flow into Northeast India originated almost entirely from the East in the pre-British era with a constant flow of tribes and nationalities from the Tibeto-Burman and the Mon-Khmer stock. The direction of population flow changed with the coming of the British as they brought peasants and agricultural labourers, teachers and clerks from Bengal and Bihar to open up the economy of the region. Also, to overcome the labour shortage in the tea plantations and oilfields, they started importing labourers from Bihar and Orissa. This flow spread to Tripura soon where the Manikya

kings offered Bengali farmers forest clearance leases with an aim to popularise settled agriculture and improve thestate's revenues. With time, as their numbers increased, the Bengalis started pressing for Bengali-medium schools and as separate Bengali and Assamese-medium schools flourished, the linguistic divide widened and set the stage for confrontation. The Assamese were further shaken up when Muslim migrants from eastern Bengal, who were relatively less educated than the Bengali Hindus, were supporting the cause of the Bengalis. This made it obvious that the Bengali Hindus who were mostly urban dwellers employed in administrations, the professions and business found support mainly from the rural Muslim Bengali migrants.

The immigrants in Assam may be broadly divided into two groups: those who came from the Presidency of Bengal to take up waste land for cultivationand those from distant areas for trade and meeting the growing demands of the tea gardens and industrial undertakings. Also, another category of migrants from Rajasthan, namely Marwaris,who, besides monopolising trade, acted as money-changers, bankers and agents of the tea-garden managers, had their place in the region. The scarcity of labour during the extension of tea cultivation made it necessary for the planters to import large number of labourersfrom the densely populated areas of Bihar, Orissa, Bengal and Central provinces. In 1891, the total number of immigrants who were brought to the tea gardens was estimated to be approximately at 423,199, forming almost 7 percent of the population of the province. With time, the labourers found it convenient to settle near the gardens and a segment of them took to cultivation on their own as a result of which villages of such immigrants started growing in the neighbourhood of tea gardens. On the other hand, the pressure on the soil and availability of cheap, plentiful and fertile land on easy terms in Assam instead of expensive holdings as sub-tenants in Bengaldrove the immigrants to move up the valley.

9.3.1 Demographic and Economic Consequences of Immigration

The state of Assam had recorded the highest rate of population

growth in India during pre and post-independence periods. According to records, the number of Muslim population in the year 1911 was 3,65,540 which rose to 5,94,981 in 1921 and 9,53,299 in 1931. The alarming rise in the population adversely affected the rural economy of Assam.The Bengali muslimsin Goalpara and Nagaon formed 20 percent and 14 percent of the population respectively. The migration of these immigrants remained unabated and as years passed it brought about changes of far-reaching consequences: economic, social, cultural and political. The migrations gave rise to powerful assimilationist and nationalist sentiments and unleashed massive conflicts over language, education and employment policy which led not only to intervention by the Central Government and use of the Indian Army but also affected the region's relationship with its neighbours.

Occupation of wastelands, grazing and forest reserves, mass squatting as well as the occupation of whole villages at times by the immigrants through the purchase of land by offering tempting prices to the local inhabitants whose economic difficulties compelled them to part with their land have been the common pattern. To restrict the indiscriminate settlements by immigrants in the Assamese inhabited lands, the officials of Nowgong district devised an administrative measure known as the Line system in the year 1916. The officials were mainly motivated to take such an action as there were possibilities of breach of peace on account of forcible occupation of land and grazing reserves. The immigrants however did not like these restrictions on their free choice of settlement areas. Many immigrant families had acquired a thousand bighas of land and they brought labourers whether to work on it or for sub-letting. This new group, locally known as matabbars, brought vast numbers of labourers along with their families every year. Besides the communal question, there was linguistic rivalry as the Assamese felt that their language was in danger and the ongoing immigration would ultimately lead to cultural invasion.

Ethnic conflicts in the Northeast have also led to internal displacement of victim populations- both migrant settlers and indigenous population. After partition, the first major ethnic flare up in Assam occurred during the language movement in 1960. As the Assam government decided to make Assamese the official language of the province, the Bengali-dominated Barak Valley erupted in agitation. During the worst phase of the violence between July and September 1960, nearly 45,000 Bengalis crossed over to West Bengal, seeking shelter. While 45,000 Bengalis fled to West Bengal, almost twice the number relocated to other Bengali-dominated areas of Assam and Tripura. Assam's Chief Minister HiteswarSaikia had admitted that between 1961 and 1969, 1,92,079 Muslims of Bengali descent were deported to East Pakistan. He added that while this cannot be categorised as internal displacement as it was not clear how many Muslims moved to other parts of India or North East since none of them went to the government camps for fear of detection and also possible deportation.

Also, with the changing demography of the region which was tilting towards an equal strength between the Hindu and Muslim populations, the immigration issue, which was essentially socio-economic, took a political character. The Muslim leaders of both the valleys started voicing their opposition to the anti-immigration move.

9.3.2 Politics Around The Issue Of Immigration

The major political struggle between the Bengali Hindus and the Assamese Hindus was over the control of middle class occupations including the administrative services. After the 1977 parliamentary elections, the Assamese turned against the Bengali Muslims due to both demographic and political reasons. The bye-elections to the Mangaldoi assembly constituency inmid 1979 provided the platform for India's most powerful and sustained mass agitation after independence. 45,000 illegal migrants were found in the voters' list during a routine update of the electoral rolls. The AASU observed

the first statewide strike to protest the infiltration issue on the 8th of June 1979. This was followed by the formation of All Assam GanaSangramParishad which composed of several regional parties, youth organizations, the AASU and the AsomSahitya Sabha. The leaders of the agitation had one specific demand which was the use of the 1951 National Register of Citizens as the baseline to determine Indian citizenship of all those living in Assam. They demanded that all those identified as non-citizens would have to leave the state. The anti-foreigner movement spilled across the borders of Assam into the states of Tripura and Manipur. In Tripura, indigenous tribal groups launched violent attacks against Bengali settlers who by then had started outnumbering the locals and controlling the state government. Similarly in Manipur, Manipuri students attacked Bengalis, Biharis, Punjabis, and the Nepali dairy and cattle farmers.

The growth rate of population in Assam during the years 1981-91 was much higher compared to the all India average. The Janata party during its 18 months' office from 1978-79, supported a policy of screening voters to ensure that non-citizens were not on the voters' list. On the other hand, the Congress and the Communist leaders argued that the agitations that were taking place, threatened not only the illegal Bangladeshis but also the Indians who had come to the state after independence as refugees since they would be excluded for the electoral rolls by government screening as well. The agitation took an anti-communist turn when the All Assam GanaSangramParishad (AAGSP), which was a coalition of 11 organisations supporting the agitation, had denounced the leftist parties in Assam as "agents of Bengalis". There were reports of members of Assamese middle class owning agricultural land being hostile to the CPI(M) for its support of the demand made by the tenants for title to land that they had cultivated for several years, on grounds that many of them were Bengali Muslims.

The protests that took place in 1979-85 against immigration and a de facto government of enfranchisement of the immigrants led

to five years of political turmoil and major outbreaks of violence in the state. 'Janata curfews', civil disobedience programmes and oil blockades paralysed the administration across the state. As the protesters called for a boycott of the elections until the electoral rolls were rid of foreigners, the government resorted to heavy use of the police which led to more than 130 deaths due to police firing during the election month. The worst massacre occurred at Nellie, a village that connects Nagaon and Guwahati, where morethan 2000 Muslims were butchered by Lalung tribesmen.

The Muslim peasantry of Bengali origin in Assam chose to register themselves as Assamese speakers in every census since independence with the aim of being assimilated into the local milieu. These Muslims had chosen the option assimilation to secure their economic and political future in an adopted homeland. When Hindus of East Bengali origin fought for their linguistic rights in the Barak Valley, these Muslims migrants started registering Assamese as their mother tongue in successive censuses. In order to ensure that Assamese speakers remained the largest linguistic group in the state, the Assamese caste- hindus co-opted the East Bengali Muslims into fold as Na-Asamiyas or Neo-Assamese. On grounds that linguistic predominance ensures ethnic hegemony, the Assamese were keen to retain the numerical strength of Assamese speakers in the state as they were constantly haunted by the perceived Bengali domination.

At the time of independence, no other issue separated the Assam Congress from the All-India Congress more than the question of where to settle the refugees of partition. Since large scale migration had started to change Assam's demography, it was already a major political issue in Assam by the 1940s. The then Chief Minister of Assam, Gopinath Bordoloi, expressed his determination to stop the massive in flow of illegal Bengali Muslims that took place right after partition and opposed federal government's move to settle the migrants. However, despite his opposition, he was pressured by the Centre to accept more than 600,000 refugees by 1961 even when

he pointed out that there were 1,86,000 landless Assamese peasants that were waiting with the hope of being settled on reclaimable lands. But Patel wanted the reclaimable lands to be distributed evenly between the landless Assamese peasants and Bengali Hindu refugees.

The six year-long Assam Movement ruptured the ongoing assimilation process of the Muslims of East Bengali origin as the Assamese who had initially called them Na-Asamiyaswere starting to call them as miyas or Bangladeshis and demanding their expulsion from the State. But as the East Bengali Muslims asserted themselves more compared to Muslims in the past few years, the Muslims of Assamese origin challenged the Na-Asamiyas in the state's minority state by promoting their indigenous credentials.

Of all the north-eastern states, the demographic picture of the state of Tripura which borders Bangladesh, has changed the most as a result of sustained immigration from East Bengal. The indigenous Tripuris are now a small minority in their own land. The change in the state's demography provoked the formation of a succession of insurgent groups that aimed to throw out the Bengali settlers and liberate Tripura from an administration which was dominated by them. The Sengkrak grew in the late 1960s to protest against the rampant and systematic alienation of tribal lands encouraged by Tripura's Bengali-dominated Congress government. The state had seen the birth of two important guerrilla organisations: the All-Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and the National Liberation Force of Tripura (NLFT). Both the organizations are known for their zeal to drive out Bengali settlers, who are seen to be responsible for the physical, cultural, political and economic marginalization of the indigenous people. While theSengkrak and the TNV attacked the Bengali settlers and security forces in a bid to protect tribal settlements or push out the settlers from tribal-compact areas, the ATTF and the NLFT had resorted to large-scale kidnappings, mostly targeting Bengali settlers. As stated by Bhaumik, between 1995 and 2005,

nearly 3,500 abductions were reported to the police.

In the year 1993, an agreement was signed between the Government and agitating Bodo groups demanding autonomy. But the agreement proved to be a failure since the Government refused to hand over to the Bodoland Autonomus Territorial Council (BATC) the areas where they were not a majority. The Bodos said that the demanded area was their homeland and the only reason of them becoming a minority in some areas was because the Government in Assam failed to stop 'illegal infiltration' into those areas. Within a few months of the Bodoland Accord, Bodo militants began large-scale attacks on Muslims of Bengali descent. During the attacks 20,000 Muslims were displaced in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts. More than 60 villages were devastated and according to Monirul Hussain, Assam's noted academician, almost 1000 Muslims, mostly women and children were killed.

Autonomy and distinctiveness, accentuated by heavy immigration which has been a continuing theme in post-colonial Assamese sub nationalism, had produced fears of minoritization among the indigeneous people. ULFA was founded around the same time as the beginning of the Assam Movement, around the issue of immigration to Assam from Bangladesh and to a lesser extent from Nepal as well, that was turning the indigenous people of Assam into a minority. The Assam Accord of 1985 which was signed between the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the AASU leaders not only acknowledged Assam's problem with 'foreigners' but it also agreed on certain formulas for identifying, expelling and disenfranchising them. The non-implementation of the Assam Accord therefore has remained a live issue in Assam politics.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: North East shares India's borders with which countries?

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Q 2: How did the process of immigration start in the state of Tripura?

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Q 3: What was the demand of the leaders of the Assam agitation, 1979-1985?

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Q 4: What is the Nellie Massacre?

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Q 5: Which state of North East has faced the highest demographic change due toimmigration?

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9.4 LET US SUM UP

- The process to check illegal migration in the North-East, which started during the British Rule, remains unfinished despite various efforts made at the national and state levels. Initially under the British, the immigrant population from neighbouring regions like Bengal, Bihar and Nepal were welcomed and considered useful for the development of the region. But soon the immigrants were seen as encroachers on the lands and reserve forests that affected the demography and ecology of the region. A decade of agitation by North-East rebel groups, both peaceful and

violent over the illegal immigration issue, has not brought concrete success yet. Unresolved border security and management issues keep the border porous and open for easy infiltration.

- Demographic changes which are usually the result of differential population growth rates among ethnic groups, emigration or immigration can eventually disrupt the political system of the region. When this occurs, the consequences can be large scale civil conflict and violence. Such breakdowns have taken place in Northern Ireland, Malaysia, Cyprus and Lebanon. Assam too has been added to the list since what began as an issue of illegal immigration soon grew to be a broader conflict among Assamese, tribals and Bengalis.
- The question of illegal immigration from Bangladesh can be seen to be overshadowing other political issues in Assam lately. SubirBhaumik, in his book *Troubled Periphery*, mentions how in the recent years a large number of Bengali Hindus and Assamese Hindus throughout Assam have started supporting the BJP as they feel that regional parties like AGP shall fail to deliver their promise of deporting illegal migrants. With north Indian migrants like the Biharis and the Marwaristoo support the BJP, the process of religious consolidation has started to affect the politics of Assam to a great extent.
- The most pressing element of the immigration issue is the inability of the authorities between the illegal and legal Bengali settlers in the region. Whatever date be chosen as the cut-off point to determine de facto citizenship the problem of verifying when someone migrated to Assam, and whether the migrant was from Bangladesh or from elsewhere in India would always remain since a large number of the settlers would be unable to provide valid documents. All these years, the migrant problem has been taken to be a state/centre issue which is being negotiated between the Assamese and the central government from time. In order for social order to be re-established, the issue demands that it be seen as a national problem, warranting the attention of a national commission.



9.5 FURTHER READING

1) Bhaumik, S. (2009). Troubled Periphery: crisis of India's North East. New Delhi: SAGE Publications.
2) Guha, A. (1991). Medieval and Early Colonial Assam: society, polity and economy. Calcutta: K P Bagchi& Company.
3) Barpujari, H.K. (1993). The Comprehensive History of Assam: volume V. Pp. 47-53, Publication Board Assam.
4) Weiner, M. (1983). 'The Political Demography of Assam's Anti-Immigrant Movement'. JSTOR.



9.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Ans to Q No 2: The immigration process started in Tripura when the Bengali migrants were offered forest clearance leases as farmers with the aim to popularise settled agriculture and improve the state's revenues.

Ans to Q No 3: The leaders of the Assam agitation demanded theuse of the 1951 National Register of Citizens as the baseline to determine Indian citizenship of all those living in Assam and that all those identified as non-citizens would have to leave the state.

Ans to Q No 4: The Nellie Massacre was a series of brutal killings that took place in a village that connects Nagaon and Guwahati, where more than 2000 Muslims were butchered by Lalung tribesmen in the year 1983.

Ans to Q No 5: Tripura.



9.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short questions: (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Write a note on the two major immigration groups to have settled in the state of Assam.

Q 2: How did the issue of 'illegal infiltration' affect the Bodo population?

Long questions: (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Describe how the immigration issue turned the Northeastern frontier into a 'sensitive border region'.

Q 2: Explain how the demographic changes brought about by immigration led to economic and political changes as well.

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UNIT 10 : TRADITIONAL LAND RELATIONS IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Understanding traditional land relations in North-East India

- 10.3.1 Traditional land holding patterns
- 10.3.2 Commons and Community lands: its transition
- 10.3.3 Categories of land and land management systems

10.4 Let Us Sum Up

10.5 Further Reading

10.6 Answers To Check Your Progress

10.7 Model Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- explain the traditional land relations in Northeast India
- discuss the various aspects related to land like traditional land holding patterns, commons and community land
- discuss different categories of land and land management system.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

The traditional basis of land management and ownership in the region was based on community ownership. However, with the infiltration of modern economy things have changed over time. For example, shifting cultivation being replaced by modern agriculture. In this unit, we shall discuss the traditional Land Relation in Northeast India.

10.3 UNDERSTANDING LAND RELATIONS IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

10.3.1 Traditional Land Holding Patterns

In this part we are going to discuss the traditional land holding patternsin the Brahmaputra valley during the precolonial and colonial period. River Brahmaputra — the principal river of Assam — is today widely considered a 'problem' for agricultural development and a cause of sorrow for the peasants who inhabit its fertile valley. Statistics of flood damage and erosion in the last 50 years showthat the losses to the peasantry are indeed enormous. But how is it that, while just a century back the floods were generally considered to be a part of the agrarian cycle and complementary to cultivation, they are now posited in opposition to agriculture? This part is an attempt to historically examine the metamorphosis of this benevolent river, which made cultivation possible by fertilising the land with the silt it bore, into a 'problem' river. It is argued that a major factor underlying this metamorphosis was the fundamental change in the nature of agriculture carried outin the riverine zone along the banks of the Brahmaputra as perthe immigration and settlement policy of the British colonial state.

- **The Three Ecological Zones- geographical as well as socio-economic division**

The agricultural and settlement pattern of the Brahmaputra valleywas not only attuned to its natural geophysical divisions but also reflected social divisions. Three ecological zones with specificcharacteristics could be distinguished on each bank of the river. The first zone was the closest to the river starting from its banks to a few kilometres inland, from where the second zone began, extending further inland for another few kilometres, an area of flood-immune plains with fertile soil, where transplantedrice cultivation, the most important crop in the valley, was extensively carried out. This

gave way to the third zone — the submontane tract — which was at the foot of the hill ranges that surround the valley from three sides.

The mostdensely populated and predominantly rice-producing *rupit* land cultivated by 'Assamese cultivators' was in the middle tract. The population density could exceed 800 per square kilometre in thistract, as in south Nalbari. Here the standard of living was higherthan in either the *chaporis* or the submontane tracts. Conditions in the chaporis were far less favourable, paddy cultivation being more uncertain, communications less easy, and opportunities for subsidiary occupations more limited than in the rupitmahal or the transplanted-rice lands. The submontane tract in thefoothills like wise was less favourably situated for cultivation and avenues for disposing of the surplus produce. These parts were also considered unhealthy. The inhabitants belonged mainly tothe 'backward tribes', and these factors altogether led to a lowerliving standard than on the rupitmahal.

The Brahmaputra's riverine islands or *chars* and the chaporis onits banks with their own peculiarities constituted one such naturaldivision in the valley. The British categorised this as 'fluctuating cultivation' because the river caused extreme changes in the areaand output from year-to-year. This fluctuating cultivation, known as *pam*, supplemented the peasant's permanent rice cultivation with mustard, pulses and other high-value winter crops. Till the end of the 19th century, the chars and chaporis were permanently inhabited by only a few communities of Mishings, Kaivartasor Nadiyals, whom the dominant-caste villagers inhabiting the middle-rupit zone considered to be of lowly status. Others stayed on the chars and chaporis — whether they were *pamuas* or graziers — only temporarily, cultivating on the river banks, though to a smaller extent than the people of the other two tracts.

In the period under review, it was common for the people of therupit zone to take up land for temporary cultivation in the charsand chaporis, but the reverse was not the case; the riverine people hardly owned land in the submontane region where permanent habitation

and cultivation existed, and even if they did, the landwas relatively inferior to that of their more prosperous neighbours.The chapori lands which were classified routinely as *faringati* or wasteland in government revenue records were uniform neither in soil quality nor crops cultivated.

On the extensive inundated lowland chaporis, the cultivators grew 'early' rice for home consumption and pulse and mustard for sale. The cash income thus obtained provided the land revenue payable not only upon these chapori lands, but also upon some portion of the established rice lands. 'Peasants cultivated some amounts of *chapori* land in addition to their permanent village holdings. . . . In well-established villages relinquishments [of land] were few in number. But in the *chaporis*, where the landwas generally given up after two or three years' of cropping, relinquishment requests were annually filed by thousands. In such tracts, since the production of winter rice, mustard and pulses during the dry season were highly variable, the occupants had to pay the land revenue six weeks before the date of payment was normally due in the early 20th century. One flood a year was considered normal in these low-lying tracts. Generally the floods occured from the middle of June to September in the Brahmaputra and the north bank rivers, and up to October in some south-bank tributaries. If the floods came relatively early, in June or early July but did not recur again in the later months, it harmed the *ahu* crops and the *sali* seedlings, but time was still available in the season to grow the sali seedlings once again for transplant during August and September. If a flood took place between mid-July and mid-August, not much damage was done to the ahu crop, as most of it was already harvested. Such floods, however, destroyed the sali seedlings, leaving no timeto grow them again and also damaged the *bao* crop to various degrees. If the flood came very late, i.e., in September or October, it generally did great damage to the standing sali crop.Thus, cultivation in the valley had to be carried out according to the opportunities and constraints of the climate, floods and the

soil, making use of the advantages while trying to negate the ill effects.

Over the centuries, the riverine communities formed the mostintimate relationships with the Brahmaputra and its major tributaries. Indeed, it is said that these communities were more dependenton the River Brahmaputra than on the land. They developed a thorough, deep knowledge and understanding of the river while engaging in productive activities. Their knowledge of the terrain and the Brahmaputra's character equipped them to inhabit theriver and its banks with relative safety. They looked upon theriver with awe and reverence; it was at the centre of their lives,culture and society. Before the riverine tracts were permanently settled by great numbers of immigrant peasants from East Bengal by the beginning of the 20th century, these were predominantly inhabited by the poorest, most marginalised classes, that is, varioustribal communities as well as the oppressed castes, including the outcastes and untouchables of Hindu society, as was noted by the *Assessment Report of Central Jorhat Group* of 1905.

Till the first decades of the 20th century, when heavy flood soccurred it was common practice for the residents of the chars to leave their houses for a few days and take shelter with their cattleon high lands further inland. It is reported that they seldom losttheir cattle or store of paddy, though it was known and expected that the standing crops of ahu and sali would suffer from floods to some extent almost every year. In the South Bank Fluctuating Group, the inhabitants were said to be 'half Hindus and half Miris', and the Hindu pamuas included all classes of people from the 'established' or permanent villages which were separated from the riverine pam tract by a lineof embanked roads. The Miris or the Mishing community, on the other hand, were its permanent inhabitants, and in 1901, had morethan a thousand villages on the riverine tract. They generally didnot opt for temporarily leaving their homes during high floods unlike the 'Hindu' pam cultivators, who cultivated '*chapori* landonly to supplement the cultivation which they had in their own villages, either because they

had not enough land or in order to obtain a surplus.' As such, their way of living was attuned to the floods. For instance, their houses, unlike that of the pamuas, were constructed on elevated platforms made of bamboo and reed. The other occupations in this tract were 'fishing and lime-making by Doms, pottery by Kumars, and eri-silk weaving by the women of all Hindu castes'.

The rupitmahal rice-field settlements between the riverine and submontane tracts were the most populous in the Brahmaputra valley. Most of the permanent rice cultivation was undertaken here. During the nearly 600 years of Ahom rule in the region,the area under settled rice cultivation grew extensively; forestareas were brought under cultivation and new grounds lying unused were broken for transplanted paddy cultivation, around which grew the culture of mustard, pulses, sugarcane, opium, garden produce, and so on. These rice-producing regions with their dense population and high revenue generation were the mainstay of Ahom political power, while for the majority of the working people agriculture was at the subsistence level, as the region entered the phase of colonial occupation in the early 19thcentury.

10.3.2 Commons and Community Lands: Its Transition

For successive governments, both at the state and the centre, management of shifting cultivation, or jhum as it is locally known, has been — and still remains — a fundamental imperative for agricultural development planning pertaining to the uplands of northeast India. The practice of shifting cultivation is perceived by development planners and policy makers as economically unviableand environmentally destructive and, hence, a major hurdleto the development of the region. Governments, therefore, have consistently tried to replace it with settled agriculture, all ocating substantial financial outlays through successive Five Year Plans since the early 1970s. Shifting cultivators, too, desire change as much as the governments do and desperately seek options that would help them

transgress the practice and move towards attaining their aspiration of assimilation into the mainstream economy. Towards this end, they perceive government programmes as a critical — often the only — means to take them out of poverty and,hence, eagerly await opportunities to avail the benefits of such programmes. However, shifting cultivation remains an enigma and persists in large parts of the region even today despite the desire of the community and efforts by the government to usher in change. The situation, therefore, demands an objective appraisal toexamine the reasons underlying its persistence — without eulogising or condemning either the practice, or government efforts —

And, thereby, identify concerns that require urgent attention if transformation of upland agriculture is to become a reality for all.

As long as the upland communities were insular, isolated and unassimilated into the market economy, shifting cultivation was sufficient to meet all their needs, including that of food security. However, as such communities gradually came into the folds ofmainstream development bringing accompanying market penetration into these areas, the foremost concern for the average shifting cultivator increasingly turned to cash generation to meet household consumption needs. Some of the agricultural producefrom shifting cultivation — maize, vegetables, chillies, sesame, ginger and cotton — have a good market demand; produce from fallows and forests — mainly wild edibles, honey, wildlife, and firewood — also find markets among the urban consumers.

Shifting cultivators sell their agricultural products in the weekly markets individually to generate much needed cash and tryto supplement incomes by selling forest produce to urban households. However, they fail to obtain a steady and satisfactory return from either, primarily because of the lack of marketing skills andtheir unorganised nature of marketing the products. Further, thesale of forest produce though attractive does not offer regularreturns being occasional and unorganised, thus failing to providea steady income.

Not surprisingly, this encourages exploitation by traders from the plains for both agricultural and forest produce and hence fails to offer satisfactory returns. Government programmes with their promise of cash generation, therefore,seem to offer a welcome opportunity to take shifting cultivators out of a desperate situation where income security has become synonymous with survival.

Programmes targeted towards transformation of shifting cultivation were initiated in the 1970s with a thrust on horticulture and cash crop promotion. Coffee, rubber and cashew plantations besides horticultural crops such as pineapple and citrus wereestablished under various government schemes as alternativesto shifting cultivation. Schemes were also launched to encourageterrace cultivation with the twin objectives of expansion of wetrice cultivation (thus reducing the dependency on shifting cultivationfor rice) and promoting soil erosion control. The plantations, established by concerned departments under centrally sponsored programmes, were initially meant to have a demonstration effect and were largely planned and maintained by the departments on land made available by participating villages; the involvement ofthe villagers was limited to providing labour for establishment and maintenance of the plantations during the gestation period, after which the plantations were handed over to villagers to reap the benefits from the crops. To encourage subsequent adoption and expansion of such cash crops, subsidies were made available through specific schemes.

Despite their desperate need, the acceptance of such programmes by the villagers was not very encouraging until recently and few, if any, replicated these options. Factors such as the lack of familiarity with the crops and their management, difficulty insourcing seed and saplings as well as inadequate access to technical backs topping made farmers hesitant to adopt these crops.

The additional labour demand for maintenance was an added deterrence. Farmers were reluctant to take up even horticultural crops such as pineapple and other fruits because of their high perishability;

also, given the poor accessibility to road heads and the lack of knowledge about markets, compounded with the absence of storage facilities or any processing options, adopting such crops proved risky and unattractive. Farmers who took up such crops often found themselves vulnerable to exploitative traders and frequently had no recourse but to resort to distress sales, in variably at a loss.The most critical factors that discouraged farmers from accepting these alternatives, however, were the long gestation period during which no returns could be expected and the near absence of access to market linkages once the crops started maturing. Further, restrictions on the sale of crops such as coffee in theopen market during this period — coffee could be sold only tothe Coffee Board till the late 1990s — frustrated the farmers to the extent that plantations set up with enthusiasm in many villages were abandoned and allowed to revert back into fallow forests. In many areas, plantations of coffee, cashew and other cash crops were slashed down consequent to poor market linkages and the farmers reluctantly reverted back to shifting cultivation.

For shifting cultivators, the practice, despite its subsistence character, allows them a harvest of a wide variety of crops through out the year, giving confidence to avert risks. Indeed, the diversity of crops within shifting cultivation is a strategy evolved to spread risks and serves as a risk insurance mechanism. Mixed cropping allows sequential harvesting of crops, ensuring food availability through out the year. In the present context, the only crop that is insufficient is rice. The variety of crops (and the various landraces within each crop) ensure that even if cropfailures happen due to adversity of weather (unusually heavy monsoon showers, hailstorms or drought) or due to pests and pestilence — which is extremely rare in this system — some ofthe landraces of each crop type (cereals, legumes, tubers, spices) will have the resilience to perform and, hence, farmers will not befaced with a total crop failure. Crop diversity, therefore, allows shifting cultivators to avoid the risk of complete crop lossesand

possible starvation. In addition, the regenerating fallows provide them with diverse edibles, meat, medicines as well asseveral utility products — the most important being fuelwood —and products that generate cash incomes.In contrast, settled agricultural systems such as wet rice terracesor plantations — systems promoted as alternatives — failto provide such diversity and allow mixed cropping of a fewcrops at best; moreover, such systems do not provide for sequential harvesting and harvests are usually limited to a single season. Although agricultural transformations hold out the promise of cash generation and improved incomes, the absence of risk-spreading provisions make shifting cultivators apprehensive about change. The bitter experiences of farmers who have tried to shift to cash crops, the uncertainty of markets, and unassured returns undermine the confidence on such options, making farmers hesitant in making the change. Volatile markets, unattractive prices and the exploitation at the hands of traders make shifting cultivators, particularly the poor, extremely wary of the high vulnerability that such transformation could entail. Moreover, the absence of returns from plantations during the initial transition years and the resultant inability to ensure food security make farmers reluctant to change. For shifting cultivators, replacement of the practice with cash crops, despite the promise of cash generation, implies the eradication of their risk management strategy and hence, signifies an increased vulnerability to food insecurity and poverty. This dilemma is the fundamental cause for hesitancy among shifting cultivators to change.

10.3.3 Categories Of Land And Land Management System

Conversion of arable land for wet rice cultivation and cash cropplantations is invariably at the expense of shifting cultivation fallows. As fallows are converted to plantations, such lands become *de facto* privatised. Customary laws allow tenurial rights to community land as long as such land is under cultivation, and the land reverts back to the common resource pool only if the family declines oris

unable to use it and keeps the land unattended for more than a certain period. Plantations established on fallows (which in effect, are community land), thus reduce the total area available for use under a common property regime. Similarly, when rice terraces are established, community rights cease to exist over the land aslong as such lands are cultivated.

As in the case of plantations,customary laws allow the family tenurial rights as long as the landis under cultivation and therefore, such lands also transform from common property to *de facto* private holdings. Moreover, in the case of terraces, legal provisions under different state legislations provide for the registration and titling of such land. Households holding terraces can get the land registered in their name and attain the right of legal ownership even though the parcel of land was originally a common property. This registration and titling legally change property rights completely, allowing the owner, if they so desire, to even sell the land to which, hitherto, they hadonly tenurial rights. The provisions under customary laws, but tressed by legal provisions, have helped in the conversion of common property to private property. In fact, in some areas of the region, this issue has become so acute that annual access to wetterraces is auctioned to the highest bidder by the new owners, thus effectively depriving the poor of having access to terraces for cultivation.

The promotion of plantations and wet rice cultivation, particularly terraces, have thus not only deprived the poor of opportunities for access to such land, but it has also deprived them of their endowments, thus marginalising their shifting cultivation by reducing the land left for the practice. In the process, fallow periods have reduced, thereby, ultimately impacting on the productivity and returns from their fields. The poor, therefore, view transformationsas a process that increasingly marginalises their cultivation practice and productivity from their fields, thus depriving themof their entitlements for equitable access to productive land andlivelihood. Among matrilineal societies such as the Khasis andGaros of Meghalaya,

such trends may also signify the possibility of dispossessment of land assets by women in the not too distantfuture. As transformations progress and more common property resources get transformed into *de facto* private holdings, the proportion of the deprived will increase, giving rise to a growing proportion of 'tomorrows' poor'. This trend requires immediate attention and needs to bearrested. Shifting cultivators, particularly the poor, acutely express the need for addressing this issue. Customary norms foraccess to land ensured universal access to all households within avillage. Government programmes promoting settled agricultural practices need to modify guidelines to ensure that access regimesare not changed drastically as a result of such programmes.

It is necessary to encourage land zoning within target villages so that (i) uncontrolled conversion of fallows to cash crop plantations orwet terraces is regulated (there by also ensuring regeneration off allow forests); and (ii) the benefits of such programmes are mademore inclusive. This requires an understanding of prevailing customary access regimes and efforts to suitably modify guidelines of programmes so that interventions made are within existing customary land tenure frameworks, thereby ensuring the continuity of universal access by all and hence facilitating the inclusion of the poor in programmes designed to make possible transformations. Studies seem to indicate that upland communities have been respondingto the needs for change without compromising on common property access regimes. Innovations based on traditional tenurialaccess frameworks that ensure long-term tenurial security butsafeguard ownership patterns, by preventing ownership transferrights, address the needs for transformations without encouraging privatisation. Government policies and approaches need to understand, acknowledge and honour such frameworks. The desire of governments for agricultural change and economic developmentis shared equally by upland communities; the difference lies inthe introduction of such initiatives

within traditional land-useand access frameworks as against those of replacement.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Of the three ecological tracts, which one is the most densely populated?

.....

.....

Q 2: What are three ecological tracts of the Brahmaputra valley mentioned in the unit?

.....

.....

Q 3: What did the programmes during the 1970s focused at transformation of shifting cultivation aim to promote?

.....

.....

Q 4: What did transformation of arable land to wet rice cultivation or cash crops inevitably mean?

.....

.....



10.4 LET US SUM UP

- The agricultural and settlement pattern of the Brahmaputra valley was attuned to its natural geophysical divisions but also reflected social divisions. Three ecological zones with specific characteristics could be distinguished on each bank of the river. The first zone was the closest to the river starting from its banks to a few kilometres inland, from where the second zone began, extending further inland for another

few kilometres, an area of flood-immune plains with fertile soil, where transplanted rice cultivation, the most important crop in the valley, was extensively carried out. This gave way to the third zone — the submontane tract — which was at the foot of the hill ranges that surround the valley from three sides.

- The practice of shifting cultivation is perceived by development planners and policy makers as economically unviableand environmentally destructive and hence, a major hurdleto the development of the region. Governments, therefore, have consistently tried to replace it with settled agriculture, allocating substantial financial outlays through successive Five Year Planssince the early 1970s.
- The promotion of plantations and wet rice cultivation, particularly terraces, has thus not only deprived the poor of opportunitiesfor access to such land, it has also deprived them of the irendowments, marginalising their shifting cultivation by reducing the land left for the practice. In the process, fallow periods have reduced, thereby, ultimately impacting on the productivity and returns from their fields.



10.5 FURTHER READING

1) Krishna, S (2012). Routledege Publication. *Agriculture and a Changing environment*.

2) Fernandes, W(2011)*Tribal Commons and Conflicts in Manipur and Tripura in Northeast India.*



10.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Rupit land, the middle tract was most densely populated.

Ans to Q No 2: Chaporis, Rupit and Submontane tract.

Ans to Q No 3: Horticulture and Cash crops

Ans to Q No 4: Privatisation.



10.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Write a short note on the agricultural produces of shifting cultivation?

Q 2: Why is it necessary for land zoning within targeted villages?

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Explain the socio economic dimensions of the 3 tracts of the Brahmaputra valley?

Q 2: Explain the consequences of transition from shifting cultivation and community lands to modern agro based economy?

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UNIT 11 : CHANGING LAND RELATIONS IN NORTH EAST INDIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Understanding Changing Land Relations in North East India and its Implications

- 11.3.1 Populations' Pressure on Land
- 11.3.2 Land Alienation and Changing Nature of Commons
- 11.3.3 Changing Land Holding Patterns: Land Laws and Policies
- 11.3.4 Creation of Tribal Belts and Blocks

11.4 Let Us Sum Up

11.5 Further Reading

11.6 Answers To Check Your Progress

11.7 Model Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- explain the changing land relations in North East India
- discuss the causes and consequences of changing land relations
- discuss the issue of land alienation
- analyse the issue of land in the context of Ethnic Movements.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

Even a peripheral examination of major conflicts across the world reveals that these revolve around one critical natural resource: land. Whether in the Middle East, Ireland or closer home in Jammu and Kashmir, the battle is between those who believe in a boundary authorized by a particular political dispensation and those who believe that their ethnic and sub-nationalistic or nationalistic claims surpass such barriers. The North East of India, that little

wedge of land protruding above Bangladesh, jutting into and flanked by Tibet/ China, Myanmar and Bhutan, is a fascinating example of how mindsets and attitudes combined with intensely competitive and unbending views of history and geography make ethnic and demographic problems extremely difficult to resolve. Patronage by the Central Government, which is resented,and the physical and emotional distance from the mainland have combined to produce a strange psyche of dependence, bitterness and alienation in the region. Despite the seeming lack of answers for the future,it is evident that the region has to build on its natural advantage in terms of abundant natural resources. Greater degrees of autonomy with extensive powers to village ''republics'' based on tradition, but with a definite change towards gender sensitivity and representation, can show the way forward. In the previous unit, we have learnt about the traditional land relation in the Northeast region. In this unit, we shall understand the changing nature of land relation in the region. We shall also discuss the causes behind the changes in traditional land relation.

11.3 UNDERSTANDING CHANGING LAND RELATIONS IN NORTH-EAST INDIA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

11.3.1 Populations' Pressure On Land

For the past several decades the North East has witnessed economic immigration in the region as a result of which states like Assam and Tripura have experienced a sort of demographic imbalance, and the numbers reflect that it has been against the native population. The waves of refugees and migrants, besides causing demographic changes, have also led to displacement of the indigenous population from their ancestral land. Generally displacement in such cases take place quietly without any direct conflict.The indigenous people begin to express their grievances through mass protest and social movement only when they realize the danger to their existence. Only then such displacement begins to draw public attention. This has happened in the states of Meghalaya, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura.

➢ **Causes of internal displacement in Northeast India**

It is difficult to outline all the causes of internal displacement considering the magnitude of the problem of internal displacement in the Northeastern region. However, fewmain causes of displacement in the region are listed below.

- Due to natural disasters like earthquake, flood, erosion, draught and climate change;
- Violence related factors — ethnic, religious and language conflicts, wars and revolutions;
- Due to development driven reasons and governmental policies;
- When migrating communities settle upon the land of the local community.

In most of the northeastern states conflicts have on a regular basis caused a considerable internal displacement of population. Displacement of the population is caused by violent conflicts between security forces on the one hand and insurgent groups and different dissident armed groups on the other.Counter-insurgency operations of security forces have beenregularly recorded in the North East region.

As the people are fighting for natural resources in the same geographical space in the Northeastern region ethnic tension in most cases is a byproduct of land alienation owing to demographic change Therefore, it is obvious that peace can be restored in the region by land restoration, poverty alleviation, education and development especially in rural areas. Successive governments have continuously ignored the problems of indigenous people of the region. Rather than exercising control over their land, the indigenous people have found themselves politically displaced in their own land.

11.3.2 Land Alienation And Changing Nature of Commons

Land Alienation is a major issue in the North-East. There have been many conflicts related to the issue of land alienation. Two of these recent conflicts are in the states of Manipur and Tripura.

Different reasons are given for these conflicts in Northeast India. Most observers treat them as secessionist and terrorist in nature. They may have some such components but land, particularly the commons managed according to the customary law, is crucial to them. These conflicts belong to two different categories but the commons are their commonality. In Manipur, the focus is on land which the Naga tribes feel the dominant group is trying to alienate them from. They have traditionally managed it under their community based customary law which the state is trying to change. In Tripura, the conflict began after the tribal commons were alienated from them in order to rehabilitate the refugees and immigrants from erstwhile East Pakistan.

On one side are the tribal communities whose identities are linked closely to their land managed according to the community-based customary laws. On the other side is the state that tries to change the law in order to alienate tribal land as in Manipur or has succeeded in doing it already as in Tripura. Whether the state succeeds in it or not, depends on the power relations. In Manipur, it has met with resistance from a relatively strong group of tribes. But their powerless counterparts in Tripura have failed to protect their land though their dependence on it is greater. Amid different power relations, the commonality between them is land and identity. Both have to be protected and ways have to be found of modernising the tradition of the commons to help the powerless communities to add to their power and thus protect their sustenance and identity.

11.3.3 Changing Land Holding Patterns: Land Laws And Policies

- **Legal Changes and Conflicts**

Because of these features of the customary law, the tribes in Manipur, Tripura as well as in other states could treat their land as their livelihood and the centre of their identity. That identity was linked to their land and the customary law. As such in these as well as in

other states the initial conflict arose from the contradiction between their community-managed tribal sustenance and the formal law of the state that depends onproperty and individual ownership. The individual based formal law that was first enacted by the colonial regime treats the tribal sustenance as a commodity, araw material and a source of profit. That causes a contradiction between them. Thecommons-private interface appears more in the land laws than in the actual areas. The legalreality of the colonial land laws recognising only private property is in opposition to the social realityof the tribal community-based livelihood. That legal system continues to be in force today. All the states have laws banning tribal land alienation to non-tribals. But for an exception, theselaws focus only on private land and do not recognise the commons as their sustenance. They own very little private land but the common land was their habitat before the individual-based laws wereenacted. But the law considers their commons as state property. By denying them right over the commons the laws impoverish them and lead them to indebtedness. The result of indebtedness isthe alienation of private land but they cannot fall back on the commons to compensate it.

One cannot conclude from it that the customary law is practised in the same form today as in the past. Much has changed in its management in Manipur but not the close link between identity andland. The situation is considerably different in Tripura. The status of the commons was not far from the above reality when the law was changed and their commons were alienated from them for refugee rehabilitation at first and a major dam later. The legal status of their land was not identical to that oftheir customary law because the king of Tripura had introduced changes in the land laws already from the early 20th century. But the social reality was close to that given above. When the state acquired their land for cooperative purposes, and more of it for the refugee colonies, the tribes were running their affairs according to their customary law despite the earlier legal changes. Their dependence on the commons was great; so was their

impoverishment after alienation.

Unlike the Manipur tribes, those of Tripura were powerless. So their land could bealienated from them with impunity through the TR & LR 1960. The state could get emotional support from the public in the act of depriving them of their sustenance because the TLR & LRA 1960 was presented as intrinsic to refugee rehabilitation. But the fact that the tribal proportion declined after 1951 shows that most of those who are considered refugees are in fact immigrants who had come in search ofland. Most tribals being illiterate could not register the little individual land they owned and the state did not recognise their commons as their sustenance. Its result was massive land alienation. Even though the official figure of 74,607 acres is high,the reality is much higher. That creates the ambiguity between the moral duty of refugee rehabilitation and the social reality of impoverishment.

- **Search for Alternatives**

One can see that central to tribal land alienation and impoverishment is delegitimizing their commons. The conflicts that have risen from it cannot beended without facing the contradiction between the traditional and formal systems and identifying legal alternatives acceptable to both of them. The tribal leaders justify their actions in the name of the customary law. That is a legitimate statement because these community-based laws are basic to their identity. However, many of them speak of going back to their customary law as though it were a static system. In reality, it has been a dynamic measure that kept changing according to the need. It was born ina specific area within a given environment and society and was geared to the needs of that community and region. Precisely because the customary laws originated in response to a specific need and context they are subject to change according to the requirements of their practitioners.

The formal law too becomes rigid at times and presents itself in contradiction to tradition. An important reason for such rigidity is

the confusion between the practices and the basics ofthe customary or formal law. Such identification is found also in a few other issues. For example, Naga unification is a legitimate aspiration of all the people who believe that they have a common origin so they should come together. However, a conflict arises when people are identified with aterritory. Land is basic to tribal identity and the customary land is linked to it. The people are a nation that confers identity on them. The territory is a colonial construct linked to a state that confers citizenship while people are a nation that confers identity on them. But the distinction between anation and a state is often ignored. A territory or state is confused with a nation.

A solution to the conflicts requires a search for alternatives acceptable to all. Its answer is neither polarisation nor romanticising either tradition or modernity. A way has to be found of modernising tradition in the spirit of the customary law that has kept changing according to need. It can change again to suit the present needs. The Sixth Schedule is the solution many tribes have been demandingall over India. The Naga tribes of Manipur have been demanding it without success. The tribes of Tripura have got it only partially. The Sixth Schedule, if understood creatively, can provide a solution to both the questions of the modernisation of the customary law and the issue of Naga Unification. But for this solution to be realistic, separation needs to be kept between the spirit and practices of law. Similarly one has to make a distinction between a nation and a state, between land and territory and ask whether territorial integration is intrinsic to people's unification.

11.3.4 Creation Of Tribal Belts And Blocks

Northeast India, which comprises the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura, is one of India's most ethnically diverse regions. The region has seen much violence since Independence. In response to demands by several tribes, ranging from separation from the Indian

Union to various structures of self-governance, the state of Assam, which once constituted a major part of Northeast India, was reorganized to facilitate the creation of three new states—Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland. This was even as several territorially defined tribal councils were established in Assam. However, these experiments failed to fulfil the aspirations of the various tribal groups, with several of them seeking to demarcate an exclusive territory and political space for themselves.

The tribes of Assam can be broadly classified as hill tribes and plain tribes with a total population of 3,308,570 persons (2001 Census). They constitute 12.4 per cent of the total population of the state. The plain tribes constitute 10.23 per cent of the total population of the state, whereas the hill tribes constitute just 2.18 per cent. They are essentially cultivators, and hence agriculture is the main stay of their livelihood. Land, therefore, is of supreme importance to them and a majority of the tribal conflicts in the state are related to competing claims over land and territoriality.

Under British rule, the hill areas of the state of Assam were governed via a number of laws. For example, the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873 prohibited the entry of all non-hill tribal British subjects into the area within the Inner Line without a permit issued by the competent authority. A considerable part of British Assam was declared a 'backward area' under the Government of India Act 1919. Further, from 1937, under the Government of India Act 1935, most of the hill areas of British Assam were designated as 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas, wherein the provincial legislature had no jurisdiction, thus bringing them directly under the Governor of Assam. As a result of these protective measures, the hill tribes were encouraged to distance themselves from the plainsmen and developed a special kind of an identity that remained crucial for subsequent political events in the region.

This was the background in which the Constitution Drafting Committee of independent India set up a sub-committee—the North

East Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas Committee—in 1947. In 1948 the sub-committee recommended the creation of 'autonomous districts' and 'autonomous regions' to safeguard the hill tribes in respect of their land, social customs, language, and culture. These special recommendations were also incorporated into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Accordingly, in 1952, autonomous district councils were constituted in theerst while Assam's districts of United Khasi-Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai (Mizo) Hills, Mikir Hills, and North Cachar Hills. At that time the plain tribal areas were notified as 'tribal belts' and 'tribal blocks' under the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, 1886, ostensibly to protect the plain tribes from encroachments by the non-tribal population in their areas.

A district council consists of a general council, comprising both elected and nominated members, and an executive council, elected from among the members of the general council to carry out its executive functions. The tenure of each council is five years unless dissolved earlier. Each council is empowered with a certain amount of legislative, executive, and financial powers on subjects such as land allotment, occupation or use of land, regulation of shifting cultivation, establishment and administration of village and towns committees, the inheritance of property, marriage and social customs, and the like. Normally, the annual budget of each council is allocated by the Central Government in consultation with the State Government concerned.

In 2003, in the wake of the Bodo agitation, the Sixth Schedule was amended by the Indian Parliament to further safeguard the interests of the plain tribes of Assam. Against this background, this unit offers an analysis of the tribal autonomy movement in Assam in general and that of the Bodosin particular; and the strategies being pursued by the government to resolve the ensuing conflicts.

➢ The Politics of Autonomy

Ethnic consolidation along tribal lines and ensuing tensions have been on the rise in Northeast India. This development has been

largely attributed to the swift pace of modernization and democratization. From the 1920s several organizations of plains tribals have been seeking more political power, with full-scale political activity also having started in the then United Khasi-Jaintia Hills district. In 1933 the Tribal League, a socio-political organization, was formed to highlight the socio-economic problems of the tribals. Three decades down the line, in 1967, the Plains Tribal Council of Assam, a Bodo political organization, initially demanded the creation of an autonomous region exclusively for the plain tribes of Assam; a demand it then revised in favour of a Union Territory. This growing tribal unrest saw the region turn within two decades of independence from what was a paradise for anthropologists to a hotbed of politics. Subsequently, Assam was divided into five more states. In the mid-1980s, the Bodos, the largest plain tribe of Assam, began a vigorous agitation for the creation of a separate Bodoland state along the north banks of the Brahmaputra. The agitation led to the loss of several hundred lives and of a considerable number of public and private properties. Subsequently, the agitating Bodo leaders and the then State Government arrived at an agreement and signed a memorandum of understanding popularly known as the Bodo Accord in 1993. The accord led to the formation of a territorially defined self-governing council known as the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) in 1993 to provide maximum autonomy to fulfil the economic, educational, and linguistic aspirations of the Bodos and other plain tribes. The council included a 40-member general council and a nine-member executive council. The general council was empowered to make by-laws, rules, and orders for application within the council area on 38 subjects, such as cottage industries, forests, cultural affairs, irrigation, and the like. The lack of a clear-cut territorial boundary, however, posed the biggest hurdle to the survival of the council. The then State Government was willing to include not more than 2,570 villages under the BAC jurisdiction as against 3,085 villages demanded by the Bodo leaders. As a result, elections to the council could not be

held. The lackadaisical functioning of the BAC led to the feeling among the Bodos that only a Bodoland state could fulfil their aspirations. The Bodos thus instigated another phase of agitation for a separate state.

The revival of statehood agitation coincided with the emergence of a separate brand of militancy. Around 1996 a section of the Bodo youth not satisfied with the functioning of the BAC raised itself as an armed organization,the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), solely to secure a separate Bodoland state through armed struggle. Suddenly several parts of Assam were thrown into a quagmire of violence. As a result, the government was forced to negotiate with the BLT to redress their grievances. In July 1999 the BLT declared a unilateral ceasefire in response to the Central Government's appeal for talks. Following a series of formal and informal talks, the BLT finally gave up the demand fora Bodoland state in 2001 and reconciled itself to a politico-administrative arrangement for autonomy under the Sixth Schedule. The successful end to the negotiations witnessed one of the biggest surrender ceremonies in the country on December 6, 2003, when 2,641 Bodo militants bade farewell to arms in Kokrajhar in Assam. A day later, on December 7, 2003, aninterim Bodo Territorial Council (BTC), led by HagramaMohilary, a former BLT leader, was constituted. The BTC has a general council with 40 elected and six nominated members and a 12-member executive council.

As for other councils, its tenure is five years. The council has legislative, executive, and financial powers in respect of 40 subjects. Unlike other tribal councils, its territorial boundary comprises four new contiguous districts of Kokrajhar, Baska, Udalguri, and Chirang. The BTC was the third council created under the Sixth Schedule in Assam after the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC). The latter two were created as early as in 1952, and have jurisdiction over the autonomous districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills, respectively. Another six tribal councils were created through state

legislation between 1993 and 2005. The formation of the BTC saw many of these councils stepping up their demands for Sixth Schedule status. One of the driving forces for such demands has been the extensive powers enjoyed by the BTC. The constitution of the BTC has indeed opened a Pandora's box for smaller tribal groups, who are now seeking special status under the amended Sixth Schedule. This occurred even as the autonomous districts of Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills stepped up their long-standing demand for the creation of separate states. Even several Bodo leaders, including the chief executive of BTC, Hagrama Mohilary, are demanding that the BTC area become a separate state within the next two decades. According to Mohilary, the erstwhile BLT leadership had in their talks with the Central Government given up their demand for a Bodoland state only because of the lack of infrastructure needed for a state. It is thus clear that councils enjoying Sixth Schedule status now wish to acquire the status of a fully fledged state, while those councils not under the Sixth Schedule are seeking a status similar to that of the BTC. Similar demands are also cropping up in the neighbouring states of Manipur and Tripura.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What was the Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan (PIP) Plan, 1964?

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.....

Q 2: When was the Bodo Accord signed? What did it lead to?

.....

.....

Q 3: When and why was the tribal league formed?

.....

.....

Q 4: What is one central element of tribal alienation?

.....

.....

Q 5: Which natural resource is a major source of many conflicts?

.....

.....



11.4 LET US SUM UP

- Land alienation owing to demographic change has been a major source of ethnic conflict in NorthEast India as the people are fighting for natural resources in the same geographical space.
- Therfore, it is obvious that peace can be restored in the region by land restoration, poverty alleviation, education and development especially in rural areas.
- Successive governments have continuously ignored the problems of indigenous people of the region.
- The indigenous people have found themselves politically displacedrather than exercising control over their land.
- Further, there is a dearth of strong and dedicated leadership in the region because of which human resources of the region couldnot be utilized in an effective and productive way.



11.5 FURTHER READING

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2) M. Amarjeet Singh (2008) *Ethnic Diversity, Autonomy, and Territoriality in Northeast India: A Case of Tribal Autonomy in Assam*, Strategic

Analysis, 32:6, 1101-1114.

3) Fernandes,W(2011)*Tribal Commons and Conflicts in Manipur and Tripura in Northeast India.*



11.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: It was an aggressive campaign to flush out immigrants, who settled in Assam since January 1951.

Ans to Q No 2: Bodo Accord was signed in 1993. It led to the formation of a Bodoland Autonomous Council.

Ans to Q No 3: In 1933 the Tribal League, a socio-political organization, was formed to highlight the socioeconomic problems of the tribals.

Ans to Q No 4: Delegitimisation of commons.

Ans to Q No 5: Land.



11.7 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: What are some of the causes of internal displacement in North East India?

Q 2: What is the nature of conflict in Tripura and Manipur?

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Explain how land and customary law is significant to the identity of a community keeping in context northeast India?

Q 2: Write a short note on the autonomous councils of the Northeast.

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UNIT 12 : DEVELOPMENT AND INDIGENOUS RIGHTS IN THE REGION

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 Concept of Development

- 12.3.1 Post-Colonial Development Paradigm in India: Issues, Concerns and Debates
- 12.3.2 Impact of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the development of people

12.4 Development Issues in Northeast India

- 12.4.1 Issues related to Developmental Projects in the North-East India

12.5 Development versus Rights of Indigenous People of Northeast

12.6 Let Us Sum Up

12.7 Further Reading

12.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

12.9 Model Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- describe the concept of development
- explain the nature of post-colonial development paradigm in India
- discuss the issues and concerns pertaining to development in Northeast India
- discuss how development paradigm has excluded and deprived certain section of the populace
- critically analyse development paradigm and its reality at the grassroots.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have learnt how land relations are changing in Northeast India. Land is a vital asset for an individual as well as a community. Livelihood of majority of the population in the region depends upon land. However due to various reasons the individuals and communities especially the tribals have been losing land in name of development projects and distress sale. Despite having various laws, which prohibit land transfers from tribals to non-tribals, such laws, are often seen to be violated. Though the Central and the State Governments have initiated various projects in the name of development, yet the indigenous population hardly get a share of the fruits of development. In many cases, they are alienated from their land in the name of development but are rarely developed in the process. They are rather deprived and marginalised in the process of development. In this unit, we shall learn the concept of development and the vision of development of the Post-Colonial Indian State. Further, we shall discuss how the Post-Colonial Development have only benefitted a fewer section of the population depriving many others especially the tribals. This unit shall mainly discuss the issues and concerns of development in the context of Northeastern States particularly Assam. After reading this unit, you shall be able to develop a critical thinking regarding the issue of development and how privileges few, and marginalises many more.

12.3 CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

Most of us tend to use the terms economic growth and development synonymously. We perceive that both the terms mean the same. But development and economic growth are two different ideas. There are significant differences between them. The term economic growth denotes rise (or growth) in particular economic aspects such as real national income, gross domestic product, or per capita income. National income or product is commonly expressed in terms of a measure of the aggregate value-added output of the domestic economy called gross domestic product (GDP). Thus economic growth of a nation takes place when its GDP rises. But development

is a broader concept than economic growth. Unlike economic growth, economic development is multidimensional and implies a long term phenomena. It entails improvement in literacy rates, life expectancy, health status and poverty rates and thereby enhancement of the quality of life of people. Thus it covers within its ambit a number of indicators apart economic expansion which are key to the life of the people in any society. It signifies not only mere economic growth but the growth accompanied by social, cultural, economic, and institutional change and development. But it is important to know that for economic development to take place, growth is an imperative. We can have economic growth without development but we cannot have development without economic growth. Economic growth is only quantitative in nature while economic development is both quantitative as well as qualitative and hence we cannot measure economic development in terms of Gross Domestic product (GDP) as in the case of economic growth. Further development is a gradual and steady process. Since it implies improvement in several aspects of human life, it takes a long duration. It refers to improvement not only in man's material conditions but also in his/her social condition. Thus development is about the overall well being of the citizens of the country and a sustainable boost in their standard of living.

12.3.1 Post-Colonial Development Paradigm in India: Issues, Concerns and Debates

The Post-Colonial Indian State with a vision to develop the country gave emphasis on industrialisation. It started to invest in industries and strived for massive industrial growth. Thus, the Post-Colonial Policies and Planning was aimed at growth and expansion of the industrial sector. Following the western model of development in India, it was believed that industrial growth was the only way to make the country developed. Industrial development was seen as a panacea to the socio-economic problems that the country was beset with after the exit of the colonial regime. Industries were considered 'temples of modern India', which would ameliorate the economic hurdles of the country and bring prosperity.

However, the grassroots reality depicted a different picture. Majority of the development projects in reality alienated people from their land thereby displacing them. According to estimates, not more than 25 per cent of those displaced since the First Five-Year Plan (1951-52 to 1955-56) have been resettled. Indeed, the experiences of the first four decades after Independence show that development projects benefit primarily a few at the cost of many. The projects, instead of promoting even and holistic development of society, had in fact widened the gaps between the haves and the have-nots, between regions, communities and sections of society, and thereby contributing to widespread unrest, conflict and extensive socio-environmental crises. All this is happening in the name of larger national interests. The development projects are undertaken in the name of public benefit, but hardly a few people are developed in the process. Millions have been forcibly uprooted from their homes, habitats and communities, and not even resettled, leave alone rehabilitated. Sometimes, even the minimum compensation has been denied to the displaced, rising questions about the validity and sanctity of so-called national interests. This will mean even more displacement and the consequent uprooting and forced changes of livelihoods and lifestyles.

12.3.2 Impact of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and the development of people

The introduction of a market friendly economy set India on the direct route of industrialisation andDevelopment. The process that led to the New Economic Policy of 1991, when in the face of a severe resource crunch; India went in for a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The loan came with a severe set of conditions that resulted in major changes in the economic policies. Planned development in post-Independent India, especially the growth of the core sectors like power, mining, heavy industry and irrigation, and related infrastructure developments, came about with an enormous

cost. Most of India's mineral resources, including coal, iron ore and manganese reserves are located in the remoteand backward regions like Jharkhand, which are mainly inhabited by tribals. It is true that strong industrial networks have come into existence in these areas, but this has resulted in the acquisition of land and subsequently massive displacements. About 40 to 50 per cent of the displaced are Tribe. With the NEP, the renewed demand for land has begun to surface. Land is required for

- industrial and mega-power projects
- large scale construction of multi-purpose irrigation dams
- mining operations
- reservation of forests and creation of sanctuaries and national parks
- construction of canals
- highways
- transmission lines
- medium and small industrial projects

The lands acquired for all the above purposes, taken together, add up to sizeable areas. The acquisitions of these lands, whether acquired through various land acquisition legislations or purchased directly from the landowners, bring hardships to the persons whose lands are being taken. The acquisition includes agricultural land, home stead, or both. Where it involves the homestead as well, the tribals are compelled to change their livelihoods and are uprooted from the soil. For example, NALCO built two units in Orissa in the mid-1980s, one in upper caste dominated Angul district and the other in tribal majority Koraput. In the former only 18 per cent of the land acquired was commonly owned land, mostly roads, schools and other facilities. In the latter, however, two thirds of tribal land comprised of CPRs for which no compensation was paid. In Angul, the farmers received an average compensation of Rs.25, 000/- per acre while in Koraput it was Rs. 2,700. The tribe are thus unable to begin their life anew and are soon reduced to the status of agricultural labourers or migrant

urban casual labour .These processes have further intensified in the era of liberalisation. In Orissa, of the 2.32 million acres acquired for development projects between 1951 and 1995, 106,000 acres were for industries. Future development plans indicate that about 200,000 acres of land is to be acquired for industry alone in the next 10 years. A little over 2.5 million acres were acquired in Andhra Pradesh in the same period, about 200,000 of it for industries. The same quantity is expected to be acquired for industries during the next ten years.

In most of the development projects of post-colonial India, one witnesses that the land is acquired especially from the tribals in the name of development. But these tribals hardly receive any fruit of development. They rather face displacement and dispossession. Most of them even do not receive compensation and many a times compensation paid is very meagre.

12.4 DEVELOPMENT ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN NORTHEAST INDIA

India's Northeast is a mini-India with its diversity of races, cultures, religions and languages. Every community residing in Northeast has its own rich cultural heritage. However, Northeast India is ill famous for ethnic discords and mayhem. The Northeast is characterised by widespread conflicts ranging from struggle for liberation to autonomy and inter-ethnic clashes. The endured decades of conflicts have kept much of the region militarised, and severely affected the development of the region. The Naga National Council's fight for independence has been followed by similar movements in Assam by the ULFA, the NLFT and ATTF in Tripura, the HNLC in Meghalaya and the various armed opposition groups in Manipur. Frequent clashes between warring ethnic groups have added to the turmoil in the region. The long enduring troubles of the region for identity and autonomy have fragmented the region, adding to its isolation from the rest of the nation. Issues of illegal immigration and cross border terrorism are some of the unsettled problems, which too have been serious obstacles in the development of the region.

Since independence, the Indian State has been consistently striving

to attain uniform economic development through rapid industrialization, liberal economic policies and new legislations. But even today the North East states of India have remained relatively less developed when compared to the other parts of the country. There is constant failure of the state machineries, which are compounded with rising insurgency, rising corruption, youth unrest, drug addiction, kidnapping, gun-culture, extortion, crime and violence with huge socio-economic inequalities which are impediment to sustainable development.

One of the main reasons for the numerous and multi faced problems existing in the region is the distance and a sense of alienation from the mainland. The Northeaster region located in a remote distance from the centre lacks adequate infrastructure, road and railway connectivity, educational institutions and health centres. The poor connectivity deprives the region from its great potential to boost trade and tourism. Solutions to the problems existing in Northeast need to be dealt with, from a different angle by understanding the logistics of dealing with the issues and pointing out the apparently visible sites of the problems such as ethnic conflict, cultural resurgence, nationalist insurgency, poor governance and corruption. The region has one of the richest biodiversity, wide range of mineral resources like coal, limestone, uranium, petroleum. It has a tremendous potential for hydroelectricity and its unharnessed river system can act as an economic way of transportation. Thus, there is tremendous scope for making the region development. Only way to develop this region is to first address the issues confronting the region in a proper way and thereby resolving the issues and paving the way from economic and social transformation of the region.

12.4.1 Issues related to Developmental Projects in the North-East India

In the Northeastern region too, development projects have not brought development to the people. Land has been alienated, people are displaced and only a few sections of the population has benefitted from developmental projects. Majority of the people are

deprived and marginalised by the development projects. In Northeast too, the tribals who are the indigenous people of the region are the worst sufferers of the development disparity. Tribals are being displaced by the state and other organisations, which require land for development. Some of the examples of development-induced displacement in Northeastern region are:

- **Ranganadi Hydro Electrical Project (RHEP) in Arunachal Pradesh**

The NEEPCO's Ranganadi Hydro Electrical Project (RHEP) on the Ranganadi/Panyor river with an installed capacity of 405 mega watts near Potin in Lower Subansiri district is the only functional mega hydropower project in Arunachal Pradesh Commissioned in the year 2001. This project was part of the North Eastern Council (NEC) scheme and was under implementation by the North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO) in Lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. The Ranganadi River enters Johing and joins Subansiri River in Pokoniaghat in Lakhimpur district of Assam. Flood and erosion was major threat to the people living in and around the Dikrong Valley. Even prior to the construction of the Ranganadi hydel power projects, the valley had witnessed a series of activities that compromised its ecological functioning. Felling of trees, digging of hilly area and extraction of gravels, stones, rocks and sands from river catchments area were done much before the construction of Ranganadi project. From 1991-2001 data out of the total 1354 families of the 22 villages, two villages were completely wiped out and 1060 families were affected due to flood and erosion. These were the condition of the people in the pre Ranganadi hydro power project. The percentage of damage prior to the dam building was 78.28 per cent. It also depicts that 886.4 Hectares agricultural land and 222.02 hectares of built up land were damaged due to flood and erosion. Similarly 501 houses were fully lost and 599 houses were partially lost.

- **Umiam Hydel Project in Meghalaya**

The Umiam hydel project is located along the WahUmiam at a distance of 18 kms from Shillong connected by National Highway No.40. The plan for the construction was conceived in the late 1950's and the project began in 1960 and it was completed in the year 1965. The construction of the Umiam hydel project has led to the submergence of the UmsawKhwan village, occupying an area of 3600 acres. As a result 600 people were displaced. Out of the evicted people, the majority are the local tribes (Khasis) for whom the serious impact of displacement is the break from their natural surroundings. In general the positive impacts of the hydel project include generation of hydel-electricity, irrigation, flood control, fishery and recreation. However the Umiam hydel project is specially meant for generation of electricity and also includes fishery development, drinking water and recreation.

- **Kopili Hydro Electric Plant in Assam**

The 275 MW (Mega Watt) Kopili Hydro Electric Plant situated in between the North Cachar Hills District (Dima Hasao district) of Assam and the Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya on the river Kopili is a hydroelectric project designed to cater to the energy needs of the North-eastern region.The Kopili Hydro Electric Project (HEP) has two dams, one on the Kopili River and one on its tributary Umrang stream. This project was developed by NEEPCO (Northeast Electric Power Corporation Ltd.). The work on the project started in 1976, the first unit of this Kopili HEP was commissioned in March 1984. Additional unit under stage two was commissioned in July, 2004. Kopili project has played a pioneering role in the development of the power scenario of the North-eastern region. The establishment of the project led to the development of the small town of Umrongso, a remote area in the Assam-Meghalaya border which has become well connected with roads, banks, postal services, telecommunications, schools, hospitals etc. Several cement factories have also been established in the area facilitating the development of the local economy. Despite its benefits,

subsequent studies found that although there were rare plant outages till 2006-07 since the commissioning of the power stations of the project, there have been reports of increasing outages since May, 2007. Open cast mining using traditional technology for coal excavation is being practiced in the upper reaches of the Kopili and the open pits are left unattended once mining was over. During monsoons these pits get filled with rain water which in turn forms sulphuric acid which is then carried by rain water to the reservoirs. The issue of acidic contamination in the Kopili River has become a major concern as it has serious repercussions not only for the life of the dam but also for the ecological balance of the region. The catastrophic flood of 2004 in Assam that affected large areas in Nagaon and Morigaon districts of Assam resulting in loss of lives and property and the issue of acidic contamination of the Kopili water have generated consciousness regarding the harmful consequences of dams. Due to dam there is loss of agricultural land, submergence of forest areas, heavy flooding in the downstream areas might destroy the traditional livelihood practices of various ethnic communities in the region. The traditional livelihood patterns of women in Dima Hasao commented that acid mine drainage not only pollutes the water but also silts up the rivers and adjacent lands making them unsuitable for agriculture. This affects cultivation and fishing which are the two most important livelihoods of the ethnic groups.

- **Doyang Hydro Project in Nagaland**

Situated on the River Doyang the Project is located in Wokha District of Nagaland, was commissioned on 2000 under NEEPCO. The Doyang Dam, 'a technological innovation of rock-fill dam' of modem man has occupied this plain and slopes causing far-reaching socio-economic consequences to the local population. Taken all these groups together the Landowner's Union has recorded the total affected population at around 30,000.' of the affected people. However, looking at the number of households in these 17 affected villages which come to 3,292 households; it is believed that the total population

of affected people may be even higher than the figure provided. According to the record available, out of the total 8420.41 acres of land acquired for the project these three villages alone have 3560.83 acres of affected land. It comes under the physical occupation of the project. And according to the Sungro Range Village Council Union, some 20,000 people of the area will be cut off from the rest of the district once the dam is completed. The consequences of the project have also led to a serious economic set back to the affected people as they are largely dependent on land, forest and the river for their sustenance. The loss of the plain and slope areas where once the settled cultivation with irrigational facility, orchards and plantation of timber had flourished has brought havoc to the economic life of the people. This phenomenon is bringing people back to the jhumming as they have lost their wetland, putting more pressure on the jhum land.

Assam's Golaghat district was experiencing drought-like conditions, when sudden waters released from a hydroelectric project in neighbouring Nagaland brought misery to 1,00,000 people without any warning in both the states. Nearly 1, 00,000 people living around the project in both Nagaland and Assam were affected, with some of the areas getting flooded for the first time. The waters from Doyang Hydroelectric Project damaged our crops, swept away several houses. Villages under Sarupathar, Golaghat, Merapani, Morangi and Khumtai revenue circles have been inundated by flood waters affecting 887.9 hectares of crop land and a population of 5575.

- **Tapaimukh Dam in Mizoram**

The 162.8 meter high Tapaimukh dam, estimated to cost about Rs. 2.9 billion, is proposed to be built in the Barak Valley at the tri-junction of Assam, Manipur and Mizoram. The project was taken up without any geological survey though it is said to be located just 50 meters from a major fault in the Trans-Asiatic seismic belt running through the area. Eviction notices have been served on the Hmar and Zeliangrong tribal groups living on the lands to be submerged.

The dam, to be located 500m downstream from the confluence of the rivers Barak and Tuvai, is expected to produce 150 megawatts hydel power. It will displace about 1500 families of31 villages, and submerge 12,286 hectares of forest and 2,703 hectares of cultivable land. Apartfrom the livelihoods of affected families, the survival of some of the rarest orchids in the world isat stake.

- **Thoubal River Development Project in Manipur**

Large tracts of cultivable land have been submerged and more than 1,750 villages already evacuated for this project under which a dam, a barrage, and two canals are coming up on the River Imphal. The project is expected to irrigate 17,500 hectares of land and generate 7.5 megawatts of hydel power. Sanctioned by the Planning Commission in 1980 at an estimated cost of Rs 1.4 billion, the project has no provisions forrehabilitation of the displaced persons.

- **The Siju Cement Plant in Meghalaya**

Asia's largest underground cave, the first one to be explored in such depth as early as 1922, is located at Siju in the South Garo Hills of Meghalaya. The site has plenty of fossil remains. In the mid-nineties, ACC, Cement Company was attracted by the lime deposits in the area, and commissioned a state of the art mechanised cement plant near the Siju caves. It is however known that not much private land will be taken. However, common lands belonging to the Garo tribe havealready been acquired, affecting the livelihoods of hundreds of people. Further damage to thelivelihoods will take place by the pollution in River Sam-Sim, affecting Garos in both Meghalaya and Bangladesh through which the river flows.

12.5 DEVELOPMENT VERSUS RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN INDIA

The scheme of administration under Sixth Scheduled almost was wholly based on the recommendations of the North East Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly of India. The

Committee was set up to the report to the constituent assembly on the scheme for administration of tribal areas. The scheme was conceived with a view to building autonomous administration in these areas so that the tribal people may continue to follow their traditional way of life. The committee took three factors into consideration for proposing a separate schemed of administration for these areas, which were called the autonomous District, viz., (a) The district social customs and tribal organisations of the different people as well as their religious, beliefs, (b) the fear of exploitation by the people of the plains on account of the latter's superior organization and experience of business, and (c) the fear that unless suitable financial provisions were made, or power were conferred upon the local councils themselves. The struggles of the indigenous and tribal peoples centre around the issues of land, forest, water, culture, transport and communication, health and hygienic, nutrition, education and identity. These demands are made to find a rightful place in the society, cultural, economic and political spheres of life in India. The thrust is also for the due recognition of the indigenous people by the government of India, which would establish their long cherished rights, and employment of their traditional habitat, and community life.

A demand was made by the indigenous people during the UN year of Indigenous people that the tribal and semi tribal be recognized as the indigenous peoples of India. But the government of India refused to accept this demand on the ground that adequate provision which protect the rights of indigenous people (Article 46 of the Directive Principal of State Policy (Part-IV) of the Indian Constitution) provided protection and promotion of the interest of the indigenous people. The inner line regulations enacted by the British in 1873 provide the basis for safeguarding tribal rights in most of the north-Border states and in practice the regulation were followed. These regulations prohibit any non-tribal person, including citizens from others states to cross an inner boundary without a valid permit. No outsiders were allowed to own land in tribal areas without approval from tribal authorities.

All the developmental projects has been initiated for the illusionary aim of development but cost have been paid by the poor tribals who have long been protecting their land with nothing in their hand and ancestral

property been occupied in the name of development. The various acts and programmes had been initiated but the concerns and challenges keep on rising without any possible outcome. It is very unfortunate that the adopted policies, programmes and plans have not seeped deep into these underprivileged sections of the society and the tribal people have suffered disproportionately from the effects of development projects on their land but the potential benefits hardly reach them. Many displaced people even do not receive adequate compensation. Therefore the overall impact of developmental projects on tribes has been often loss of livelihood, massive displacement and involuntary migration. There is no denial the fact that if the quality of life of people is to be improved, development projects are a must but there is general consensus now that development should not be at the cost of people and their environment.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What do you mean by development?

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Q 2: Why was there a demand in land by the government under NEP?

.....

.....

Q 3: Explain in brief why northeast India is undeveloped?

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12.7 LET US SUM UP

- The Post-Colonial Policies and Planning was aimed at growth and expansion of the industrial sector and it was believed that industrial

growth was the only way to make the country developed.

- The demand for land has increased for industrial and mega-power projects; large scale construction of multi-purpose irrigation dams; mining operations; reservation of forests and creation of sanctuaries and national parks; construction of canals; highways; medium and small industrial projects, etc.
- The development projects are undertaken in the name of public benefit, but hardly a few people are developed in the process. Millions have been forcibly uprooted from their homes, habitats and communities.
- Majority of the development projects in reality alienated people from their land thereby displacing them. In most of the development projects the land is acquired especially from the tribals in the name of development. But these tribals hardly receive any fruit of development. They rather face displacement and dispossession. Most of them even do not receive compensation and many a times compensation paid is very meagre.



12.8 FURTHER READING

1) Datta, P S., 1992, *India's North-East: A Study in Transition*, Vikash Publication House Pvt Ltd, New Delhi.

1) Mehta, P.L., 1991, *Constitutional Protection to Scheduled Tribes in India*. Delhi: HK: Publishers & Distributors.

1) Shiuma, B.D., 1984, *Planning for Tribal Development*, Delhi: Prachi Prakashan.

1) *UNDP Human Development Report*, 2003, New York, Oxford University Press.

12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Development is a process that creates growth, progress, positive change or the addition of physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components.

Ans to Q No 2: With the NEP, the government recognises the demand for land for industrial and mega-power projects; large scale construction of multi-purpose irrigation dams; mining operations; reservation of forests and creation of sanctuaries and national parks; construction of canals; medium and small industrial projects,etc.

Ans to Q No 3: People in states furthest away from the centre, because of poor communication links, geographical distance, difficult terrain, lack adequate infrastructure, road and railway connectivity, educational institutions and health centres. The problems such as ethnic conflict, cultural resurgence, nationalist insurgency, poor governance and corruption. The poor connectivity deprives the region from its great potential to boost trade and tourism.

12.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Answer Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: What were the different problems of the tribals in India after independence?

Q 2: Discuss the different issues and challenges in Northeast India?

Q 3: Briefly describe some of the tribal development programmes in Northeast India?

Q 4: Explain the rights of indigenous people in India?

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Discuss the Impact of the New Economic Policy (NEP) on the Tribals?

Q 2: Discuss the concerns and debates on development of tribals in India?

Q 3: Elaborate the issues related to development projects in northeast India? Give examples.

Q 4: Aren't people displaced by development projects fairly compensated? Explain.

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UNIT 13 : STATE AND SOCIETY IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Understanding Ethnicity

13.4 Brief Introduction to State Formation in Post-Colonial North-East India

13.5 State-Society interaction in NE through ethnic lens- the case of Assam

13.6 Let Us Sum Up

13.7 Further Reading

13.8 Answers To Check Your Progress

13.9 Model Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- understand the relationship between state and society in North-East India
- explain the oretically the relations between various communities residing in the region
- discuss the relations the various communities share with the centralised state.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

In the first part of this unit, are going to have a detailed understanding of 'ethnicity' as a concept and the relevance of the concept in the case of North-East India. North-east has a large number of ethnic communities and one of the major cause of various conflicts in the region is based on ethnic lines- whether the conflict is among the communities themselves or conflicts emerging between the communities and the state. In the later parts we are

going to briefly take up state formation in the region in the post-colonial period as well as understand the relation between state and society in the region by taking the example of Assam.

13.3 UNDERSTANDING ETHNICITY

The term 'ethnicity' implies the sense of kinship, group solidarity and common culture. In 1973 edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary,* it is defined as "1. The condition of belonging to a particular ethnic group. Thomas Erikson in his book *Ethnicity and Nationalism* conceptualized 'Ethnicity' as the classification of peoples and the relations between groups, in a context of 'self-other' relation. According to Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan 'ethnicity' can be attributed to having the character or quality of an ethnic group.

Ethnic identity is the focal point around which much of the politics of North-East India revolves. Identity aspirations have the potential to influence, inspire and mobilise the communities in pursuit of self-government, autonomy or independence. In one sense, identity struggles have the potential to undermine the dominant power structures that cease to be democratic and responsive. But taken to another extreme, identity assertions can also end up in chains of fratricidal conflicts, leading to genocide and mutual destruction. North-East India provides instances of multiple forms of manifestations of ethnic identity.

In North-East India several communities have been claiming separate identities based on the 'naturally inherited' features such as kinship, race, culture, religion, language and traditions. But very often one encounters instances wherein some culturally-related communities start espousing separate identities and also the apparently unconnected communities bonding up together with one identity. Solely relying on primordialism cannot explain the contradictory social processes, which question the salience of the 'naturally givens' in the development of ethnic identity. It is also pointed out that most conflicts between communities although packaged in the name of kinship, culture and traditions, are actually motivated by material concerns – land, jobs, political power etc. Further, economic inequalities have made their

appearance felt in almost all indigenous communities, raising questions about their 'tribal' nature.

Some scholars working on North-East did take instrumentalist position to explain ethnic processes in the region. Their studies took note of changes taking place within the tribal societies ever since the region came under British rule. They show how factors like colonial rule, Christian missionaries and modern education contributed to the birth of educated elite that played an important role in giving shape to ethnic identity of the respective community. Ethnic identity politics in the region is viewed from economic interests, ideological hegemony and political expectations of the upcoming indigenous educated middle class elites. Despite its merits, the instrumentalist interpretations of ethnic processes in North-East have their limitations as well. First, the indigenous elite are themselves a part of the community and hence it cannot construct or articulate any identities which are not acceptable to the members of the community. The parameters that a community sets for elite maneuvers should not be ignored. Secondly, the indigenous elites are not always homogeneous. Factionalism and competition within the emerging indigenous elite can give birth to more than one identity in a given culturally-related group of people. Finally, ethnic identities and sentiments are not always amenable to cost-benefit calculations.

The instrumentalist interpretations of ethnicity run into difficulties at times due to complex nature of the political economy of nation states within which several communities emerge, evolve and develop. Even in developing countries like India, the operation of market forces is able to integrate several inaccessible areas of North-Eastern region into the Indian national market. Developments like growth of settled cultivation, commercialization of agriculture, increase in mining activities, state induced development projects and programmes etc. have given birth to indigenous business entrepreneurs, contractors, real estate owners andrich peasants, and along with them a class of landless peasants, unemployed or underemployed youth and casual labourers working in unorganized sectors. Hence it would be wrong to focus only on ethnic elites, ignoring interests and dynamics of different antagonistic classes that have come into existence. But at the same time, development of classes should not however drive one to place North-Eastern societies on

par with advancedsocieties. In the more advanced societies where classes and class struggles are the norm, the ruling classes, as scholars like Bonacich point out, invoke ethnic sentiments to divide the working masses to their advantage. Class explanation has its limits in transitional societies which are simultaneously witnessing the birth of ethnic communities as well as classes. Notwithstanding the process of class differentiation taking place in each of the communities, one cannot subsume ethnic rivalries and conflicts operating in the region to the calculated interests of the ruling classes. More sophisticated theories are required for understanding the interrelationship between class and ethnic politics in underdeveloped regions like North-East India.

One way of enhancing our understanding of ethnic identities is by relating them to the study of ethnic boundaries. Some scholars have pointed out socio-political processes involved in construction and maintenance of ethnic boundaries. Ethnic identities make sense only within the ethnic boundaries. But just as ethnic boundaries are subject to contestations and change, ethnic identities need not be permanent. There is every possibility of new ethnic identities emerging and the old ones disappearing. Many such instances of changes in identity and boundaries are visible in North-Eastern region but very few academics working on North-East have reflected on the relationship between ethnic identities and ethnic boundaries.

As mentioned earlier, ethnic communities are much more than mere tribes. Presence of primordial attributes such as kinship ties, racial and cultural similarities are not enough to make a cultural group into an ethnic community. Transformation of tribes into ethnic communities requires several other material and psychological conditions. In their workson nations and national identities, scholars like Ernst Gellner, Anthony D. Smith, and Benedict Anderson have thrown light on factors like evolution of linguistic communities, development of print media, growth of literature, penetration of market forces, expansion of transport and communication networks, weakening of primordial loyalties, increasing competition and claims over national resources, working of democratic institutions and politics etc. in contributing to national politics. Although ethnic communities cannot claim the status of nations, some

factorsrelevant to the advent of national identities seem relevant to the growth of ethnic identities as well. There is a need to bring in all these missing or neglected links in the study of social forces and ethnic politics in the region.

Further, post-colonial studies initiated by scholars like Partha Chatterjee have thrown light on how colonial and post-colonial states through administrative interventions such as census studies, anthropological surveys, classification of people on the bases of cultural and racial differences, and official recognition of certain communities have facilitated the growth of ethnic identities. Systematic studies of ethnic dynamics in North-East India along these lines are still its infancy. A recent book edited by SanjibBaruah (2009) has a few interventions along these lines. Similarly, substantial literature has come out in recent years explaining how policies of liberalization and globalization, far from eliminating ethnic loyalties, in fact reify and recreate ethnic identities and ethnic politics. Of late, because of BIMSTEC and the Act East policy, the North-Eastern region, which borders East and South East Asian countries and also Bangladesh and Nepal, has acquired considerable significance. Positive or negative effects of the policies of liberalization and globalization pursued by the Government of India on ethnic identity assertions and conflicts in the region need much more attention than theones given so far. It is possible to have a new look at the manifestations of ethnic identities from these perspectives and vantage points. Very often ethnic identities are by-products of ethnic movements and conflicts. While it is true that the identities inspire the ethnic movement, it is also true that the course of the movement further consolidates and strengthens ethnic identities.

Similarly, the causes, course and effects of ethnic conflicts contribute to further reinforcement of the ethnic identities. Conversely the cessation of conflicts and establishment of peace lead to weakening of certain ethnic identities. North-East India bears witness to all these processes of appearance and disappearance, strengthening andweakening, and making and breaking of ethnic identities. At the end, one may also note that ethnic identity manifests in different forms in North-East India. Social forces that facilitate or abet or lead ethnic politics are not always same. Even when they are similar, the manner in which each of them reacts may differ from situation to situation.

Hence no single theory of ethnicity could explain identity politics of the north-eastern region as a whole. Which theory of ethnicity is relevant or useful for explaining a particular ethnic identity movement or conflict can be assessed only after empirical study of the ethnic phenomenon. Very often we may have to use a variety of theories to understand the ethnic complexities. Hence scholars trying to understand ethnic identities should be open to all theories and possibilities and not restrict themselves to preconceived theories and explanations.

13.4 BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO STATE FORMATION IN POST-COLONIAL NORTH-EAST INDIA

Both the British Raj and the independent Indian government created legal regimes around land, government employment, and local representation, with the intention of prohibiting new settlements or cultivation in lands occupied by the autochthonous population. Enforcement of these laws has always been uneven, particularly because of policies encouraging migration to areas opened to tea cultivation and other industries. The more remote hill tribes remained relatively isolated from migration and cultural integration, while the exposed plains tribes lost substantial areas to migration. Colonial northern Bengal was an exception, with many hill tribe areas converted into tea plantations and British hill stations. The post-independence political status of the Northeast was settled in a piecemeal fashion. Partition in 1947 split hill tribes living on the new border with East Pakistan; further east, the separation of Burma from British India had already divided hill communities a decade earlier. The princely states of Tripura and Manipur acceded to India as centrally administered territories, while the Khasi states and Cooch Behar were dissolved into Assam and West Bengal, respectively. On the other hand, Nepal remained sovereign, while Bhutan and Sikkim became monarchical protectorates. The latter was annexed to India in 1975. Controversy over accession to India contributed to three separatist insurgencies within the first decades of the country's independence. In 1956, the Naga National Council (NNC) declared independence from India; a separatist insurgency began in 1964 in Manipur; and, in Assam, the Mizo National Front (MNF)

rebelled two years later. Tactical factors aggravated accession-related violence in the Northeast compared to, for example, Hyderabad, where resistance to accession was put down relatively quickly. In the Northeast, difficult terrain; the presence of international borders providing militants with access to external aid and safe havens; and, for some tribes, military training and access to arms as a legacy of participation in World War II also helped sustain insurgent violence. The centre's response to these early challenges devastated the prospects for peace. Up until the 1970s, the Indian government used collective punishment, forcible relocation, and military occupation in an attempt to end insurgencies in the Northeast. In the next part we are going to analyse ethnic related issues and its relation to conflicts prevalent in the region in an attempt to understand state- society relation in the NE through an ethnic lens.

13.5 STATE-SOCIETY INTERACTION IN NE THROUGH ETHNIC LENS

The Indian state has survived with democratic stability for a long periodsince independence, despite various frequent ethnic conflicts over theperiod of time. Democracy in India has taken deep roots inspite of lowincomeeconomy, widespread poverty and illiteracy and immense ethnicdiversity. Indian state has succeeded for more than six decades instrengthening democratic processes within the framework of a centralized state, moderate accommodation of group demands, especially demandsbased on ethnicity, and some decentralization of power. The next part deals withhow the genesis of conflicts among various ethnic groupsin Assam which some time paralyse the machinery of governance eventhough there is a strong governance system. The question is whethersuch conflicts play a productive role in generation of legitimacy for thestate. The question involves complexities which need to be probed. Such complexity is enhanced further by the fact that violence is a characteristicfeature of the modern state – which claims its legitimacy from the roleand of the modern nation-state.

The Case of Assam

The politics in North-East India has long been in a confusing state

ofaffairs. But still the region is democratically vibrant contradicting John Stuart Mill's proposition that democracy is 'next to impossible' in multi-ethnicsocieties and completely impossible in linguistically divided countries'.

As mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, the region itself, though in most of the literature there has been a tendencyto consider the North-East region as one unit, is highly divided ethnicallyand linguistically. One of the single units of this region, Assam consistsof as many as 24 ethnic groups with distinct languages and cultures.Though democracy exists in the region, various aspects such ascultural and linguistic differences between the tribal peopleand Assamese speaking people, the grievance include- unequal assimilation intothe Assamese identity, the 'chauvinistic' mind-set ofmainstream Assamese people, and linguistic hegemony over other subnationalgroups of the state-forced them to seek 'recognition of theiridentity'.

Since the colonial period, a new form of native resurgence could bewitnessed which led to the struggle to forge new identities on the ruinsof old ethnic and caste identities. Western educated elite made a consciouseffort to construct and propagate through language, literature, education, culture and social work, new socio-political group identities. In theearly part of 19th Century, we could see the development of nationalism on the basis of Pan-Indian cultural homogeneities and anti-imperialism;but at the same time we could also see the rise of distinctivecharacteristics of our regional-cultural homogeneities which was muchdifferent from Pan-Indian characteristics. In Assam a section of Westerneducated elite attempted to construct the Assamese identity from theperspective of language, literature and culture. As the first attempt in thisdirection, in the early 19th century Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan talked of an Assamese 'nation' and tried to uphold the pride of the Assamese language by making it a symbol modern national consciousness. In the early days of the British rule in Assam, for their administrative convenience, the British introduced Bengali language in administration and in courtsof law. With the increasing dominance of Bengali language, Assamese language lost its due position in its own land among its own people.This made Assamese speaking people furious and took various

steps tobring back the glory of Assamese language and literature which promptedthe Calcutta based enlightened section of Assamese to bring out theirown literary journal *Jonaki* in 1889.

Even after independence the public space was dominated by variousregional-cultural issues, which have paralyzed our governance system. After independence, India adopted democratic governance system whichis, in the words of Weiner, mainly a legacy of British colonialism. Atul Kohli aptly argued that India inherited a number of political traits from British rule such as a relatively centralized state, including a well functioning civil service; early introduction of elections, and socializationof the highest political elite in values of liberal democracy. But suchcolonial structure of Indian democracy failed to accommodate the aspirations of the people of some peripheral states of North-East. Eventhough there were some constitutional arrangements made toaccommodate these sections of people, but already a new form of consciousness had awakened among various ethnic groups for better life, opportunity and society. These ethnic groups had to fight for all kinds of amenities and social-cultural securities.

However, some scholars accuse the Assamese middle class of visualizingsuch struggles of self-determination as a challenge to the very existenceof the Assamese life, literature and society and not raising an 'umbrella voice' loud enough for the preservation of unique identities of the other ethnic groups residing within Assam. The education facilities, employment opportunities, health services were far below the advanced Assamese areas. Such factors eventually led to complete breakdown in the process of ethnic accommodation in the state.

In the 80s the question of ethnic identity took a radical turn with the rise of various militant groups. The self-proclaimed custodian of the interests of the 'natives' by the militant groups against foreign immigrants had made the issue more complex and obscure. Looking at the nature ofactivities of these groups, one can presume that these groups were moreinterested to assert their group interest rather than the interest of the community as a whole. This had resulted in intra-community conflictswhich have been supposed to be more dangerous because two militantgroups of a particular

community have been fighting against each otherjust to uphold their own group interest out of which the community atlength achieved nothing except bloodshed. For example, in Bodocommunity they had two militant groups — National Democratic Frontof Bodoland (NDFB) and Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). Both thegroups had vowed to protect the interest of the Bodo community. Butmore often, their competition to assert their influence over the community had led to violent confrontations against each other.

In Assam, growing competition for limited social and economic space has intensified the hostilities and prejudices among the ethnic groupssince the colonial period. But in the post-colonial period successivegovernments have failed to contain the ethnic clashes over the period of time. Even though we have adopted democratic culture as politicalprocess, federalism as an administrative structure has been unable to administer ethnic as pirations effectively, thus,bringing down the legitimacy of the governance system. Myron Weiner argued the weakening of modern political institutions todeal with local religious, linguistic, castist and regional concerns that ledto sectional contestations resulting in the spiral of community conflictsand violence in India generally and particularly in the North-East. Someother scholars argued that the violation of federal principles and the emergence of the patterns of 'cosmetic federalism' – the national state'scentralizing tendencies and the overriding power to cut-up sub-nationalterritories have been resulted into frequent violence in the region. Baruahand Chandhoke further state that contrary to conventional wisdom,public policies promoting self-governance for particular communities inthe region may actually be contributing to the problem as these practicesen courage competitive mobilization among other groups resulting in mutual contestation that fuel intensification of conflicts and violence which ultimately leads to, in Arun Shourie's words "total breakdown of governance".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is one major focal point around which the politics of North-East revolves?

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Q 2: Which two policies made the NE region relevant in context of globalisation and India's relation with the neighbouring countries in the East and South-East Asia?

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Q 3: Which were the 2 princely states of the region?

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Q 4: In which year Jonaki was first published?

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Q 5: What the two militant groups fighting for the rights of the Bodo community?

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13.6 LET US SUM UP

- Ethnic identity is the focal point around which much of the politics of North-East India revolves. Identity aspirations have the potential to influence, inspire and mobilise the communities in pursuit of self-government, autonomy or independence.
- The instrumental view to understand the ethnic processes in the North-East holds that factors like colonial rule, Christian missionaries and

modern education contributed to the birth of educated elite that played an important role in giving shape to ethnic identity of the respective community.

- Post-colonial studies initiated by scholars like Partha Chatterjee have thrown light on how colonial and post-colonial states through administrative interventions such as census studies, anthropological surveys, classification of people on the bases of cultural and racial differences, and official recognition of certain communities have facilitated the growth of ethnic identities.
- Ethnic conflicts also affect the formation and reinforcement of ethnic identities.
- Both the British Raj and the independent Indian government created legal regimes around land, government employment, and local representation, with the intention of prohibiting new settlements or cultivation in lands occupied by the autochthonous population. Enforcement of these laws has always been uneven, particularly because of policies encouraging migration to areas opened to tea cultivation and other industries.
- Post independence of India, controversy over accession to India contributed to three separatist insurgencies within the first decades of the country's independence.
- Genesis of conflicts among various ethnic groupsin North-East (for example, in Assam) sometime paralyse the machinery of governance eventhough there is a strong governance system.



13.7 FURTHER READING

1) Baruah, A. 2003. 'Tribal Traditions and Crises of Governance in Northeast India, with Special Reference to Meghalaya', Crisis States Program Working Papers Series, No. 1. London: Development

Research Centre DESTIN/London School of Economics.

2) *Man and Society A journal of North-East Studies*, ICSSR, North-Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong, Volume VII, 2011.



13.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Ethnic identity.

Ans to Q No 2: BIMSTEC and Act East Policy.

Ans to Q No 3: Tripura and Manipur.

Ans to Q No 4: 1889.

Ans to Q No 5: National Democratic Frontof Bodoland (NDFB) and Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT).



13.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Short Questions (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: Define ethnicity?

Q 2: What is the instrumental and post-colonial interpretation of understanding ethnic identities?

Long Questions (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: Explain the process of state formation in the NE in the post-colonial period?

Q 2: Explain the state-society relationship in the context of understanding.

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