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REORGANIZATION TO ACCOMMODATION: A STUDY ON NORTHEAST INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The term 'Northeast India' as a modern construction referred by academicians, policy makers to refer India's easternmost eight states into one homogenous identity. It was the British rulers who referred this region as 'North East Frontier' to identify its own geographical specificity. From colonial period to post-colonial period still the region is being considered as one homogenous category which undermine the dynamic specificity of this region. This paper is an attempt to understand the reorganization and accommodation of Northeast India under Indian federalism.
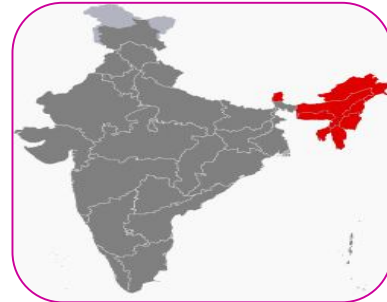
KEYWORDS: *Northeast India, Reorganization, Indian federalism.*

INTRODUCTION:

The Northeast India (for governmental purpose named as North Eastern Region) situated in the easternmost region of India mainly comprises of eight states i.e. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura. According to eminent scholar from Northeast India V. Venkata Rao "the entire region is unique in its nature for its diversity and variety, inhabited by colourful races, the like of which we do not find in any part of the world" (1987: 458). Though all of these eight states are multi-diverse state from different perspective but from geographical as well as political administrative perspective, the eight states is being treated as one homogenous entity i.e. North East India .The term 'Northeast' was modern construction by British rulers to identify this regions in terms of its own geographical specificity. Alexander Mackenzie, the political correspondence of Bengal government from 1866-1873 first used the term 'North-East Frontier' to "identify Assam including the adjoining hill areas and the princely states of Manipur and Tripura in his book *History of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal* in 1884" (Haokip, 2011: 111). As ThongkholalHaokip, while discussing the origin of the term 'Northeast' mentioned,

Initially the term remained a geographical concept and throughout the colonial period the British rulers referred to Assam as the 'Northeastern Frontier of Bengal'. Thus, in the colonial period the area what now constitute the 'Northeast' was considered to be a frontier of Bengal of Bengal that needs to be protected and defended militarily. (2011: 111)

The paper is an attempt to understand the reorganization of Northeast India and its accommodation in India's asymmetrical federalism. The paper will discuss the state formation process in Northeast India from state reorganization Act, 1956 to North East State Reorganization Act, 1971 and its accommodation within the arrangement of asymmetrical federalism in India.

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North East India: From State Reorganization Act, 1956 to North East State Reorganization Act 1971

The state formation process in India started with the territorial reorganization of the then existing total 29 states from nine governor's provinces of British India and nine princely states and ten centrally administered chief commissioner's provinces with Andaman and Nicobar Island. The first state formation process after independence was started when Andhra Pradesh was created as first state in 1953 on the basis of linguistic factor. In 1953, 22 December then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru appointed the State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) to examine the issue of reorganization of the states of the Indian Union so that "the welfare of the people of each constituent unit as well as the nation as a whole is promoted" (SRC, 1955). On the basis of the recommendation of SRC, Indian parliament enacted State Reorganization Act, 1956 through 7th Amendment to create 14 states and 6 Union Territories on language basis. This Act created Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Bombay (later Maharashtra), Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Madras (Tamil Nadu), Mysore (Karnataka), Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Through his SRC, 1956 Act, though the aspiration of different linguistic communities of mainland India was accommodated but it could not able to address the aspiration of various linguistic, ethnic communities in North East India. For this entire region, the act only recognized Assam as state by including all other parts of North East (excluding Manipur and Tripura Princely state) against their will on the ground of administrative efficiency, regional stability, resource constraints and security needs, even though Assam was going to be a multi-lingual state (Goswami, 1997; Inoue, 2005: 23). This resulted strong opposition, dissatisfaction among various ethnic communities mainly the hill areas who demanded a separate homeland through this Act. The Mizo, Naga, Khasi etc. showed their dissatisfaction against the idea of creating only one state for the entire North-Eastern region by neglecting their demands of separate state.After independence, the government of India administratively controlled the tribal areas of North East region through government of Assam who act as an agent of the President under the special provisions in the sixth schedule of the constitution (Sinha, 2005; Bath, 2017).

After Assam, the first area which got statehood in Northeast was Nagaland in 1963. Nagaland was initially a part of greater Assam as a schedule district named Naga Hill district (Kikhi, 2017: 598). In 1961 through the Nagaland Transitional Provisions Regulation, 1961, the existing administrative area with in greater Assam i.e. Naga Hills Tuensang Area was renamed as 'Nagaland". With the state of Nagaland Act, 1962 gave full statehood status to Nagaland which resulted the formation of 16th state in India. After Assam, the formation of Nagaland as second separate state significantly influenced the separate statehood demand among other ethnic communities in North east Region. After Nagaland, the third state which got statehood status was Meghalaya. On 2nd April, 1970 Meghalaya came into existence as an autonomous state by combining the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hill District from greater Assam (Karna, 2005). Government of India gave gull fledged statehood to Meghalaya on 21 January, 1972 through initiating a new state reorganization act for the North East Region. In this context it is important to note that in the late 1971, Indian Parliament passed five specific acts i.e. The North Eastern Area (Reorganization) Act, 1971 and the 27th Amendment of the Constitution of India Act, The Manipur Hills Area Act and the North Eastern Council Act which paved the way for creation of Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya as new states in North East India (Nag, 2011:268).

The creation of Mizoram as separate state was the outcome of long struggle, separatist insurgent movements for independent Mizoram by Mizo National front under the leadership of Mizo leader Laldenga. In 1972 Indian government granted union territory status to then Mizo Hills District of greater Assam after signing accord with Mizo National Front and later on in 1987 Mizoram got full statehood status (Inoue, 2005). Another state which got statehood status very late in North East region was Arunachal Pradesh. Before statehood status, this area was known as North East Frontier Agency (Sinha, 2005). In 1971, through North Eastern Area Reorganization Act, NEFA got its political new name 'Arunachal Pradesh' with union territory status and on 20 February 1987 Arunachal achieved its full statehood status (Bath, 2017).

In this state reorganization status in North East region, two princely state i.e. Manipur and Tripura merged with Indian territory in 1949.Manipur and Tripura after independence as Part C state remained

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union territory and in 1972 through North East State Reorganization Act, 1971, both princely state became full-fledged state (Singh, 2017; Misra, 2017).

Sikkim is a different case in comparison with other North Eastern states. After independence also, for a long time till 1975, Sikkim become the protectorate of Indian government. On 26th April, 1975, Indian Parliament passed the 38th Constitutional Amendment through which Sikkim became an integral part of India and on 16th May 1975 Sikkim became 22nd State of Indian Union (Inoue, 2005: 21).

North East India: Accommodations under Indian Federalism

Within the asymmetrical federal model of Indian state, North East India is very crucial to understand as the region is being considered a homogenous region from colonial period to post-colonial period. In North East India's context through the asymmetrical federal arrangements, Indian state tries to accommodate the diverse interest of different ethnic, tribal communities of this region. According to renowned scholar Balveer Arora (1995) and H. Khan Kham Suan (2009, 2013), Indian state through two different routes tried to accommodate the diverse interest of North East India i.e. first through socio-cultural and political route and second through economic and financial route. Through socio-cultural and political route under Indian constitution, in its article 371 (A), (B), (C) and (G) made special provision for tribal administration to accommodate the socio-cultural identities of different tribal communities of this region. Under the article 244 through the provision of sixth schedule, Indian constitution made some administrative provisions for these tribal areas to create sub-state level structure like Autonomous Council/ District Council in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. Within this sub-state level structure, these tribal areas have been given some extra legislative, executive, judicial power under its own jurisdiction for the purpose of protection, preserving their own custom, tradition and culture. Through financial route, the North East region is given some extra special privileges like allocating more financial grants, the status of 'special category states'. From after 1971, through North East State Reorganization Act, 1971, Indian state created a sub planning body i.e. North Eastern Council for the entire region as a whole to look after the development of infrastructure and communication facilities. In 2001, Indian government also formed one new ministry for the entire North-east Region as Ministry of DoNER i.e. Department for Development of the North Eastern Region which is "responsible for planning, execution and monitoring of development scheme and projects in the North Eastern Region" (Mdoner, 2018).

CONCLUSION

Although under these socio-political and economic arrangements with the asymmetrical federal framework, Indian state tried to accommodate the diverse interest of this region along with the reorganization of North East India in response to separate homeland demands, still it raises question about its success in terms of reorganization as well as accommodation in Indian federalism. Under its asymmetrical federal model, on the one hand Indian state tried to accommodate the diverse interest of this region by following two routes as already mentioned in this article, at the same time under these asymmetrical framework, the all North Eastern states, in terms of representation at territorial chamber and popular house remain politically less-significant state compare to other states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra etc. because of its tiny number of representatives (Gogoi, 2016). In same way, from academic discourse to governmental machinery, from academicians to policy makers, the whole region is being categorized as one homogenous entity under the conception of 'Northeast' which is very problematic to understand the dynamic specificity of this regions.

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