



JOURNAL OF POLITICS

ISSN : 2277-5617

An Annual Publication of the Department of Political Science, Dibrugarh University
(A Blind Peer-Reviewed Journal)

Vol. XXI, 2021

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BOOK REVIEW
TROUBLED PERIPHERY - CRISIS OF INDIA'S
NORTH EAST BY SUBIR BHAUMIK, NEW
DELHI: SAGE PUBLICATIONS
INDIA PVT. LTD., PAPERBACK EDITION, 2015; PP 305

Sun Gogoi

'Troubled Periphery: Crisis of India's North East' authored by Subir Bhaumik, is a scholastic work on the roots and dimensions of the multifaceted post-colonial political crisis of the Northeastern India. It highlights how the aspects and issues centered on culture, ethnicity, ideology, religion, and economic marginalization have shaped the nature of popular dissent and insurgency in the region. Further, the author throws light on the obstacles in the path of development, and subsequently he envisions a road ahead to a better future for the Northeast, which in his view, is a peripheral zone of India. Northeast has a population of 39 million and about 475 ethnic groups and sub-groups speaking over 400 different languages and dialects of which 175 belong to the Tibeto-Burman group. The two largest dominant groups of the plains are the Assamese and the Bengalis consisting of about several million each. On the other hand, the tribal population of the region numbers only about little more than two million. Apart from ethnicity which dominates the political process of the region, the Northeast has always been subject to the complex interplay of 'ideology' and 'religion' both in the pre and the post independence period. While Hinduism and Islam are major religions in the plains, Christianity dominates the hills. The advent of colonization in Assam (1826) was followed by relentless migration of traders, workers, manual laborers and peasants from the rest of the Indian subcontinent, particularly the undivided Bengal and North India, which was an outcome of colonial political economy which was primarily aimed at

promoting capitalism in the newly conquered region. It sowed the seeds of the problems of demographic accommodation, cultural confrontation and conflict of material interests in the Northeast.

The nomenclature 'Northeast' was a colonial and administrative construct like the erstwhile 'North-Western Provinces' of India.¹ The First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26) led to the expansion of British Empire in the region. After the Brahmaputra and the Barak valleys had come under the grip of the colonizers, their commercial interest in Assam gradually expanded and they felt the need of a stable 'Northeast frontier', a term used to denote the hill ranges of the Northeast inhabited by different tribal groups. The colonial masters overemphasized the 'absence of civilization' and 'warlike nature' of those groups to justify their incursions into the hills. As an outcome of this expansionist move, 'Eastern', the former connotation of this frontier region of Bengal was now shifted to the 'Northeastern', a new geo-political nomenclature in the early 1870s. The demarcation of the 'Inner Line' at foothills of the two valleys marked the limits of regular colonial revenue administration. This exclusionist policy in the long run added to the alienation of the so called 'unruly' hills from the 'civilized' plains and thus widened the cultural and political distances between their inhabitants. Beyond the Inner Line, the tribal people of hills were left out of the British revenue administration to manage their day to day affairs only being subject to 'good behavior' with the people of plains and the colonial masters. The colonizers were reluctant to bring those groups under a rigid polity. It is evident that during Ahom days too, the neighboring hill tribes were mostly left to their own devices and the degree of Ahom sovereignty over them had always been fluctuating. Amongst the ethnic groups and tribes of the South-East Asia, the political culture of 'self-governance' and 'evading state' was prevalent. James C. Scott argues that the dominant discourses of 'state making' – both historic and contemporary virtually pays no attention to the history of 'deliberate' and 'reactive' statelessness.² Down through the centuries, they have been fleeing the suppression of the state-making projects in the valleys. "Civilizational discourses never entertain the possibility of people voluntarily going over to the barbarians, hence such statuses are stigmatized and ethnicized. Ethnicity and "tribe" begin exactly where the taxes and sovereignty

end – in the Roman Empire as in the Chinese”, Scott said.³ Ironically in the context of the both colonial and the post-colonial India, the birth of generic ethnic and tribal identities is connected with the process of colonial state-making and then post-colonial nation-building themselves. These identities are essentially modern and they do not necessarily exist beyond state sovereignty. A clear view of the people of the Southeast Asia, according to Scott, is blocked as most of their history is obsessed with ‘state’: classical, colonial and independent. Bhaumik too is looking at the matter within the purview of the Indian state. Those who are unfamiliar with this ‘anarchist’ history of the region and the sustained diversity and complexity, are not supposed to grasp the matter at first reading. The focus on comprehensive issues, particularly in the case of Northeast where a unified history never had existed before the advent of colonialism, requires lucid understanding of backgrounds before one understands the individual stories of the states in light of the Indian nation building process. The unique racial construct of the region helps its people to develop a sense of ‘being different’ from the rest of India.

Bhaumik highlights that after the partition, Gopinath Bordoloi, the erstwhile Chief Minister of Assam was pressured by the Centre to accept more than 600,000 Hindu-Bengali refugees by 1961. Nehru threatened Bordoloi with denial of federal development funds unless Assam agreed to share the refugee burden of India. Though the Assamese middle class and common masses joined hands with the Centre in the process of nation building, they were immensely resentful of the state’s changing demography, land loss to Bengali migrants and uneven distribution of the resources exploited from the Northeast by the Centre. Today, separatist ideologues of the region frequently refer to the virtual withdrawal of Indian army from the region in front of the advancing Chinese in the early sixties followed by Nehru’s farewell address: *‘My heart goes out to the people of Assam’*, only to justify their allegation that the ‘heartland’ Indians consider not only Assam, but the entire Northeast as its mere ‘colony’ in practice. They have even questioned India’s moral right to exercise its sovereignty over the region.

The author notices that most of the ethnic groups of the region recognized the supremacy of the Indian Constitution without must protest after independence.

However, he holds the case of the Nagas as an exception as violence erupted in the Naga Hills district in the immediate aftermath of Independence. Being grappled with the crisis, the Indian Government introduced a draconian law named Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), 1958. It is a virtual murder of the democratic spirit of the Indian Constitution. Soyam Lokendrajit asserts that “AFSPA is a Black Law more draconian than the Asia Law Amendment Ordinance Gandhi opposed in 1906 with Satyagraha in South Africa”.⁴ AFSPA, empowering the army to shoot and kill just on the basis of mere suspicion engenders an atmosphere of terror, anxiety and violation of human dignity in different pockets of Northeast, thereby rendering the people incapable of discharging their developmental human instinct. The justice Reddy Commission (2004) in its review of the provisions of the act recommended that AFSPA should be repealed: “the Act, for whatever reason, has become a symbol of oppression, an object of hate and instrument of discrimination and highhandedness”.⁵ Bhaumik lays heavy stress on the need for Indian state’s response to the widespread public demand for withdrawal of AFSPA and implementation of the recommendations of official committees that suggest alternative less draconian measures.

Bhaumik throws light on how the tribal groups of the region as an outcome of their forced incorporation with the Indian state before and after Independence, were reluctant to share a common Identity with the people of mainland India. The author emphasizes the common identification of this region as the ‘Mongoloid fringe’ of India, thus placing an anti-thesis to the politically dominant Aryan Caste-Hindu culture that prevails in the mainland India and the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. It is evident that the politics in Northeast witnessed the Mongoloid-Aryan dichotomy during the last days of the British-Indian Empire. The objective behind the formation of the All Assam Tribal League in 1933 was to bring the Mongoloid tribes and communities together on a common platform and to exert political power for their all round socio-economic uplift. In the recent decades, the Northeast has been experiencing the growing tendency of asserting generic identities among different ethnic groups, which were introduced in the last colonial days and cemented in the early days of nation building. In view of the author, the material advantages that follow the recognition as Scheduled Tribe (ST) have motivated

‘political tribalization’. The author cites the instance of the Lashkars or the *Deshi Tripuras* who preferred to be recognized as ‘local Bengalis’ during the princely rule in Tripura, but later on sought recognition as a ST to secure politico-economic benefits.

However, this journey of shifting identities has never been as straight for all the ethnic groups of the region as shown by Bhaumik. For instance, most of the educated Ahoms, a socio-politically advanced group amongst the Mongoloid communities of the Brahmaputra valley, were happy to be recognized as ‘Hindus’ during the colonial days. Unlike several other ethnic communities of the region, they were reluctant to seek political privileges from the colonial state by identifying themselves as ‘tribal’. On the other hand, representatives of several other groups from both the hills and plains of the Northeastern India like Nagas, Mikirs (Karbis), Kacharis (Bodos), Deories and Miris (Misings) met the Simon Commission that visited Shillong in 1929, seeking special political privileges from the colonizers, which would be later on materialized under the Government of India Act, 1935. Instead, some leaders of the Ahom Association in the early 20th century had been seeking socio-cultural recognition as *Kshatriya* which means the *Varna* or group of the ‘rulers and warriors’ in traditional Hindu society.

In the early 18th century, the *sanskritized*⁶ Ahom elites including the *Swargadeos*⁷ (Monarchs) were branded as *Anarya Hindu* (non-Aryan Hindu) by the *Bhattacharyya* Brahmins of Bengali origin who gave them initiation. Thus, even at the zenith of their political power in the Brahmaputra valley, the Ahoms remained theoretically alienated from the mainstream Aryan Hindu society of the valley. On the eve of independence, however, the desire of the Ahom middle class was thwarted by the opposition of some upper caste Hindus of the Brahmaputra valley. The *Auniati Satra* and the *Dakhinpat Satra*, two prominent stake-holders of the egalitarian *neo-Vaishnavite* culture of Assam, approved a literary work named *Repunjoy Smriti* (1934), which was published under the initiative of Tirthanath Goswami, the erstwhile *Satradhikar* of the *Dhalar Satra*.⁸ Goswami was also the president of the first session of the *Asom Satra Sangha* in 1925. This book was all about the hierarchical Hindu social order and it placed the Ahoms within the fold

of other socially alienated castes of Assam such as the Kaivartas. The book was circulated in whole Jorhat region and its copies were easily available in bookstalls. Consequently in Dibrugarh, the All Assam Ahom Council held its meeting which witnessed heated discussion about the matter. The Ahom leaders totally lost their confidence and trust on the so called upper Caste religious mentors of Assam, and the meeting decided that all Ahoms would strictly follow the *Chaw-Klong* ceremony for marriage and would not depend anymore on the above mentioned people.⁹ Subsequently the Ahoms too sought 'tribal' recognition along with several other ethnic communities of Assam in the aftermath of independence.

Apart from the issues of 'material consideration', therefore, the tendency for tribalization was further accelerated by the exclusionist casteism amongst a section of the 'ethnic Assamese', a term used by several researchers to denote the Assamese speaking forward castes of the region. This nomenclature itself is an exclusionist one as it tends to alienate not only the population groups of immigrant origin from Bengal or the rest of India, but also the indigenous tribal population and other ethnic groups of the state. Sanjib Baruah remembering his interactions with a mainland Indian army officer in the 1990s has written that "For instance, I was taken aback when I first heard what was then a rather new term, 'ethnic Assamese'.....The gentleman asked me if I was an ethnic Assamese. Until then I was used to saying that I am an Assamese, just as in India a Bengali, a Gujarati or a Malayalee would identify him- or herself. But why the odd qualifier 'ethnic', I wondered".¹⁰ The growing tendency for tribalization in the aftermath of independence is not necessarily to be interpreted only in terms of economic determinism/material aspirations. Superiority complex of the dominant section of the 'Assamese' society psychologically thwarted some other tribes of the valley like the Bodos, the Deories and the Misings, largely keeping them away from the mainstream society and politics.

Thus, if one observes with a micro-perspective within the 'troubled periphery' of Assam, it will be substantiated that virtually another periphery exists (within the greater periphery) where lies the tribal groups, and other Mongoloid communities of Assam who have adopted Hinduism, but ironically remained

alienated from the *Varna* /caste system; which has been the lifeline of Vedic Hinduism since time immemorial. In practice, the *Sanskritized* Mongoloid communities of Assam have often been treated like *Shudras*, the group of people that exists at the bottom of the traditional caste hierarchy. Such dichotomies have led to identity crisis and clashes not only amongst the ethnic groups or between the ethnic groups and the state, but within some of the ethnic groups as well. The identities pertaining to several of them can be located in an ambiguous and fluctuating position between the traditional ethnic traits and the process of *Sanskritization*.

Bhaumik subsequently highlights the interconnection of religious ideology with the politics of regional nationalism and separatist movements. Muivah, much less a practicing Christian than the erstwhile National Socialist Council of Nagaland: Isaac-Muivah (NSCN-IM) Chairman Isak Swu, introduced the phase 'Nagaland for Christ'. The senior leaders of the Mizo National Front (MNF) went ahead in championing Christianity by personally conducting church services in rebel camps. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) on the other hand, remains silent on the question of religion as it would not be conducive in pursuing their dream of a *Swadhin Asom* (Sovereign Assam). The ULFA was reported to have contained communal riots in the Hojai region of Nagaon district by displaying arms openly soon after the demolition of the Babri Masjid at the hands of the Hindu Chauvinists forces in December, 1992.

The author throws light on the 'ethnic imbalance' in power sharing as a cause behind the quest for retribalization within the ethnic groups. The internal contradiction within the groups confines the growth of regional ethnic nationalism as an anti-thesis to the broader Indian nationalism. A nation (ethnic group), according to Benedict Anderson, is an 'imagined political community'. It is imagined as 'limited' because it has finite (if elastic) boundaries, beyond which other nations exist. No nation imagines itself 'coterminous' with mankind and hence, is exclusive in nature.¹¹ The Naga nationalism has been weakened by the rivalry between the Tangkhuls and the Angamis, and thus has remained an incomplete process till date. This rivalry can be considered as an outcome of fragmented political

imagination backed by the power politics of Naga hills. The quest for hegemony made Muivah, the Tangkhul Naga leader of the NSCN-IM to brand the Angami Nagas as the 'revolutionary traitors', whereas the Tangkhuls, his own group, as the 'revolutionary patriots'. It is noticed on the other hand that the Tangkhuls living in Manipur, Indo-Myanmar frontier and the Upper Myanmar are labeled as *Kaccha Naga* (impure Naga) by the rest of the Naga people.

The experiences of 'forced assimilation' with the so called mainstream deepened the tribes' sense of cultural marginalization and political alienation. The politically ambitious emerging middle class and intellectuals amongst the tribes from both hills and plains raised their voice and mobilized their influence over the respective communities to resist the authoritarian behaviour of the state which was virtually being controlled by the dominant upper caste-Hindus of Assam. He emphasized the role of 'language' as an instrument of the politics of socio-political polarization that is starkly evident in Assam and Tripura. Resenting the imposition of Bengali language (1837-73) the Assamese middle class developed a sense of linguistic chauvinism in the following decades. In the late 1950s, the government of the erstwhile undivided Assam legally, but forcibly introduced Assamese over all other communities and tribes. This big-brotherly attitude of the ethnic Assamese dominated state government paved the way for breaking away of most of the hill tribes and their respective territories from Assam during 1960s-1980s.

The Assamese speaking population is increasingly insecure about its survival as a dominant group. The so-called mainstream Assamese and the tribal communities of the region still fear cultural subordination at the hands of the Bengali 'middle class' (Hindu), and demographic conquest at the hands of the Bengali 'peasantry' (Muslim). The strategy of language imposition has been at work in Tripura where the Bengali migrants now overwhelm the indigenous tribal population to impose the Bengali language and scripts and wrest political and social control. On the other hand, this tendency proved to be threatening and provocative for the tribal groups of the undivided Assam across the hills and plains. The author highlights how the decision of the state government undermines the distinct linguistic identity of different ethnic groups, and garnered a separatist tendency among the

Bodos who had formed their own *Sahitya Sabha* (1952) which in the late 1960s would play a decisive role in linguistic politics of the state by recommending the abolition of the Assamese script and its replacement as a medium of instruction with the Roman script. When in 1974, the Bodo primer *Bithorai* (written in Roman script) was introduced in the schools of Bodo-dominated areas, the state government stopped financial grants for Bodo primary schools. It resulted in a massive movement in the Bodo areas. After the negotiation with the central government, the *Bodo Sahitya Sabha* agreed to adopt *Devanagari* script for the Bodo language. But it increasingly divided the Bodos along a religious line as the Christian Bodos and the most of the Bodo students educated in Shillong strongly advocated the use of Roman script enjoying the backing of the separatist National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). This language-centric internal rivalry thwarted the quest for a united Bodo nationalism to a great extent.

The issue of land alienation remains a root of conflict in the region which sows the seeds of ethnic hatred first at the individual level and then it is transmuted to the level of collective or group. Makiko Kimura traces the root of the infamous Nellie Massacre (1983) in long standing land alienation problem of the Tiwas in light of the fear psychosis amongst the indigenous communities and the ideology of the Assam Agitation.¹² Bhaumik too holds the issue of land alienation responsible for the massacre of the Muslims of Bengali origin. However, being a journalist in practice, the author throws light only on the outcomes or the 'ends'; and unlike Kimura, Bhaumik seems to be less interested in highlighting the complicated interconnection amongst the issues of land alienation, the ideology of the Assam Movement and the event of Nellie. Whether the leadership and the goals of the Assam Agitation were genuinely in favor of the tribal people, hitherto it has been a debated question. A section of scholars like Kimura believes that the leaders of the agitation raised the issue of land alienation amongst the tribes only in order to back their claim that the influx of foreigners created socio-economic problems in Assam. The incident has been generalized by Bhaumik as a 'tribal attack' on the Muslims executed mainly by the Tiwas (traditionally known as 'Lalung'). However, now it is substantiated that apart from the Tiwa tribesmen (being the preponderant participants of the attack), the local Koch and other marginalized Assamese communities too joined the Tiwas to execute the event.

The post-Assam Accord (1985) socio-political scenario of Assam was marked by communal colorization of electoral politics. The six year long Assam Movement and the subsequent victimization of the Muslims of East Bengal origin ruptured the ongoing assimilation process converting them overnight from the *Na-Asamiyas* (New-Assamese) to *Miyas* or Bangladeshis (foreigners). It was like a paradigm shift in the way of Assamese nationalist imagination. In recent years the East Bengali Muslims have asserted themselves more as Muslims rapidly polarizing the state politics in communal line. Such polarization has facilitated the advent of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Brahmaputra valley as a pro-Hindu antithesis to the minority consolidation, and finally the saffron party with its regional allies formed government in Dispur winning the assembly election of 2016.¹³

The author remarks that in Northeast, the outbreak of insurgency has been more frequent than elsewhere in the country. The recourse to armed-struggle has often been the first, rather than the last option of a frustrated or relatively deprived ethnic group or tribe. Armed rebellion in Northeast is a typical language for these groups to express their disillusionment and grievances. The problem lies mostly in the failure of Indian state to address the regional economic grievances and political aspirations. Moreover, the strategic geo-political location of Northeast too encourages different groups of the region to resort to armed struggle as a primary path. Kautilya's four principles of *Sham* (political reconciliation), *Dam* (monetary inducement), *Danda* (force) and *Bheda* (split) has been applied amply in dealing with the insurgent groups of the region. However, till date these policies have succeeded only in bringing about partial solutions to the long standing crisis. The author emphasized the case of Mizoram as an exception in this context. The Mizo Accord (1986) was a 'durable' one as it was recognized and approved not by a fraction of MNF, but by the entire leadership of the organization. Unfortunately in the cases of NSCN, ULFA and some other insurgent groups of the region, it can be noticed that the emerging fractions in leadership and the consequent ambiguity has become an obstacle in the path of peace making for both of the insurgent groups and the Indian state.

The author throws light on the role governments and the non-state actors of the neighboring foreign countries in the sustenance of insurgent groups and

proliferation of insurgency in Northeast. The majority of the leadership and the cadres of those organizations are trained in the frontier regions of the countries like China, Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The rebels have made their camps in hills and jungle terrains across the international borders. He holds the Sino-Pakistani Axis responsible for the growth of insurgency during the 1950s and the 1960s. After 1971, the newborn Bangladesh allegedly backed almost all militant groups of Northeast. This nexus is marked by the working of criminal syndicates of guns, drugs and other contrabands. This illegal trade network is encouraged by cheaper foreign goods of China and Southeast Asia, corrupt local authorities and the difficult terrains of the border regions.

Bhaumik has contested the long lasting dominant discourse of the region that the centre's indifference towards the economic development of Northeast is one of the major causes behind ethnic unrests in the region. He highlights that the peripheral Northeastern states have received a very high rate of per capita central assistance, several times more than poor heartland states like Bihar, as they have been as 'special category'. However, due to sustained political instability, lack of proper planning and advent of rampant corruption in both political and administrative domains, the developmental schemes introduced in the region are not broadly facilitating the marginalized sections.

The author further focuses on various interconnected political issues of the region in light of recent elections held in the state and the vested interest of political parties, civil society organizations and the insurgent groups. He emphasizes that the insurgent groups that in the past were more inclined towards boycotting the elections, are now providing strategic support to the political parties on some calculated grounds, and vice versa. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) reportedly used the ULFA as its military arm in the 1980s and the 1990s to annihilate the Congress the so called 'collaborator' of Delhi. In response the Congress pushed for President's rule and sent armed forces into Assam. He recognizes the major role played by the students' organizations of the Northeastern states like the All Assam Students Union (AASU), the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union

(AAPSU) and the Naga Students Federation (NSF) in the process of political socialization and mobilization of the respective states. The author goes on to suggest some measures to resolve the crisis of this peripheral region. It can be noticed that Indian state's approach to conflict resolution in the case of Northeast is marked by an approach of both conflict management and suppression. In negotiations with the insurgent groups, smaller tribes and ethnic groups of Northeast, Delhi is comfortable talking about power sharing and money, but not resource sharing and autonomy. Thus, the factors of alleged economic exploitation of the periphery and political marginalization remain untouched and result in development of the syndrome of 'relative deprivation' amongst the minds of indigenous groups against the heartland India. The author lays stress on bridging the psychological distance between the so called Northeastern periphery and the Indian heartland, which according to him, would be possible through changes in attitudes, policies and a vision of a prosperous shared future, whereas the physical distance can be bridged by development of transport, infrastructure and use of modern technology. Nevertheless the way to conflict resolution is not as smooth as straight as envisioned by the author. The genesis of the trouble in the region appears to lie more in political disagreement and less in economic consideration. The Centre should search for a political solution to the crisis as a matter of priority. Political stability has always been preceding economic development and prosperity down through the centuries across the globe. The author contends that the pressure groups like the students organizations may play a vital role as negotiators to resolve the ethno-political crisis of the region. All the important groups of the region have to work in collaboration to find out a viable road ahead. The look East Policy, in the words of Rajiv Sikri, a former Secretary East of the Ministry of External affairs, "envisages the Northeastern region not as the periphery of India, but the centre of a thriving and integrated economic space linking two dynamic regions with a network of highways, railways, pipelines, transmission lines crisscrossing the region".¹⁴ The author reminds the reviewer of the reality that India's proposed Look East Policy as mission of collaboration with the Asian Tigers would never be fruitful until and unless Myanmar remains a military state. Therefore, India, apart from overcoming the democracy deficits in its Northeastern region, has to play a pioneering role in

resolving the crisis of democracy in the immediate neighborhood. The proposed mission, according to Sanjib Baruah too, in effect, has been 'hijacked' by the military establishment and security concerns.

The author lays stress on solving the long standing problem of land alienation of indigenous people. Bhaumik cites instances of how the tribal people across the Northeast have lost their land and livelihood to money lenders and migrants, to the government agencies and the military bases. The land, water and forest resources which are traditionally regarded as 'communal property' by the tribal people now have virtually become property of the state and subject to ecological degradation due to the building of river dams, widespread and uncontrolled mining of the natural resources by private entrepreneurs. The author emphasized the need for stopping illegal migration into the region from the neighboring countries, and discouraging rampant migration from the rest of India. A strict national labor policy is to be implemented for protection of the interest of the indigenous groups of people.

The author himself reveals in the Preface that the work is generated from nearly three decades of his personal experience as a journalist and academic researcher in Northeast and in its neighboring regions and that he had the benefit of covering the most important events at very close quarters. The work is affluent with factual information. The author seems to be vigilant enough to address each of the various issues to trace the origins and different dimensions of the existing multifaceted crisis, leaving the readers inquisitive with a number of issues to ponder on. One can argue that reading of the work '*Troubled Periphery: Crisis of India's North East*' is conducive to develop a 'macro' outlook towards the understanding of long standing troubles that keep on haunting the region and contradictory discourses on the process of peace making and nation building.

Notes :

¹ The North-Western Provinces was an administrative region in British India which was established in 1836. In 1858, the kingdom of Oudh was annexed and merged with this region to constitute 'North-Western Provinces and Oudh'. In 1902, this province was reorganized to form the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. XXIV, 1908, p. 158).

² Scott, James C. *The Art of Not being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2010, p. x.

³ Ibid., p. xi.

⁴ Lokendrajit, Soyam. *Who is Terrorist?* Imphal: Waba Publications, 2013, p. 76.

⁵ Retrieved from: <http://manipuronline.com/features/the-conspiracy-of-silence/2010/11/03>- files on April 2, 2020 at 6:00am (IST).

⁶ The term 'Sanskritization' was first introduced by M. N. Srinivas. Sanskritization is basically letting the lower caste individuals perform rituals and adopt various methods of living as like those of upper caste people by abandoning the disgrace associated with caste-based domination and oppression. Also, the concept of Sanskritization helps lower castes to elevate their position in the social hierarchy. In the study performed by Srinivas, he noticed the behavior changes in lower castes and how they are adopting the living style of Brahmins to be superior and indulge in various reputed ceremonies.

⁷ "Swargadeo" was the 'Hindu' Royal title of the Ahom Monarchs: *Swarga* meaning 'heaven' and *Deo* meaning 'a divine person' or 'owner'.

⁸ The *Satras* are basically monasteries set up to propagate Vaishnavism in the Brahmaputra valley. Sankaradev, the famous Vaishnava saint of Assam, is said to have established his first *Satra* at Bardowa (Nagaon district). The abbot of a *Satra* is traditionally called *Satradhikar* in Assam.

⁹ Retrieved from: <https://www.endangeredalphabets.net/alphabets/ahom/> - files on January 15, 2022 at 5:00pm (IST).

¹⁰ Baruah, Sanjib. *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, p. xvii.

¹¹ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2015, p. 7.

¹² Kimura, Makiko. "Agency of Rioters: A Study of Decision-making in the Nellie Massacre, Assam, 1983", in *Beyond Counter-Insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India*. Edited by Sanjib Baruah. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 188-204.

¹³ In the Assam Legislative Assembly elections of 2016, BJP and its allies have won an absolute majority. BJP won 60 seats on its own in the 126 member House. Its ally Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) won 14 seats, while another ally Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF) bagged 12 seats. This thumping win of the saffron party can be seen as its expanding political influence beyond its traditional heartlands of Northern and Western India.

¹⁴ Ghoshal, B.D. "India's Look East Policy and the Northeast", in *Pentagon's South Asia Defence and Strategic Year Book*. Edited by Harjeet Singh. New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2010, p. 79.