

RESEARCH NOTE

Ethnic mobilisation for decolonisation: colonial legacy (the case of the Zo people in Northeast India)

L. Lam Khan Piang*

*Department of Planning & Evaluation, National Institute of Health and Family Welfare,
New Delhi, India*

This article attempts to communicate the methodological tension between subjectivity and objectivity by recording the aspiration of communities who are problematised both by colonialism and the modern nation-state. It highlights how colonial policy and practice contribute to the postcolonial imbroglio in Northeast India. It delineates how British colonial cartography always gave priority to 'administrative convenience' in the demarcation of boundaries, resulting in the division of ethnic community. It argues that Northeast India and the Indo-Burma borderland are not yet decolonised, as the government of India, without any rearrangement or alteration, adopts the colonial administrative boundaries, which divided ethnic communities. Neither the State Reorganisation Act (1956) nor the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act (1971) fulfilled the aspiration of the segmented communities in the northeast, as they did in the mainland. The article also argues that the responses of the government of India towards the problems in Northeast India react to the manifested symptoms of the deep-rooted political problem rather than getting to the crux of the problem to find a solution.

Keywords: ethnic; decolonisation; colonisers; territory; ethnoscape; ethnic mobilisation; state reorganisation

Ethnicity has captured the attention of scholars and statesmen alike in the postcolonial period. Boundaries of states have been drawn and redrawn on the basis of ethnic composition and aspirations, which were not the criteria for colonial cartography. The political and imperialistic design of the colonial master engendered the division of the cultural collectivities. Consequently, the postcolonial ethnic mobilisation for integration among the ethnic communities can be attributed to the melon-cutting of the ethnoscape. South and Southeast Asia have experienced various ethnic mobilisations, some in the form of insurgency movements. Especially in Northeast India, the political aspirations of the segmented communities for territorial integration has led to popular unrest, which culminated in armed struggles for self-determination due to the unresponsive and insensitive attitude of the government of India. However, the government of free India, far from taking the initiative, even after 60 years of independence can not come up with a road-map to solve the Northeast problem.

*Email: lampiang@gmail.com

The aspirations of the linguistic communities in mainland India were respected by the government of India: consequently the State Reorganisation, 1956, was done on the basis of language. This resulted in the rearrangement and alteration of certain states' (provincial) boundaries in mainland India and even the creation of new states. But nothing was done to Northeast India along the same lines. Even the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971, which came 15 years after the states' reorganisation in mainland India, could not address the aspirations of the various ethnic or linguistic communities who had been territorially segmented and divided by the colonial government's administrative boundaries. During the freedom struggle of India, the leaders advocated the principle of 'self-determination'. In 1927, following the appointment of the India Statutory Commission, the Indian National Congress adopted a resolution expressing their desire for the redistribution of provinces on a linguistic basis. Those supporting the resolution spoke of the right of self-determination of people speaking the same language and following the same tradition.¹ However, in the postcolonial period the Indian leadership spoke a different language by declaring on 10 April 1979 that 'the right of self-determination' appearing in article 1 of the 'International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights' and article 1 of the 'International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966)' applied only to peoples under foreign domination and that these words did not apply to sovereign independent states or to a section of a people or nation – which is the essence of national integrity. But, it may be argued that the end of colonialism without granting the peoples the right of self-determination is tantamount to merely a change of colonisers for the people in the (ex) colonies. To link the 'end of colonialism' and the 'right of self-determination', the term decolonisation is redefined in this paper.

Four different definitions of decolonisation have been identified by John Darwin² from the historical literature. First, decolonisation is equated with the legal-constitutional event of a transfer of sovereignty. Second, decolonisation is regarded as a mere collaborative formality designed to install moderates and pre-empt extremists in the struggle to control the (ex) colonial states or to preserve the imperial influences. Third, decolonisation is defined as complete extrusion of all foreign influence from the new state.³ Fourth, decolonisation is defined as not merely the breakdown of colonial rule but of a much larger complex which might be called the global colonial order. These definitions reduce decolonisation to a change of form rather than substance, as they are mainly constructed from what happened after World War II between the colonisers and colonies – except the third one, which Darwin regarded as utopian and still an aspiration, not accomplished fact. To merely conceptualise decolonisation from the accomplished fact would not solve the problems that colonisation had caused the indigenous people inhabiting the (ex) colonies. It is simply, as Fanon put it, the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men without any period of transition – just complete and absolute substitution.⁴

In this article, decolonisation is defined in the light of the UN charter, UN General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) and 2625 (XXV), which specifies the duty of the state to promote self-determination of people to bring a speedy end to colonialism. Defining decolonisation in terms of the 'end of colonialism', self-determination, and the 'integrity of national territory' is empowering for the ethnified nations, who are living in their ancestor homeland but divided by states' (international) boundaries. Thus, decolonisation, besides the end of colonialism and the transfer of power, is the undoing of the mess created during the colonial regime

by the colonisers for their convenience, a mess that has hindered the efforts of the indigenous people in the (ex) colonies to become a nation (or nation-state), as they are ethnified and divided into various states, due to the melon-cutting of territory without considering the ethnoscapes. Decolonisation should not be merely a change of colonisers, as in the case of the northeast hill areas and the northwest of Burma, which were never a part of either India or Burma (Myanmar) respectively, before the advent of the British colonisers. It should also take into consideration the dismantling of any creation of the colonisers that segmented the people and their territory during the colonial regime, and it should make them realise an inalienable right to complete freedom, to exercise their sovereignty and the integrity of their national territory, and ultimately to exercise their right to self-determination.

After the British colonisers left the South and Southeast Asia region, some part of the hill areas of the northeast frontier of India happened to be included in India. In fact, the hill people were never under any ruler from India; only when the British annexed the hills under the British Empire were the hill people and the people from mainland India under the same colonial government. It may also be argued that, simply because they were under the same colonial regime, that did not make them a nation or give them the same aspiration. Though the political leadership in India was aware of the inherent problem of Northeast India, they were not responsive to the aspirations of the various ethnic communities. Talukdar wrote that

The indigenous elite leadership who were trained in European models and ethos of a nation state failed to bring a complete political and cultural de-colonization. As a result, a number of identity movements have sprung up among the various ethnic groups mainly in the Northeast India where a large number of tribes live. These movements are often perceived as a threat to or a reversal of the process of nation building pursued in the country.⁵

Against the backdrop of these problems a question arises – why is there no state reorganisation in Northeast India, by altering the various colonial administrative boundaries which cut across the ethnic or linguistic community, along the same lines as in mainland India? Even after independence the communities who were segmented in the process of colonial expansion were not given a chance to be together under a single administration, not to speak of self-determination. Is not attainment of India's independence tantamount to a mere changing of colonial master for them? Is it necessary for a community to take up arms to realise political power to administer themselves according to their customary practices, in their own ancestral homeland, in consonance within the constitution of the State?

While dealing with these questions this paper analyses the process of the ethnification of the Zo⁶ people since the advent of the British colonisers in the present Northeast India. It also deals with how the State Reorganisation Act (1956), and the State Reorganisation (Northeast) Act, 1971, offered nothing new, but rather propagated the colonial misdeed to the ethnic communities in Northeast India.

In the case of the Zo people, the Mizo Union submitted a memorandum to His Majesty's Government of India and its Constituent Assembly on 26 April 1947 for the 'territorial unity and integrity of the whole Mizo population and full self-determination' within the province of Assam, while the Constituent Assembly was drafting the Constitution of India. The Mizo, whom I prefer to call the Zo people, included in the memorandum were from the Lushai Hills, Manipur, Cachar, Tripura, Chittagong Hills, and the Chin Hills. This political aspiration was not addressed

appropriately, which resulted in the formation of the Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1961. The MNF mobilised the Zo ethnic community under its banner to fight for self-determination, a fight which lasted more than two and a half decades. The struggle for self-determination under the MNF was ended with the signing of the Mizo Accord on 20 February 1986. Experiences, however bitter they may be, have shown that ethnic aspiration cannot be neglected and overlooked, as the cost is immeasurable.

In dealing with the Zo people one cannot simply avoid the eastern side of the Indo-Burma borderlines, as almost half of the whole Zo population, perhaps more, is on the Myanmar (Burma) side. It is a challenge to estimate the population of a people divided into different sovereign states, though they occupy a contiguous territory. In attempting to provide the estimated population of the whole Zo people in different countries, different sources from different years are explored. In India, the 2001 census enumerated the population by language, reporting the total population of the various major tribes, which I prefer to call the dialectal groups of the Zo people, as 14,71,789.⁷ This report did not provide for various smaller tribes. On the other hand, the Zo population in Burma is estimated as 12,43,440 according to the 2007 census. However, only 29.7 per cent reside within Chin State.⁸ It is difficult to get reliable sources for the population of the Zo people inhabiting part of Bangladesh. Thus, it may be estimated the total population of the whole Zo people will be more than 3 million. However, this paper deals mainly with the Zo people and their struggle for self-determination on the Indian side of the border after India and Myanmar attained independence, as their experiences since the end of the British colonial regime were different though the roots of their problem are one and the same.

Colonial convenience: a curse for the indigenous people?

The encroachment into the habitat of the Zo people, especially their hunting ground, converted into a tea garden by the British colonisers, brought unrest to the tribal chiefs in the Lushai Hills. The tribal chiefs felt threatened due to the presence of the British colonisers in the neighbouring areas; as a result they occasionally raided the subjects of the British government of India. The British had a non-intervention policy towards the tribal people in the northeast frontier region. However, the British government of India sent an armed expedition into the Lushai Hills (presently, Mizoram), known as the Lushai Expedition (1871–2) due to a raid committed by the Lushai tribe (one of the Zo tribes) on the British subjects working in the tea garden. In this raid, the tea garden was destroyed, the owner (an English planter) killed, and his daughter captured as a hostage.

In 1885, the annexation of Upper Burma altered the policy towards the Chin-Lushai country as the Lt. Governor of Bengal mentioned in his telegram:

The annexation of Upper Burma has, it must be remembered, materially altered our position in regard to this wild region, which is surrounded by settled districts under our administration; and merely punitive expedition, however appropriate it might have been in the former days, when we had no ulterior object beyond the immediate punishment and prevention of outrages, would not under present circumstances, appreciably advance the permanent pacification and domination of the hill country.⁹

In 1888 the British took advantage of another event, when Lt. Stewart and his team were waylaid by armed Lushai and shot dead. This event was the immediate

cause for the Chin-Lushai expedition (1889–90), besides other causes. With this armed expedition and subsequent annexation of the Chin-Lushai country, the colonial expansion in the northeastern frontier regions of Bengal was concluded. In this expedition three columns of army were sent forth from three provincial army headquarters – Burma, Assam, and Bengal – through Chittagong. The column sent from Burma advanced toward the west into the Chin Hills and occupied them with much difficulty, after which they made Falam their headquarters. The column from Assam occupied the North Lushai Hills and set up base at Aizawl, whereas the column from Chittagong occupied the South Lushai Hills and made Lunglei its headquarters.

This whole process of expedition, occupation and annexation resulted in the division of the Zo (Chin-Lushai) country, which ethnified the Zo people in the postcolonial period, as the international boundaries were demarcated based on the administrative boundaries, which were created on the basis of how much each column of the army could wrest during the Chin-Lushai expedition. These administrative boundaries were drawn in line with the process of annexation of the region. For example, the hill areas inhabited by the Zo people in Tripura (Tipperah) were annexed much earlier, in 1761. In this year the lowland or the valley area of Tripura was annexed to the British Empire and the Hill areas became ‘independent Tipperah’ under the British protectorate. Of this Alexander Mackenzie remarks that, ‘The Raja claimed to exercise authority within them [tribal groups], but did not ... they never carried their armies in victories march through the bamboo thicket of the hills’.¹⁰ The same is applicable to some areas inhabited by the Zo people in the Chittagong Hills.

The administration units’ boundaries were demarcated arbitrarily when new areas were annexed in the aftermath of an armed expedition by the colonisers during the colonial expansion. The boundary demarcation gave priority to administrative convenience without factoring in ethnoscape, which resulted in the segmentation of ethnic community. Thus, most of the ethnic mobilisations in Northeast India in the postcolonial period are for re-unification of the territory inhabited by the ethnic communities, which were segmented by the colonisers to suit the interest of the imperial design.

Of late, Manipur, and Assam have been stealing the limelight by keeping alive the nationality question in Northeast India. The minorities’ problems in Assam have been addressed in one way or another by granting certain political status with more political power within the state of Assam, for example the creation of Bodo District Autonomous Council, the Karbi District Autonomous Council, etc. The problems pertaining to Manipur State were of colonial creation. The emergence of a couple of dozen insurgent groups is merely a manifested symptom of the deeply rooted political problems since the creation of Manipur State, with the inclusion of the Hill areas. However, the government of India has not come up with any proposal to solve the problems. It may be argued that the indifferent attitude of the government towards the ethnic, territorial, and political problems of Manipur is tantamount to allowing the breeding of insurgency, which is a necessary evil to legitimise the state militarisation in the region in propagating the legacy of the colonial regime.

This paper deals with the problem of Northeast India through Manipur, which is geographically the confluence of various important hill ranges such as the Chin Hills, the Mizo Hills (Lushai Hills), the Naga Hills and the North Cachar Hills. These hill

ranges come together in the valley of Manipur. As a result, the surrounding hill areas which were sliced out from these various hill ranges became a part of the present Manipur territory and are inhabited by various tribes that have affinity with the tribes inhabiting those hill ranges. It is a historical fact that many of the boundaries, which are demarcated during the colonial regime, have divided many of the ethnic communities.

For instance, the boundary line between the Naga Hills and Manipur was fixed in 1872 by R. Brown, the then British political agent in Manipur, and Captain Butler, the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills district.¹¹ The western boundary line of Manipur was settled by the treaty of 1833, in which the line of the Jiri (river) and the western bend of the Barak (river) was taken as the boundary.¹² The subsequent treaty in 1834 laid down the eastern boundary line of Manipur. As per the treaty, the Kabo Valley was ceded to Burma. The southern boundary of Manipur from the east begins at the point of the river, which is called *Nansawing* by the Burmans and *Numsaulung* by the Manipuris, and enters the plain up to its sources and across the hills due west down to the *Kothikhyong* or Manipur river.¹³ Thus, it may be asserted that, in settling the border problems of Manipur and its neighbouring areas, the claim made by Manipur Raja and Burman in the series of treaties, from the treaty of Yandaboo 1826 till the Manipur-Chin Boundary commission in 1893, was taken into consideration. However, the Nagas tribes as well as the Kukis tribes, and more particularly the Sukte tribe, who were independent during that time, were not even consulted.

The eastern border issue came up when Sir James Johnston held the office of Political Agent in December, 1881. The government of India set up a Border Commission with Sir James Johnston as a commissioner. He erected stone pillars on both sides of the Nanniya River, which ran near the *Kongal Thana*,¹⁴ after surveying and investigating what is called the 'Pemberton imaginary line'.¹⁵ In 1884, the Burmese challenging this arrangement threatened to destroy the *Kongal Thana* and the stone pillar. At this juncture the third Anglo-Burmese war broke out and the settlement of the boundary dispute between the two countries was kept in abeyance for some time.¹⁶

The southern boundary of Manipur, particularly the southeast boundary line, was settled only in 1894 by the Chin-Manipur Boundary Commission. Before that the British regarded the 'imaginary boundary' of Captain Pemberton as the boundary. The boundaries of the administration units within the Zo territory (the Chin-Lushai land and its surroundings) during the colonial regime were not very clear-cut except for those which were drawn on the line of the rivers in the beginning. It was not a problem for the British government as the whole Indian sub-continent including Myanmar (Burma) was under the British Empire.

These boundary lines in the northeast frontier in general, and within the Zo territory in particular, were mostly drawn by the colonial government, without having undergone due consultation with the people. If any boundary line was drawn after negotiation with any of the Zo chiefs, they manipulated the terms of the negotiation for their own convenience. During the British rule the Zo people did not apprehend that they would be kept within India or Burma. They have two terms for a foreigner – *Kawl* (Burmese) and *Vai* (Indic) – and all they knew was that the *Kawl* lived in the east and the *Vai* in the west of the Zo territory. Subsequently, after the British colonisers left, the region was divided into three sovereign states.

State reorganisation and Northeast India

The government of India is not ignorant about certain colonial administrative boundaries that were demarcated arbitrarily by the colonial government. In the State Reorganisation Commission Reports (1955), it is written:

The formation of provinces [during the British rule] had been mainly governed by considerations of administrative convenience and economy and the reason of military strategy and security ... there was a conscious and deliberate design behind the demarcation of the territories of administrative units, it was grounded in imperial interests or the exigencies of a foreign government and not the actual needs, wishes or affinities of the people ... In some cases, therefore, various factors conducive to the growth of natural units operated in the back ground ... they were, however, subordinate to the prime consideration of administrative and military exigencies.¹⁷

Barpujari wrote,

admittedly, geographical and administrative unification of Northeast India or undivided Assam was artificial and not a real one. Historically, linguistically, socially and culturally the hill tracts have no affinity with the people of the plains. It is historical accident for administrative reasons that these had been tagged to the province.¹⁸

The Government of India is very much aware of the fact that the states, provinces or districts were the work of the colonial government. These are

largely the result of historical processes and the spread and the consolidation of the British power in India. On the attainment of independence the integration, however, was naturally based to a large extent on the old pattern, which existed before independence.¹⁹

The pattern of states in the union before the State Reorganisation in 1956 is thus the result of historical accident and circumstances. Though the State Reorganisation could not answer the aspirations of all the linguistic groups of Northeast India, somehow it solved the problems of some major linguistic groups in the mainland of India.

In the case of Northeast India, the only change that the Act brought was adding Tripura to Assam. This was in accordance with the policy adopted by the government of India to have a large state bordering East Pakistan (presently, Bangladesh). It emboldened the Assamese, and, as a result, Assamese language was passed in the State Assembly as the official language in Assam. The hill tribes resented this, as they regarded this as the first step towards assimilating them, which they had always been apprehensive about. Tiplut Nongbri asserted that the rise of ethnicity in the region was a response to the new situation, which developed as a consequence of the tribe's contact with a powerful alien system. She pointed out that the key factor that spurred the process of ethnic mobilisation in Northeast India was the national policy of tribal integration, which failed to appreciate the political and cultural sensitivities of tribes, and sought to include them against their will within the state of Assam.²⁰ In the context of Northeast India, this assertion holds much water in the political development of the region, as each of the memoranda presented to the government of India by ethno-political parties of Northeast India demanded the integration of their inhabited areas.

In the case of the Zo people (Kukis) in Assam and the surrounding areas adjoining Manipur and the Lushai Hills, they were divided by certain boundary lines, which were drawn by the colonial government. Neither the British colonial government nor the government of independent India worked to keep the entire Zo people under a single administration by altering certain administration units' boundaries on the basis of linguistics, as it was done in mainland India.²¹ Resolution Number 4 of the Ministry of Home affairs No. 53/69/53-public, dated 29 December 1953, in pursuance of which the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) was appointed, mentions as follows:

The language and culture of an area have an undoubted importance as they represent a pattern of living, which is common in that area. In considering a re-organisation of states, however, there are other important factors, which have also to be borne in mind. The first essential consideration is the preservation and strengthening of the unity and security of India. Financial, economic and administrative considerations are almost equally important, not only from the point of view of each State, but for the whole nation. India has embarked upon a great ordered plan for her economic, cultural and moral progress. Changes, which interfere with the successful prosecution of such a national plan, would be harmful to the national interest.

The above statement clearly states that the main criteria for the state's reorganisation were language and culture. But, in Northeast India, no administration units' boundaries demarcated during the colonial period were altered on the same criteria as in the case of mainland India, for example the creation of Madras for the Tamil speaking population. Even before the SRC was set up, the Mizo Union, in 1947, submitted a memorandum to 'His Majesty's Government, Government of India and Its Constituent Assembly', for the reunification of the Zo people under a single administrative unit.

In 1904, Abraham Grierson published his *Linguistic Survey of India*, running to 11 volumes. This was the first ever and the only scientific linguistic survey done in the whole British Empire in India. He divided the people into groups on the basis of language, and clubbed the various tribes together into a group on the basis of the linguistic affinity that exists among them, even though there are local variations. He divided the mongoloid race in Northeast India into two main groups: the Mon-Khmer and Siamese-Chinese family (including Khasis & Tai) and the Tibeto-Burman family. The former group or family includes the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos. These groups live in Meghalaya state and they do not experience much of a boundary problem with others except Assam and Bangladesh. He divided the second group or family, namely the Tibeto-Burman into three: (i) the Tibetan dialects, Himalayan dialects, and North Assam groups; (ii) the Bodo, Naga & Kachin groups; (iii) the Kuki-Chin and Burmeses.

In Northeast India, the linguistic groups who demanded the integration of their inhabited areas across the states and Indo-Myanmar international boundary lines are the Nagas and the Zo (Kuki-Chin) people. The government of India was fully aware of the aspirations of the hill people on both sides of the border and also aware of the fact that, even if a border agreement were reached between India and Burma, the problem of national minorities would remain. The political geography of the place itself was of such a nature that the human environment did not coincide with physical.²²

After the Chin-Lushai Expedition the Zo country was subjected to suppression and division. The bigger slices of their homeland after the division by the colonial ruler were the Lushai Hills, part of Manipur, the North Cachar Hills and the Chin

Hills. There were certain adjoining areas which were sliced off from these four areas on every side of the borderline and joined with other administration units. All these divisions were the consequences of the nature of annexation of the areas. B.K. Roy Burman wrote, 'For quite some time in the nineteenth century the British policy was to consolidate the control over the tribal in the borders of Burma and Cachar through the king of Manipur'.²³ If not for the help of the British political agent stationed at Imphal, the influence of the Manipur king was concentrated only in the valley. However, the British political agent expanded the king's influence over the hill tribes and kept the hills' affairs under the President of the *Durbur*, the post reserved for the British officer. The segment of the Nagas and the Zo people who live in the present Manipur had an independent existence outside the Manipuri Kingdom in the hill areas, before the advent of the British. McCulloh, the political agent of Manipur in the middle of the nineteenth century wrote:

Before the connection of the British Government with that of Manipur took place, the latter, not to speak of exerting influence over the tribes, was unable to protect the inhabitants of the valley from their exaction and blackmail, and even after the conclusion of peace with Burma, and the fixation of boundary of Manipur, the Majority of the tribe were independent, and known to us little more than by name. With the assistance of arms and ammunitions given to Manipur by the British government, some of the tribes have been thoroughly, the northern one particularly, reduced, and the attack of the one that bordering Burmese have led to apprehensive of the interruption of the general peace of the frontier.²⁴

The areas where the British political agent could administer nominally through the Manipur *Durbar* came under Manipur. This situation still continues even after India and Burma got independence from the British government, without any rearrangement or alteration. Thus, the hill people wanted to shake off the domination of the valley people and expressed their desire to amalgamate with their cognate tribes, which became a bone of contention between the hill and the valley people.

The SRC asserted that the problem in the hill areas of the northeast at this stage was at least as much psychological as political. It noted the following problems with regard to the northeastern hill tribes:

There is no denying the fact that the demand for a hill state partly reflects the separatist pull of the extremist elements. Other factors, however, appear to have lent support to the demand and these are: (i) Suspicion and distrust of the people of the plains by the tribal people of this area; (ii) The diversity of races and cultures and the different levels of social, educational and political development in the different areas of this region which have prevented the tribal people from coming up to the level of the people on the plains; (iii) Lack of communications in these areas which has made it difficult for the various tribes to come in close contact with the rest of India; and, (iv) The economic backwardness of the region. It has also been alleged that the Government of Assam has not been as sympathetic and helpful to the tribal people as it should have been.²⁵

Thus, it may be argued that the political unrest among the former colonies in the postcolonial period is the result of the 'administrative mess' left behind by the colonisers that manifested in the form of ethnic mobilisation for reunification of the ethnified community. This mess is the product of the melon-cutting of the territorial homeland of the ethnic community without considering the ethnoscape. This political turmoil or political unrest can be termed as the coloniser's 'administrative mess', as it is the result of the administrative design. The government

of India has even after 60 years of independence not developed a specific policy to tackle the problems; rather it has engaged only with the manifested symptoms of the problems.

Immediately after independence the government of India set up the State Reorganisation Commission in 1954 and the commission submitted its report in 1955. Based on the report a bill was introduced in the Parliament of India, which resulted in the passing of the State Reorganisation Act in 1956. The criteria for the state reorganisation according to the Act were language and culture. Nevertheless, certain linguistic communities like that of the Zo people (Kuki-Chin) were not taken up for consideration. The Zo people were given different names by the colonial ethnographers and administrators but none of them ever treated them as a different ethnic entity due to the shared history, culture, language, myth of origin, etc. An attempt has always been made by writers to club together the various names by using hyphens like Kuki-shin, Lushai-Kuki, Chin-Lushai, etc. For those who favoured the state's reorganisation on the basis of language, their main argument was 'discrimination by the dominant linguistic group of the existing states'. The SRC was of the opinion that under foreign domination,

when opportunities for self-development were denied to all alike, different linguistic groups could live together without apparent conflict. Now that the people have to shape their own destinies, consciousness of the lack of community interests between different language groups tends to become deeper and deeper with the progressive realization of divergent economic and other needs. It is a peculiar feature of the multi-lingual States that in each one of them suspicion of favoritism and charges of partiality have centered round the linguistic division, each language group considering that it is being unfairly treated. Only removal of minority consciousness by reorganising the States on a unilingual basis can eliminate this widespread sense of distrust.²⁶

It is due to the slow nature of the decolonising process that ethnic communities who were ethnified due to administrative boundaries demarcated during the colonial regime live in different states separated from their cognates even within India, not to speak of outside India. The government of India maintained those boundaries even after the attainment of independence. Hence, they have been reduced to national minorities in their own ancestral homeland and their territory was partitioned into different states within India as well as sovereign states. Thus they remained invisible and could not have a meaningful participation in politics.

Ethnic mobilisation: the case of the Zo people

There is difficulty in differentiating the concept of *ethnie* and nation and also in ascertaining what kind of human group shall be called a tribe as well as an ethnic group. Oommen argues that nation and *ethnie* share all the characteristic features except territory and a good example of an ethnic group is a tribe. That is, if and when an *ethnie* identifies itself with a territory, it becomes a nation. Oommen wrote that an *ethnie* is a cultural collectivity that is outside its ancestral territory or one whose ancestral territory is being divided by borderlines. In other words, a cultural collectivity that has lost control over its ancestral territory.²⁷ Anthony Smith argued that, through the process of mobilisation and politicisation of an *ethnie*, the new priesthood – the intelligentsia – by adopting the civic model of nationalism and taking on territorial component, mobilised the members and turned them into citizenship to become a nation. By citizenship he means turning a lateral *ethnie* into a

cross-class nation, one that did not necessarily have a state of its own but that also included those in the federal states.²⁸ By contrast, Oommen maintained that a cultural collectivity is a nation but that it becomes an *ethnie* through the process of ethnification. He defined ethnification as a process through which a link between a territory and a culture is attenuated, and the possibility of a nation sustaining its integrity is put into jeopardy.²⁹

Unlike social scientists, who try to explain an ethno-nation by giving it objective characteristics, Walker Connor sees the nature of ethno-national bond through the nationalists' perspective and defies the approach that tries to understand nation by attributing tangible characteristics. He writes:

Objective criteria, in and by themselves, are therefore inefficient to determine whether or not a group constitutes a nation. The essence of nation is a psychological bond that joins a people and differentiates it, in the sub-conscious conviction of its members from all non-members in a most vital way.³⁰

He argues that the nationalists see the existence of a sense of shared blood at the core of ethno-psychology and they do not hesitate to appeal for popular support. He was convinced that the frequency and success of such appeals attest to the fact that nations are indeed characterised by a sense, a feeling, of consanguinity.³¹ In tune with this he defines a nation as a group of people who feel that they are ancestrally related. It is the largest group that can command a person's loyalty because of felt kinship ties: it is, in this perspective, the fully extended family.³² He takes into consideration descent or kinship ties not necessarily factual, but sentient or felt. He thinks that sharing of an 'intuitive-conviction' of the group's separate origin and evolution by the members is the 'irreducible required' characteristic for the existence of a nation. He says that logic operates in the realms of the conscious and the rational; convictions concerning the singular origin and evolution of one's nation belong to the realms of subconscious and the non-rational.³³ This approach seems to be very convincing in the sense that nation is created with the zeal burning at the hearts of the nationalists. Here, we confront one interesting question: that is, who are the nationalists? From the above discussion we can say that nationalists are those who believe in the existence of their nation and mobilise fellow national members so as to be recognised by the others.

According to Ernest Gellner,

Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent . . . Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle. Nationalist sentiment is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of the principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment. A nationalist movement is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind.³⁴

In the light of Gellner's understanding of Nationalism, the political movement for reunification and self-determination of the northeastern people such as the Zo people (Mizo) and the Nagas are based on the principle that the 'political and national unit should be congruent'.

It is the process of ethnification that divided an ethnic community politically or administratively even though they inhabited a contiguous territory. It has made them an ethnic minority within the various political or even administrative boundaries wherever they exist. In democracy population count matters when it comes to active participation in electoral politics. The ethnic minority find themselves vulnerable and

handicapped when their customary laws and traditions are not reflected in the state's laws. The whole process gives rise to ethno-national consciousness among the ethnified ethno-national community. Caught in such a situation, the elites mobilise fellows from their ethnic community by making use of the emerging ethno-national consciousness that gains momentum towards a certain political goal, which is nothing less than a homeland. This can be called ethno-nationalism.

With the end of colonialism many new states emerged in Asia and Africa at the cost of the ethnic communities inhabiting the areas of the political faultlines constructed during the colonial regime. Though they were living in their homelands they became ethnic minorities due to political boundaries demarcated by the colonisers to suit their own purposes. The northeast frontier of India and the northwest frontier of Burma were the abode of the Kachin, the Naga and the Zo people. The British government found it desirable to put the Chin-Lushai land under a single administration; as a result the Chin-Lushai Conference was convened in 1892. But the resolutions were not wholly implemented, as the local officers showed no interest in them. Even after India and Burma attained independence from the British Empire nothing was done to implement the resolutions of the Chin-Lushai conference. This is how knowingly the sentiment of the ethnic communities and their cultural unity were undermined. As such, the problem of the Zo people remained unsolved, which resulted in the rise of Zo nationalism that culminated in various ethnic mobilisations.

Ethnic mobilisation in the then Lushai Hills (Mizoram) began with the realisation of the educated elites of the need for a social forum to take up the socio-political issues facing the people. So, with the initiative of R. Vanlawma, a meeting was convened at Pu Hranghnuna's residence at Muallungthu village on 15 April 1946, and the Mizo Commoners' Union was formed, which was later changed into the Mizo Union. The Mizo Union in their General Assembly in September 1946 passed a resolution to demand the reunification of the Zo people under a single administrative unit. The same year in November, a Mizo conference was held at Lakhimpur (Cachar), which was attended by many representatives from Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Chin Hills, Lushai Hills, and Chittagong Hill tracts. The Conference elected Bawichhuaka, a Hmar from Cachar, as their President. The Conference unanimously supported the resolution of the Mizo Union, to demand the reunification of all the Zo-inhabited areas into one unit to be designated as Mizoram District.³⁵

The Mizo Union, on 26 April 1947 submitted a memorandum to His Majesty's Government, Government of India and its Constituent Assembly through the Advisory Sub-committee. In this memorandum, they expressed their aspiration and a demand was made for the territorial unity and solidarity of the Zo people. However, the government of India did nothing in response to their demand. So, the Mizo Union submitted a representation again, on 15 December 1970, to the Prime Minister of India, as follows:

In submitting this fresh representation, may we recall that we have during this decade appraised in several terms to the Government of India the need for the creation of a new state to be named Mizoram comprising all the areas contiguously inhabited by the Mizo group of people to the eastern zone. Frustration has overtaken the Mizo people largely in three ways: (i) The injustice done to them by dividing their homeland during the British Raj; (ii) The Political instability brought about by the Government of Assam; (iii) The economic instability as a result of mismanagement by the Government of Assam.

Nevertheless, the aspiration of the Zo people, which they put forward in their charter of demands in their memorandum, submitted to the Sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly, was not given any due consideration even after 60 years of independence.

The Mizo Union was demanding that the Zo (Kuki-Chin linguistic group) be kept under a single administration, but the government of India turned a deaf ear. Had the government of India met their demand, much bloodshed caused due to the suppression of the Mizo National Front movement would have been avoided. This is also in tune with the point made by the SRC in their move in favour of the state's reorganisation on the basis of language. It is written in the report:

The constituent States in a federal republic must each possess a minimum degree of *homogeneity* to ensure the emotional response, which is necessary *for the working of Democratic institutions*. The States of the Indian Union *can achieve this internal cohesiveness* only if they are constituted on a unilingual basis, because language being the vehicle for the communion of thought and feeling provides the most effective single bond for uniting the people. *Linguistic homogeneity*, therefore, provides the only rational basis for reconstructing the states, for it reflects the social and cultural pattern of living obtaining in well-defined regions of the country.³⁶

When the government was not responsive, ideological differences emerged within the Mizo Union, though it was just barely one-year-old. The leaders were divided on the issue of complete independence, which they called *Zalenna*. This dissension, though it did not lead to a split into different organisations at the beginning, divided the leaders into two camps – the Mizo Union, headed by the president, and the Mizo Union Council. The former camp was headed by Khawtinkhuma as the president and Saprawnga as the secretary. The latter camp selected Pachhunga as a chairman and R. Vanlawma as secretary. When the Advisory Sub-Committee, also called the Bardoloi Committee, visited Aizawl on 17 April 1947, both the camps submitted memoranda. The Mizo Union put emphasis on the integration of the whole Mizo (Kuki-Chin)-inhabited area under a single administration. They also mentioned that, 'All ... items shall be subject to revision according to the future trend of events to the extent of seceding after ten years'. However, the Mizo Union Council mentioned in their memorandum that

The Mizo have no relation in every aspects as well as no cultural affinity with the rest of the people of India, so we will not feel free and secured if we are left under India. When the British imperialists left Mizoram, we do not want to be under India but left alone.³⁷

There was another group interested in complete independence, who formed the United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO) on 5 July 1947 under the leadership of Lalbiakthanga. They were called *Zalen Pawl* by the locals. They campaigned to join the Burma Union, but they did not last long.³⁸ Some writers relate the rise of nationalism in Mizoram (the then Lushai Hills) and its surrounding areas with the famine that occurred due to *Mautaam* (bamboo flowering) in 1958. The *Mautaam* was, indeed, an important event, but not the sole reason for ethnic mobilisation. It was an opportunity for the elites to mobilise the people by invoking the spirit of nationalism. After the famine was over the Mizo National Famine Front called a meeting with an agenda to form a kind of national organisation. In the meeting, even a leader like Laldenga could not accept putting *Zalenna* as the main objective for the new party; at the same

time R. Vanlawma could not compromise with *Zalenna*. As a result, they could not form any party.³⁹

In due course Laldenga also accepted *Zalenna* to be the main objective and informed R. Vanlawma of his acceptance. On 28 October 1961, those who had the idea of *Zalenna* formed another political party called the Mizo National Front (MNF) with Laldenga as the president and R. Vanlawma as the secretary. It is clear that, even before the *Mautam*, some sections of the people already had an aspiration for complete independence. After the *Mautam* they started mobilising the people through print media, public address, etc. They took up arms and started mobilising to fight for the right to self-determination. After five years of its existence, the MNF declared independence on 31 March 1966 and began their armed struggle for complete independence from the government of India. But the government of India did not accede to their demand and took up stringent measures to subdue the arms struggle of the MNF. The government of India retaliated even to the extent of using its air force to strike against them. This was the first time that India had ever used an air strike in a situation which the government would like to consider an internal disturbance. Even though the MNF continued their struggle, their losses during the war with the Indian army were too much to recover from, which resulted in the initiation of a peace process in the early 1970s. In 1986, a peace agreement was signed between the government of India and the MNF leader, which is known as Mizo Accord. As per the accord, Mizoram became a full-fledged state within the Union of India.

State's responses

In analysing the state's responses to Northeast India's problems one cannot help but be critical of the government of India's insensitivity to the issues. The ethnic movement in the hills of Northeast India is not a product of the post-independence era alone but has deep historical roots. Tribal resistance movements in the region were not unknown during the colonial period, though they were in a nascent stage and largely confined to individual tribal groups seeking to protect their territorial rights (or rather, territory) against the intrusion of the British.⁴⁰

As a result, it is imperative for the policymakers to address the northeastern problem as not one of mere law and order, but a historical as well as a political problem. Samir Kumar Das wrote:

The remote North Eastern region was the last to be conquered by the British and even when some sort of administration was sought to be imposed on the backward peoples, belong to different races and ethnic groups inhabiting their areas, there were occasions of stiff resistance and even when they were ultimately subdued the spirit of independence and dignity of their traditional way of life, did not die down.⁴¹

Sanjoy Hazarika remarks:

The intractability of the problems of the Northeast and Delhi's piecemeal, ad hoc policies toward its people has complicated an already difficult situation. Policies toward the Nagas and other pro-independence group seemed to resolve around three factors: brute force to crush the physical capacity to resist, a flood of funds to soften the revolution of indigenous groups and a fierce campaign to portray them as renegades, 'misguided' elements who would see sense if only they were given a chance.⁴²

Even after 60 years of India's independence, the government of India is yet to understand the people living in the 'remote North Eastern region'. Does it mean that the problem of the region is also remote to the thinking of the policymakers of the state? It is necessary to understand so as to solve such a complicated and vexed problem by delving deep into the crux as well as the historical processes. During the time of the transfer of power the government of India was prompt in acquiring the whole northeastern region though it was slow in its endeavour to understand the inherent political problem. One can understand that the new government could not give attention to remote Northeast India immediately after independence as there were immense problems in mainland India. In the words of Rajni Kothari, 'India as a latecomer had to pursue both nationhood and economic development simultaneously'.⁴³ However, when the problem remains unsolved even after 60 years of independence, one is compelled to question the sincerity of the government of India.

The Constituent Assembly and the northeast of India

At the suggestion of the Cabinet Mission, under the Chairmanship of Sir Stafford Cripps, an Advisory Committee was formed on the rights of citizens, minorities and tribal areas. Thus, when the Constituent Assembly was set up as per the proposals of the Cabinet Mission, it formed an Advisory Committee on tribal areas under the chairmanship of Sadar Vallabhai Patel to consider the problems of Assam and tribal areas. The Advisory Committee formed a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Gopi Nath Bardoloi, the then Prime Minister of Assam. Two members were co-opted by Bardoloi Sub-Committee from each hill district of Assam except from the frontier tracts.⁴⁴ They were Nichols Roy and B.N. Rau.⁴⁵ They were the architects of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India (dealing with the District Autonomous Council for the tribal in the Hill areas), which was especially meant for the Northeast India tribal areas. The princely states of the Northeast India, Manipur and Tripura, were left out in the scheme of the Sixth Schedule; perhaps the members of the Bardoloi Committee were not aware of the tribal situation in the princely states. No special arrangement was made for the hill areas of Tripura and Manipur. Perhaps the Constituent Assembly felt that, as the integrated Indian states would be constituted as Part 'B' and Part 'C' states under rigorous control of the centre, no special scheme for their minorities would be necessary.⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the Sixth Schedule frame did not fulfil the political aspirations of the Hill people, as the Sixth Schedule areas were still under the Assam State. The Nagas outright rejected the offer of the Sixth Schedule and the Naga National Council (NNC) boycotted the first election to the District Councils. The Naga Hill was given statehood in 1963. The Northeast Hill areas witnessed such unrest among the people that the government of India was compelled to reorganise Northeast India. Hence the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act in 1971. According to the Act the state of Meghalaya was formed, comprising the autonomous state of Meghalaya formed under section 3 of the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969 (55 of 1969), and much of the territories comprised within the cantonment and municipality of Shillong did not form part of that autonomous state. This Act raised the status of Manipur and Tripura from Union Territory to the level of Statehood, whereas Mizoram was given Union Territory status comprising the Mizo district of

Assam. The Northeast Frontier Agency was given the status of Union Territory. However, ethnic mobilisation for the integration of linguistic groups is not dying out; rather it appears to increase after the North-Eastern Areas Reorganisation Act, 1971, was passed. So, one can question how far the North-Eastern Areas (Organisation) Act, 1971 solved the Northeast problem.

It is rather astonishing when scholars like Rajni Kothari write that 'India's record to date as a polity is mixed. Its great successes are aggregative: building a nation out of a highly fragmented and historically divided society without resort to authoritarianism'.⁴⁷ This statement overlooks the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) 1958 and Northeast India. In response to the problems emanating due to ethnic mobilisation for reunification and self-determination, the government of India enacted this Act on 11 September 1958. It extended to the area of Northeast India if the government declared it a disturbed area. The origin of this Act can be traced back to the colonial regime, which promulgated the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Ordinance on 15 August 1942 to tackle the Quit India Movement. As a result, leaders of the Northeast people feel that the process of decolonisation is yet to be realised, as long as draconian laws like the AFSPA still exist to tackle the political problem of the Northeast region.

Maloy Krishna Dhar, former Joint Director, Intelligence Bureau, India, working amongst the Northeast insurgency, wrote:

No effort was made to explain the damning fault lines that India had inherited from the British and failure of the government to repair those fault lines through administrative and political action ... Manifestation of discontentment and agitation among other aboriginal tribals elsewhere in India was also ascribed to the Christian Church and machinations of the foreign missionaries. No one in the I.B. had bothered to study and project the underlying economic, political and social imbalances, which haunted the tribal people. That the less privileged tribal were being exploited by the advanced Hindu communities were never projected.⁴⁸

Thus, it is imperative that the government of India understands the Northeast people and their problem, which is a historical as well as a political problem rather than merely a law and order problem. The AFSPA 1958, which was enacted by the Parliament in the ninth year of the Republic of India, does not serve its purpose, as more and more insurgent groups were formed after the Act was enacted and the areas were more disturbed than the time before the law was enacted. In the making of a nation or nation-state, the fundamental principle is the building of trust among the citizens rather than shaping and moulding the nation or nation-state by coercing the people with certain laws.

Understanding Northeast India

To have a proper understanding and appreciation of the problem of Northeast India in general and of the border areas in particular, one must delve deep into the historical development and have an insight into how the existing political and administrative boundaries were demarcated. Sushil K. Pillai wrote, 'The human problem of tribes whose areas are artificially divided by the international boundary needs to be tackled beyond the present 20 km free movement'.⁴⁹ The government is not unaware of the ethnological, linguistic, and cultural affinity of the people in the Indo-Burma border area, especially the Zo people. They were ethnified by the

artificial political boundary drawn in the midst of their homeland by the colonial government. Nari Rustomji wrote:

The unrest in the India's north-eastern borders has arisen not from want of goodwill on anybody's part but from a failure of understanding . . . Though economic neglect is often cited as one of the causes for the unrest on India's north-eastern frontier; it is by no means the major factor. Despite a minimum of expenditure on the frontier areas, the British were able to win the goodwill and loyalty of the tribes through engendering a feeling of confidence that they had no interest in interfering with their religion, culture or way of life. Nothing gives rise to so much anger, hostility, even hatred, as the apprehension of cultural aggression. And it is this apprehension that has been at the root of the unrest on India's North eastern frontiers since the British withdrawal.⁵⁰

For the northeast Hill tribes, the Constituent Assembly has assigned the Bardoloi Committee to draft the provision for the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. One of the members, Rohini Kumar Chaudhuri, questions the knowledge and credential of the members. He wrote,

In truth, Sir I have no information worth the name about the tribal areas and at the same time I shall say that none of my honourable friends here, not even the honourable Premier of Assam [Gopinath Bordoloi] has much of an information about the tribal areas in India.⁵¹

It must be because of this lack of information that the tribals of Manipur were left out at the time when the Constituent Assembly drafted the Sixth Schedule. It is because of this that social tension emerges between the hill and the valley people, and it is why Manipur became one of the most disturbed areas where the presence of the state is almost absent.

Neither the State Reorganisation Act, 1956, nor the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971, meets the aspirations of the people of the Northeast India. This is because neither of them altered any of the colonial administration boundaries that segmented the ethnic communities of Northeast India. The common words used in the creation of certain states and union territories like Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya, Mizoram (UT) and Arunachal Pradesh (UT) were – 'it comprised the territories which immediately before that day were comprised in the States or the Union Territories'.⁵² So, the process of decolonisation, which was always the demand of the people and could have met within the constitution of India by rearranging the colonial administration boundaries, was kept in abeyance. The colonial administrators' highhandedness that manifested in the boundaries demarcation by coercing the people or without any consultation of the people concerned was still maintained even after independence.

It is important to note that the ethnic belts are cutting sharply across administrative and bureaucratic demarcations. In the turbulent northeast of India, ethnic and tribal loyalties are crisscrossing international demarcations.⁵³ As a result it is necessary to pay special attention to the administrative units' boundaries as they were drawn for the convenience of the British colonialists' administration. For example, the Nagas never entered Assam, but when the boundary of the Naga Hills and Assam was drawn during the colonial period, the Nagas were settled in the areas in the present Assam. In the same way, the Nagas wholly claimed some districts of Manipur without considering the Kukis settlement in some of the sub-divisions of the districts. If the Kukis areas of Senapati and Ukhrul districts are combined together, as these are contiguous, a Kukis district can be made. It happened that the Kukis were marginalised as well as ethnified by the administration units' boundaries,

which were drawn by the British colonisers. Perhaps they were the victim of the infamous 'divide and rule policy', as they Kukis were the only people who gave frontal resistance to the British imperialist expansion, which is popularly known as the 'Kuki rising' (1917) (in local terms, 'Zo gal'). It is the view of the Kukis leaders that only the people who owned the land, love the land, and protect it with all their might from external aggression.

So, in the 'artificially created Manipur' (using Nirmal Nibedon's words), ethnic problems emerged due to the division of the ethnoscape. Three main ethnic groups inhabit Manipur – Nagas, Zo people (Kuki-Chin group) and the Meitei (including the Schedule Caste). The first two groups have cognate tribes living across the neighbouring states such as Nagaland, Assam, Tripura and Mizoram. In the same way the Meitei also have cognates living in Cachar. In the case of the Zo people Nirmal Nibedon wrote:

The ethnicity of the Mizo [Zo people] and their desire to live under one administrative roof would manifest itself again and again, much to the discomfiture of the Meiteis and the Indian leaders alike. In fact, a Mizo Reunification Committee would continue to function in the heart of the Manipur Hills. The message propagated by its exponents like Captain L. Z Sailo would be purely on the ethnic lines. They maintained that the only way to heal the wounds of the Mizo would be by uniting the families of 'Chhinlung Zo,' the allusion being to the people who had come 'out of the cave'.⁵⁴

What Nibedon wrote holds much water, as even today the word 'reunification' is a rallying point and mobilising tool for any ethno-political group in the areas. In 1986 the government of India and the Mizo National Front (MNF) signed the Mizo accord. But, the accord could not fulfil the Zo people's aspiration for reunification of the entire Zo-inhabited areas under a single administration. This resulted into the formation of the Zomi Reunification Organisation (ZRO) in April 1993 at Phaipian (Kachin State), Myanmar.⁵⁵

Undermining the importance of ethno-nationalism, which is the driving force of every insurgency movement, will be rather fatal in dealing with Northeast India. Nibedon wrote,

Ethnicity in the North East is a growing reality. Somewhere it is taking the form of a low-key revival elsewhere it is already touching explosive heights . . . It would be wrong to think that this ethnic resurgence is wholly the result of foreign propaganda of the handiwork of international intelligence agencies.⁵⁶

He emphasises the strength of ethnicity by saying that, 'The Vietnamese have won the war against the Americans, but ideology had nothing to do with their victory. It is ethnicity that has won the war for the followers of Ho Chi Minh'.⁵⁷ It should be noted that when the mobilisation of a people is based on ethnic lines, the movement is likely to be serious as the people attach their emotion to it.

The violence that ravages the northeast after India attained independence is due to the insensitivity, callousness and lack of sincerity on the part of the government. Chaube wrote, the 'politics of violence is a sign of desperation. It is resorted only when its protagonists have failed to get results through the politics of persuasion, bargain and mobilisation'.⁵⁸ In the same way, when the demands made for the reunification of the Zo-inhabited areas under a single administration since the time of Bardoloi Committee in 1946 did not yield any positive response, it gave an

opportunity to the nationalist elites to start an ethnic mobilisation for self-determination that culminated in an armed struggle.

Concluding remarks

By way of conclusion it may be said the problem in the northeast is not merely one of law and order, as the government of India would like to project; rather it is more of a political problem, which is deeply rooted in history. Thus, in dealing with the postcolonial imbroglio in Northeast India, the aspirations of the cultural collectivities or linguistic groups that can be met within the constitutional framework of the Union of India merit consideration, so as to begin the process of decolonisation in the northeastern region of India. The government of India's unresponsive attitudes towards the aspirations of the ethnic communities, which were presented through memoranda from time to time, engendered distrust amongst the people of Northeast India towards the people from mainland India. When these peaceful protests to realise their just demands were neglected and unheard, it culminated in violent agitation and protest. In the nation-building process, building trust amongst the various communities as well as between the state and the various communities plays a vital role, and this required immediate attention, rather than taming people through coercion with such draconian laws as the AFSPA (1958). However, this process is lacking in the agenda of the government of India.

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Notes

1. Govt of India, *Report of the SRC*, 1955, 13.
2. Darwin, "Decolonisation and the End of Empire," 542–3.
3. Fanon, "Concerning Violence."
4. *Ibid.*, 36.
5. Talukdar, "Nation Building Process in India," 59.
6. The name Zo is used here to identify the Kuki-Chin-Lushai people, who were always clubbed together by the ethnographers and colonial administrators due to the existence of affinity among them.
7. Govt. of India, *Census of India*, 2001.
8. Central Statistical Organisation, Govt. of Union of Myanmar.
9. Foreign Dept., Govt. of India. Telegram dated Sept. 3, 1889, Lieutenant Governor of Bengal to the Secretary.
10. Mackenzie, *The North-Eastern Frontier of India*, 272.
11. Shakespeare, *The Assam Rifle*, 52.
12. Mackenzie, *The North-Eastern Frontier of India*, 151.
13. *Ibid.*, 171.
14. Laldena, "Kuki Rebellion 1917–1920," 45.
15. Without a proper geographical survey Captain Pemberton drew an imaginary boundary line between India and Burma.
16. *Ibid.*, 45.
17. Govt. of India, *Report of SRC*, 2–3.
18. Barpujari, *North-East India: Problem, Policies and Prospect*, 6.
19. Govt of India, *Report of SRC*, 264.
20. Nongbri, *Development, Ethnicity and Gender*, 114–15.

21. The Report of SRC (1955) proposed the creation of the Madras state and mentioned that the main claim advanced on behalf of Madras was for the addition of the Tamil-speaking areas of Travancore-Cochin. This claim rests mainly on linguistic considerations and grounds of geographical contiguity.
22. Pakem, *India–Burma Relations*, 108.
23. Burman, “Prefatory Introduction,” 10.
24. McCulloh, *The Manipur Valley*, 57.
25. Govt. of India, *Report of SRC*, 185.
26. Govt. of India, *Report of SRC*, 37.
27. Oommen, *Citizenship, Nationality and Ethnicity*, 36.
28. Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nation*, 156.
29. Oommen, *Citizenship, Nationality and Ethnicity*, 13.
30. Connor, “Beyond Reason,” 44.
31. *Ibid.*, 49
32. *Ibid.*, 50.
33. *Ibid.*, 50.
34. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1.
35. Vumson, *Zo History*, 248.
36. Govt. of India. *Report of SRC*, 35.
37. Vanlawma, *Ka Ram Leh Kei [My Country and I]*, 182.
38. *Ibid.*, 199.
39. *Ibid.*, 261.
40. Nongbri, *Development, Ethnicity and Gender*, 96.
41. Das, “Ethnic Insurgencies in Northeastern India,” 223.
42. Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist*, 249.
43. Kothari, “Integration and Performance,” 194.
44. Kumar, *Reorganisation of North-East India*, 16.
45. Chaube, *Hill Politics in Northeast India*, 95.
46. *Ibid.*, 97.
47. Kothari, “Integration and Performance,” 194.
48. Dhar, *Open Secrets*, 87–8.
49. Pillai, *Anatomy of an Insurgency*, 73.
50. Rustomji, *Imperilled Frontier India’s North-Eastern Borderlands*, 1–2.
51. Jafa, *Administrative Policies & Ethnic Disintegration*, 89.
52. Kumar, *Reorganisation of North-East India*, 278–80.
53. Nibedon, *North East India*, xiii.
54. *Ibid.*, 42.
55. Zomi Re-Unification Organisation, *The Indigenous Zomi*, 110.
56. Nibedon, *North East India*, xv.
57. *Ibid.*, xvii.
58. Chaube, “Insurgency in Northeast India,” 35.

Notes on contributor

Dr L. Lam Khan Piang is working as Assistant Professor in the Department of Planning & Evaluation, National Institute of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi.

Author’s postal address: E – 7, NIHFV Campus, Munirka, New Delhi – 110067, India.

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