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Dialogues across Fault Lines of Territory and Peoples: Bridging State, Nation and Ethnicity in North East

Edited by Aarushi Prakash and Chok Tsering

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TAPAN KUMAR BOSE

Project Context

The Naga self-determination conflict is perhaps the most definitive example of state and ethno-nationalist conflicts in the Northeast of India. The continuation of this conflict over nearly seven decades and emergence of other ethno-nationalist movements in the region underscores the inability of the Indian state in dealing with the demands of the ethno-nationalist communities who built their distinct identities grounded on cultural factors, i.e. unique history remains a problem. The states responses have remained ad hoc - ranging from denial of all such claims and using military means to suppress such movements to creating autonomous ethnic homelands through "peace accords" which have often failed to address the main issues marginalisation and justice.

In the backdrop of this statist peacemaking practices, the recently signed Indo-Naga Framework Agreement between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM) seemingly is a welcome departure. The agreement has established a "framework" or the broad principles that would guide the future deliberations between the Government of India and the NSCN-IM. As we understand that while the Government of India has accepted the "uniqueness of Naga history and culture" and the NSCN-IM has accepted the primacy of Indian Constitution, both parties have agreed to find ways to resolve the conflict on the basis of "shared sovereignty of the people". Undoubtedly it is a catalytic moment in the contentious politics of the Northeast. It is necessary to examine whether the "Framework Agreement" holds the promise of a more flexible and a durable template of peace-making, or is it likely to produce waves of discord, especially in the context of the tension between competing claims to territory and peoples' self-determination rights in the neighbouring states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur.

Project Goal

Recognising that the Indo-Naga accord cannot deliver durable peace unless there is peace amongst the Nagas, and more importantly peace with its neighbours, it was proposed to create a Dialogue Forum that would encourage multi-stakeholders to engage politically in a non-partisan conversation so as to build an inclusive and democratic forum for inter-community dialogue.

The aim of the Round Table Dialogue was to bring together members of different ethnic communities of North-East regions to re-establish civil society dialogues and conversation on political and social issues across faultlines. It was designed to facilitate the understanding of other's grievances, anxieties and foster mutual respect for each other while focusing on common concerns and thinking of ways of overcoming confrontational politics. Furthermore it aimed at building confidence and strengthening people to people relations between different ethnic communities in the Northeast states of India. The December

2015 dialogue was envisaged as a first, in what it is hoped will be a series of such multi-stakeholder dialogues.

Process of the project

The process entailed identifying such people for participation in the dialogue who were both knowledgeable about the current situation in the North-East and had a presence in the region. We also needed to get such people who were open to discuss and dialogue so-called contentious issues with a view to find ways to resolve the intercommunity and intracommunity conflicts. There was also the commitment to ensure that there be a women panelist/presenter in each session. As a matter of fact there was a women panelist in almost every session, leaving last minute drop outs.

The Other media and South Asia Forum for Human Right's long association with human rights and peace movements had earned us both credibility and confidence of civil society organisations in the north-east region. It helped us in getting the support of prominent Assamese, Kuki, Meitei and Naga academics and civil society actors. We were able to get together at one platform several prominent academics, social workers, students and civil society actors to participate in the dialogue. This was an important aspect of the project and we need to continue to work in the North-East to expand the circle of people who are willing to dialogue. Keeping in mind to incorporate the intergenerational perspectives, we planned for a panel discussion on the issues faced by the youth in the North-East as well as on the role of youth and students in the self-determination movement in the region. This panel comprised of veteran youth and student activist and young scholars from the region who are now living in Delhi.

The only hardship that we faced was in dealing with the student bodies and students from the North-East as they were preoccupied with exams. If they were available then we would have held an open ended session where the students could have interacted with activists, policymakers, researchers from the field and noted people from New Delhi who work on the same topic. Unfortunately this session could not be held as the the University examinations intervened.

Summary of the programme

The first of the Round Table Dialogue on North-East held on Dec 12-13, 2015, was organised by the Other Media, South Asia Forum for Human Rights, Heinrich Böll Stiftung and in partnership with the India International Centre (IIC). It brought together a mix of eminent academics and young scholars, revolving door activists on the verge of being policy makers, and civil society voices representative of the multiple ethnicities affected by the Indo-Naga accord. The Dialogue focused on the Indo-Naga Framework Agreement as a catalytic moment in the contentious politics of the Northeast to examine whether it held out the promise of a more flexible template of peace-making involving shared sovereignty, or likely to produce waves of discord in the neighbouring states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur.

The Northeast Dialogue was exciting and quite successful in that we managed to demonstrate the value added that a network like The Other Media and SAFHR bring, which Universities are unable to do ---that is to focus on a still unfolding contemporary

development and draw in a mix of eminent veteran academics and young assistant professors, revolving door activists on the cusp of being policy makers, a spread of Naga, Kuki, Meitei, Assamese and Delhi perspectives.

Tapan Bose's rather skeptical analysis of the secretive Naga Framework agreement as derived from published materials and privileged exchanges (framework/charter of demands submitted by NSCN I-M in 2006) was juxtaposed with Mr. Kevilito and Dr. Rosemary's rather affirmative reception of it, not withstanding exclusion of civil society stakeholders and the neighbours and the interlocutor Mr. Ravi's refusal to meet Naga Peoples' Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR). There was frank discussion on the problematic issues such as the goals posts of the peace process - Sovereignty and Integration. Questions were raised on the proposed "Pan Naga mechanism" - who would be in control of Kohima (14 tribes) or the rest where there are many more Naga tribes. Issues of constitutional amendments were raised.

There was less polarisation on the basis of exclusive identity like "I am a Naga" and greater recognition of the difference within the ethno-national identities – for example the differences between a Naga from Ukhrul and Kohima in their assessment of the framework agreement. A Naga woman social activist introduced yet another perspective reaffirming the critique of the implications of the exclusion of women in shaping agreements which guarantee customary laws which trivializes Violence Against Women (VAW). In addition there was intergenerational divide highlighted by a scholar of student politics in northeast.

The Naga, Meitei and Assamese participants based in Delhi brought in yet another perspective adding a further layer of complexity. The Dialogue demonstrated the possibility of developing frank and non-polarised conversations between ethnic groups while not avoiding areas of confrontation also looking at their mutual interest in working together on environmental and economic issues.

Assam, as always-stoked contentious interpretations as Professor Monirul Hussain unraveled the dynamics of identity mobilisations in Assam and the disentanglement of the Assam Province. Prof. Hussain's presentation led to extensive discussions. Dr. Rakhee Kalita traced the peace process in Assam the various turning points of insurgency, counter-insurgency and peace talks. Rita Manchanda presented a comparative analysis of why peace agreements fail. Dr. Sanjoy Hazarika brought in the human cost of the so-called "success" story of Mizo peace accord. There was focused attention to analyses implications of changing political economy – insurgents, intelligence agencies student politics the church and etc.

Expectedly the session on insider outsider discourse and competing unique histories in Manipur prompted extremely candid and introspective analysis. The session was enriched by the participation of quite a few scholars and students from Manipur and Nagaland and from Delhi. Manipuri participants, Dr. Malem Ningthouja, Mr. Paradip Phanjoubam, Dr. Bhagat Oinam and three other young teachers helped in unpacking the doubts and fears of the non-Meitei communities of Manipur who are protesting against the passage of three bills - Protection of Manipur People Bill, 2015, Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms (Seventh amendment) Bill, 2015, and Manipur Shops and Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill, 2015 - in the state assembly, ostensibly to protect the indigenous people. Yet the indigenous tribes of Manipur – the Nagas and Kukis are apprehensive that these laws would be used against them as it would allow non-tribal people to take possession of their land.

Outcome

By mobilising a section of policy makers, social activists and public intellectuals, but above all faculty and students from the Northeast and those engaged in the study of the Northeast from its multiple universities and research institutes the Round Table Dialogue Consultation has contributed to continuing efforts to expanding the middle space for a dialogue in the North-east.

The thematic presentations covering political, constitutional, economic and social aspects incorporated multiple perspectives, including gendered approaches to customary law guarantees in peace accords. It encouraged the emergence of multiple voices across ethnicity, region and gender.

The significance of a middle space for such a dialogue is all the more important because of the shrinking of spaces of political conversation across faultlines in the Northeast. The excitement generated by the Dialogue prompted several participants to propose a follow up Dialogue in Imphal.

Indo-Naga Framework Agreement: The Apprehensions and Expectations

TAPAN KUMAR BOSE

The "Framework Agreement", which was signed by the Government of India and National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Isak-Muivah (NSCN-IM) nearly eight months ago, has established the "broad principles" that would guide their future deliberations. The agreement was concluded after almost 80 rounds of talks held over two decades. The content of the agreement is still under wraps. It would be made public after the Union Government has discussed it with the Chief Ministers of other Northeastern states and members of the parliament.

Secrecy is the most distinguishing features of this 18 year-long negotiations. The government of India has not shared the details of the agreement with the cabinet or members of the parliament. The NSCN-IM also did not tell the Naga people what the agreement contains. The signing of the Framework Agreement in the presence of the Prime Minister, took everybody by surprise. Maintaining this level of secrecy is not an easy task. The decision to keep the details a secret from the Naga people must have been taken at the highest level of NSCN-IM. Many Naga civil society actors have expressed their unhappiness with this secretive nature of the negotiations. Several had turned away from the NSCN-IM sponsored "civil society consultations". In fact after the announcement of the signing of the agreement several members of the Naga civil society expressed skepticism whether New Delhi or the NSCN-IM would ever consult them when the final accord is reached.

What does the future hold?

Two aspects of the agreement have become public. It appears that the Indian Government has accepted the "uniqueness of Naga history and culture" and the NSCN –IM has accepted the primacy of the Indian Constitution. Since the signing of the Framework Agreement, Mr. Ravi, the government interlocutor has been visiting Nagaland and has held several meetings. The NSCN-IM has also held meetings with several Naga organisation including the Naga Baptist Church. It seems that Mr. Ravi is particularly interested in assessing the views of the Naga people on the integration issue as well as the idea of a "Pan-Naga government" which will have a "non-territorial" jurisdiction over Naga people living in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur, outside the present state of Nagaland.

Lots of confusions persist on the two critical issues of Naga sovereignty and integration of the Naga ancestral domain. On the issue of sovereignty, Mr. Muivah claims that the Framework Agreement has clearly stated "that both sides respect the people's wishes for sharing sovereignty." He has however added that they were yet to work out, "to what extent to share our rights to sovereignty". From various comments of Mr. Muivah, it appears that shared sovereignty means divisions of "competencies" between the centre and the new entity of Nagalim and both will exercise sovereign powers in their respective domains. It appears that NSCN-IM has moved away from their earlier declared position that, "We cannot accept the Indian constitution". To be fair, Muivah had also said that "we are not

totally opposed to having some important sections of the Indian constitution incorporated in the Naga constitution."

The idea of a "Framework Agreement" is not new. In fact during the talks held in Bangkok in December 2006, both the Government of India and the NSCN-IM had agreed on a broad framework to define a relationship that could end Naga insurgency. Among the basic principles that were proposed included recognising the uniqueness of Naga history and culture. The NSCN-IM had submitted a 20 point Charter of Demand in which it had suggested that relationship between India and Nagalim would be based on the concept of shared sovereignty and the principle of "asymmetric federalism". It also asked for a separate Naga Constitution "Within the framework of the Constitution of India". The NSCN-IM had recommended that the separate constitution of Nagalim should be included "in a separate chapter" of the Indian Constitution. The NSCN-IM also wanted the agreement to set out the division of competencies between the Union of India and Nagaland, the details of which was to be incorporated in the Constitutions of both India and Nagaland. (http://unpo.org/article/5998)

The idea of "shared sovereignty" is relatively new in political theory. It envisages a federal set up where sovereignty is shared between the Centre and federating units and the federal government has limited powers over the internal affairs of the federating unit. It also considers granting of dual citizenship. Under the Indian constitution the states do not enjoy internal sovereignty. It does not grant dual citizenship. Even under Article 370 the people of Jammu and Kashmir do not have dual citizenship. In the Indian constitution individual civil rights and political rights are well-articulated, however, it is difficult to define its approach to managing collective rights, particularly ethno-cultural diversity. Like most modern rationalist states, Indian State has not been "neutral" on ethno-cultural issues. It's response to the demands of highly mobilised identities premised on cultural factors, and often, demanding autonomy has been rather ad hoc - ranging from conceding minority cultural rights to denial of all such claims. The NSCN-IM's demand for recognition of Nagas as a separate people is based on the assertion that Nagas practise a distinct culture and profess a distinct religion and they have a history which has nothing to do with the history of India. The question is to what extent the Government of India and the Indian political parties would be willing to accept and accommodate the stated position of the Nagas.

The Question of Sovereignty

The Naga demand for an independent Naga homeland including all Naga ancestral homeland was first articulated by the Naga National Council, under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo, when it declared an independent Naga State on August 14, 1947 and set up the "Federal Government of Nagaland". Since then Naga armed groups have been locked in fierce battle which has taken the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Nagas have suffered massive abuse of human rights, including torture, rape, destruction of their home, villages and towns.

Nearly seven decades later, NSCN-IM is asking the Naga people to accept the "primacy of Indian Constitution". We are told that the NSCN-IM's demand for sovereignty has been "addressed". Have Nagas accepted this? There are sections of Nagas who seem to be willing to give up the sovereignty demand. The 18 year long ceasefire has changed the minds of the Naga people, particularly in Nagaland state. At least two generations of Nagas have come

of age who have no experience of the freedom struggle and the brutal regime of AFSPA. They are more familiar with the army's new slogan – "friends of the hill people". Ceasefire crafted peace brought in economic development, improvement in education, wider and deeper penetration of the market economy has broken down the traditional control of the Naga elders and large numbers of Naga youth are working outside the state. Across villages and towns in Nagaland, that sense of "separate Naga identity" had been faltering. Moving around Nagaland during the past ten years I have witnessed a gradual change in people's perceptions of tribal or communal identity, making way for individual aspirations and a search for other, more personal, identities. They may not be inclined to take up arms and join the struggle for independence and face the might of the Indian military. Rather, they seem to be more interested in finding out what they would get beyond what the Indian state has given them till date. It would seem that Muivah is aware of this change in the mood and attitude of sections of the Naga people. It is possible that he would be able to carry the process forward with the support of the younger generations of the Nagas.

But Muivah is also aware that sections of the older generation of the Nagas, who still wield substantial amount of authority in Naga society might do what he had done after the Shillong Accord. Giving up the sovereignty issue also means abandoning the ten Naga tribes who live in Myanmar to their fate. It would also mean formal acceptance of division of homeland, division of tribes and division of families, which despite the international border the Nagas had not accepted till date. In the Framework Agreement, there is no mention of what the Nagas call Eastern Naga or Naga inhabited areas inside Myanmar. Clearly, NSCN-IM has given up the Nagas in Myanmar.

The Issue of Integration

Integration of all Naga ancestral domain is an old demand which has figured in the succession of peace agreements to resolve the Naga conflict — the Akbar Hydari Agreement 1947, the Sixteen Point Agreement 1960 establishing Nagaland state and the Shillong Accord 1975 which precipitated the emergence of the NSCN.

One of the first resolutions adopted by the Naga People's Convention (NPC) in 1957 had demanded the integration of all Naga areas. This was followed by Mokokchung Convention of the NPC in 1959, where the Sixteen-Point memorandum was adopted. The Clause 13 of 16-Point Agreement stressed for the consolidation of contiguous Naga areas. Nagaland State Legislative Assembly had adopted a resolution on 12 December 1964 which said that, "It is hereby unanimously resolved that the Government of India be urged for the integration of the Naga areas adjoining the State of Nagaland to fulfill the aspirations by the Naga peoples' Convention held at Mokokchong in 1959." Nagaland Legislative Assembly has adopted similar resolutions on several occasions.

South Naga

The demand for bringing Naga tribes living in the princely state of Manipur under one consolidated territory was first raised by the Naga National League (NNL) headed by Athiko Daiho, in September 1946 during the last days of the British Raj. It is pertinent to recollect that during the colonial period, while Manipur Maharaja and his durbar administered the valley areas, it was the political department of the British Crown, which administered Naga areas of Manipur. Before the formation of Manipur as a full-fledged state of the

Indian union in 1972, the Naga People of Manipur which was formed in 1970 at its first convention held at Mao Gate had unanimously resolved that the Naga people wanted to "live together in one state has undoubtedly been motivated by genuine patriotic urge." Even after the formation of Manipur state in 1972, the Naga Integration Central Committee (NICC) had appealed to the Government of India and the Naga leaders to lose no time in resuming the negotiations, and had warned that protracted uncertainty and insecurity would have the most harmful effect on the material, mental and moral well-being of the Nagas, as well as on the whole North Eastern region of India. As the recent history shows, exclusion of more than a million Nagas spread across the territories of Manipur, Assam and NEFA/Arunachal Pradesh in the Indian Union from Nagaland state created instability and reinforced violence as the Nagas living outside Nagaland have continued to demand their inclusion in Nagaland state. Curiously, both Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh were at the time under the central government's control and the redrawing of state boundaries would have been less of a democracy flashpoint then.

Eastern Naga

The Nagas occupy a compact area of the Northwestern region between the Chin state on the south and the Kachin state on the north of Myanmar. In April 2012 Khaplang signed an agreement with the Thein Sein government which granted autonomy in the 'Naga Self Governing Administrative Unit'. Since then Khaplang with his base on the Myanmar side of the border had been trying to redefine his status and power in the changed context of the Burmese military junta's new constitutional arrangements and electoral politics. At the same time, Khaplang had been seeking to outflank Kitovi-Khole faction by reaching out to India agencies. Also, in an effort to counter the ascendancy of the rival I-M group, and its monopoly of the Indo-Naga peace talks, Khaplang has been claiming that the NSCN–IM were not serious about the unification of ancestral Naga domain. The dialogue between the NSCN Khaplang and the government of Myanmar is a tactical one. NSCN-K has been allowed to retain its armed cadre on the understanding that it will not engage in any military activity inside Myanmar. This gives Khaplang and his army an unofficial protection and they are able to carry out their attacks across the border inside Indian Territory. However, this has come at a price. Until recently time, the Naga territory in Myanmar was under one district or one administrative zone i.e. Khamti district of Saging division with little part in Kachin state. However, in 2008, the ruling Military junta of Myanmar decide to split the Naga territory. It created a Naga Self-Administered Region which included the hill townships of Layshi, Lahe and Namyung and took out Khamti, Homalin and Tamu and put these under Sagaing division. This has created a lot of resentment among the ten Naga communities, of which the Konyaks are perhaps the largest, into confrontation with the government of Myanmar and with the Chins who have laid claim on nearly one third of Naga territory in Myanmar. The other reason for dissatisfaction is USDP led government's programme of compulsory recruitment of Naga youth in the Border Guards Force. If what is being written by members of the nascent civil society actors of Nagas in Myanmar in their blogs is any indication, there is a growing voice against Khaplang's leadership. It also seems that many of them are looking to the "elders in Western Naga" for support and guidance.

It is apparent that the Naga civil society has not completely accepted the total marginalisation of the Khaplang faction (NSCN-K) which is based in Myanmar. NSCN-K's June 4, 2015 military ambush of the Dogra Regiment in Manipur's Chandel district shows

that it would continue to demonstrate its presence and relevance. It is precisely the reason why the Naga civil society is stressing on the need to once again try and get the outfit back on the road to peace. The Naga Mother's Association has already gone across the border into Myanmar and met with the leaders of Khaplang faction. The All Naga Hoho are now preparing to send another delegation to meet with Khaplang. It would seem that unlike the NSCN-IM, which is keen on keeping Khaplang outside the peace process, the larger body of Naga civil society is interested in making it an all-inclusive process. While the NNC and its various factions and the break-away group of Khaplang faction of NSCN may not present a serious security problem, the main NSCN-K group will continue be a source of problem particularly as long as the situation of the Nagas in Myanmar is not settle to their satisfaction.

Speaking at the 69th Independence Day of the Nagas in Dimapur Muivah did not address the issue of integration directly. Muivah has said the framework agreement would pave the way for the final accord. While promising that "Nagas will have their rights" he added that "we should also respect the rights of the neighbouring states." Asking the Nagas to respect the rights of neighbouring states, adds an interesting twist to demand for integration, which has been interpreted by many as giving up the demand for integration. It has been one of the core demands not only of NSCN-IM but that of the Naga communities, living in and outside Nagaland state. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had indicated that the final solution rested on a breakthrough formula which did not involve redrawing the state's borders.

Conclusion

One of the significant achievements of the 18 year long ceasefire and the peace process is it provided security and freedom for Naga civil society to interact and give expression to their ideas. They also interacted with the insurgents often on terms of equality, sometimes even questioned them, which was unthinkable earlier. Ceasefire crafted peace brought in economic development, improvement in education, wider and deeper penetration of the market economy has broken down the traditional control of the Naga elders and large numbers of Naga youth are working outside the state. Across villages and towns in Nagaland, that sense of "separate Naga identity" had been faltering. There are signs that Naga politics is moving from ethno-centricity to building a multi-ethnic Naga national identity. The outcrop of such new demands as the Eastern Nagas demand of the Frontier Nagaland state or the Southern Nagas demand of an Alternative Arrangement suggests the need for a more complex reading as it reflects "a geo-political" framing that transcends tribal lines. While ethnic or tribal affinity continue to provide the primary motivation for seeking integration, it is also true that the demand for inclusion is also driven by the promise of rights and entitlement in a greater Nagalim.

Giving up the demand for sovereignty and diluting the demand for integration puts NSCN-IM in a challenging position. It has the hard task of explaining how the non-territorial Pan-Naga government will protect and promote the culture, social practices and their tradition rights of the Nagas living under the jurisdiction of other states.

Of Rebellions and Conformisms: Youth in India's North-East

KAUSTUBH DEKA

An ordinary university student in a university campus in the Northeast India is neither a rebel nor a conformist, but perhaps she is both. This paper is an attempt to understand the coexistence of the seemingly contradictory narratives of protest and participation in the unfolding socio-political discourse in the North East Region (NER) through the body of its youth, one of its most articulate partakers. Student and Youth politics in India's northeast has progressively become an essential mechanism to articulate different agendas, socio-cultural assertions and political ambitions of the different ethnic groups in the region prompting the argument that students and the youths have become the agents of identity formation and student movements have turned into de-facto identity movements or at least strong articulation of an identity politics.

However in the last two decades or so, the growing sway of a globalised worldview on the region's youths/students is fairly discernible. Like in the case of most of India, the last two decades have transformed the NER in ways incomprehensible to a previous generation. Consequently alongside the long standing narrative of neglect, an emerging narrative of participation is felt too in the region. Politics now has to make space for the emergent aspirations and ambitions of its participants; it has also evolved into a platform for voicing the grievances, frustrations and demands of the lots whose regional-local reality falls far below their 'globalised' aspirations. In essence (this new equation), youth politics and activism in the region remains an effective platform of protest that reflects the ethnic paradoxes as well as ethnic coalitions. The multipronged reality of the region is apparent through contradictory trends that also co-exist in the region. While on one hand youth groups are formed in parts of the region that demand fair and corruption free elections, some other groups take critical stands on the electoral process accusing non-fulfilment of pending demands and promises made. Thus trends of election apathy, electoral boycotts from the youth now mingle with calls for free and fair elections from the same population group in Northeast India. This complex reality needs to be probed further and understood better. As students unions and other youth organisations have been at the forefront of many of the social and political movements, it can be said that youth culture in Northeast India is predominantly one of protest against perceived or felt odds. In other words, depending on how it is channelised the political attitude and the behaviour of the youth in India's northeast potentially might pose challenges to the democratic governance of the state affecting the process of development in the region or it might perhaps reinforce democratic participation in the region.

Based on a survey conducted amongst university students in seven university campuses across the NER and on interviews with a few select student-youth organisations of the northeast, this study attempts to understand how the youth in India's northeast looks at the electoral process specifically and the prevalent political system in general? The findings and indicators are expected to provide valuable insights to further policy prescriptions on the region and to emphasise the importance of adopting a youth-centric approach to public policy formulation.

Backdrop and Research Methodology

In the mid 1980s in Assam a student organisation, the All Assam Students Union, led an intense anti-government agitation. In 1985, the Asom Gana Parishad emerged from this movement and formed the state government in an unprecedented move after contesting and winning the assembly elections held after the signing of the accord between the government and movement leadership. With this new found legitimacy and road to power, after the Assam Movement, student politics in India's northeast has progressively become an essential mechanism to articulate different agendas, socio-cultural assertions and political ambitions of the different ethnic groups in the region prompting the argument that students/youths have become the agents of identity formation and student movements have turned into de-facto identity movements or at least strong articulation of an identity politics. In essence, youth politics and activism in the region remains an effective platform of protest that reflects the ethnic paradoxes as well as ethnic coalitions. The multipronged reality of the region is apparent through contradictory trends that also co-exist in the region. While on one hand youth groups are formed in parts of the region that demand fair and corruption free elections, some other groups take critical stands on the electoral process accusing non-fulfilment of pending demands and promises made. Thus trends of election apathy, electoral boycotts from the youth now mingle with calls for free and fair elections from the same population group in Northeast India. This complex reality needs to be probed further and understood better.

This paper seeks to emphasise the emergence and prominence of students as a political category arising out of a complex interaction between state and society. Paul Brass writes, "Ethnicity and nationalism are modern phenomena inseparably connected with the activities of the modern centralising state"[1] and goes on to contend that "ethnic identity and modern nationalism arise out of specific types of interactions between the leadership of centralising states and elites from non-dominant ethnic groups, especially but not exclusively on the peripheries of those states."[2] Taking cue from Brass we observe that different movements led by the student organisations have often been crucially influenced by the symbiotic interaction between the state and society to the extent that most of these movements are characterised today by the dual narratives of resistance as well as complicity.

Therefore, given these challenges at policy level previously discussed, this paper argues that we must focus on the youth of the region primarily through two thrust areas:

1. From the viewpoint of the transitional importance of youth as stepping stone to promote active citizenship.

2. From the point of view of engaging with the protest culture of the youth as potential movers and shakers of social change.

These points will be better emphasised in the context of the following section of the paper where I take stock of the various activities and developments unfolding in the arena of student-youth activism in the region.

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1. Paul R. Brass, Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison, (Sage, United Kingdom, 1991), p.8.

2. bid, p.9.

I conducted a survey that tried to measure the knowledge, attitude, behavior, belief and practices of the students in seven university campuses in India's Northeast towards the electoral process. The campuses visited are:

1. Gauhati University, Assam. 2. Dibrugarh University, Assam 3. North Eastern Hills University, Meghalaya 4. Manipur University 5. Nagaland University 6. Mizoram University 7. Sikkim University.

For this purpose a random and representative sample of seven hundred was collected from seven university campuses from across the region and a subsequent data set has been generated. I also conducted semi-structured interviews with student's-youth leaders/activists belonging to some of the most active student-youth groups in the region, during the months of November 2013 to January 2014.

Part One

Conceptualising the Youth: Different lenses to view student-youth activism

The key political role played in the anti-colonial struggle has legitimated the participation of students in national politics in the developing countries.[3] However, in the Indian context, like many other de-colonising societies, the tensions between the nature of student movements and the political establishments and political class have been palpable from early on. The non-political desirability of student movements have been emphasised since long by political stalwarts like first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru. Addressing a Students Congress Conference at Banaras on 15th February, 1946, he observed the 'defects' in the student movements in India in the following words, "to offer political leadership to the country is not the function of the student movements in India. They cannot recommend any action to the country. Of course this does not apply to conditions that are created in a time of crisis. Students instead of taking active part in politics should go to the villagers when they find time and there they should try to improve the conditions of our poor countrymen. The student movements all over the world are of a non-political nature, whereas in India they are linked to politics. This is the main defect with the student's movements in India."[4]

Nehru's sentiments on the desirability of the student politics to be connected more to the ground level problems (call 'to go to villagers') is however reflective of the wider expectations of the times that 'the universities poised to produce not only much of the elite who must modernise the society, but they are also almost solely responsible for the conduct of intellectual life in general.'[5] In fact in the time of Indian independence, was characterised by an unquestioned acceptance of the dynamic link between universities and modernisation. As such substantial financial outlays were allocated to higher education in the initial Five-Year Plans. Of the sum reserved for education, in the Third Plan, 20% was designated for higher education despite the disproportionately small number of students involved. In

3. Philip G. Altbach, "Student Politics in the Third World, Higher Education, Vol. 13, No. 6. (December, 1984).

4. The Times of India, 16.02 1946, New Delhi, p.1.

5. Philip G. Altbach, "Student Politics", Transition, No. 28. (Jan., 1967), pp. 25-27.

1965/66 primary to secondary enrolments (ages 6-17) totaled 64 million while all university enrollment was slightly over one million.[6]

Phillip G. Altbach[7] has taken a position that the student movements in the developing countries/third world have been more successful in affecting political change. He points two features of Third World student activism. Firstly, Third World nations often lacked established political institutions and structures of the industrialised nations and it made it easier for any organised group, such as the student community, to have a direct impact on politics. Third World students act have had acted historically as a "conscience" of their societies. Secondly, it is the location of the major universities in many developing nations in the capital cities that makes access to the seat of political power easier. The simple fact of geography makes demonstrations easier to organise and gives the students a sense of being closer and capable of accessing the centres of power. Thus, the students in developing societies have been seen as a uniquely mobilisable group, as a kind of "incipient elite" destined for power and responsible for exercising their political power even while being students.[8]

Thus, the debate on the 'political' nature of student movement builds up in the wake of increased political activity on the part of the student of India in the post-independence decades. Aditya Nigam's essay 'Student Movement and Education Policy 'published in the Social Scientist in 1986 throws some useful light in understanding this phenomena, who traces the resurgence in student activism in India in the decades of mid 1960's to the increasing disillusionment amongst the students about the Congress party abandoning the socialistic agenda.[9] Another important essay to understand the historical developments of student politics in the Indian scenario have been by Llyod and Susane Rudolph and Karuna Ahmed titled 'Student politics and National Politics in India' published in Economic & Political Weekly (EPW) July 1971 issue. The authors argue the Rudolph's points out the development of the youths as a new class in the post independent India within the two broad developments - the creation and prolongation of youth as a distinctive life-stage with its attendant cultures and social arrangements, and in the relatively rapid build-up of the relatively large educational sector, "a result of political capacity (in the sense of the ability to make demands effectively within the political system) outstripping economic capacity (in the sense of the economy's ability to supply resources)."[10] In similar light sociologist T.K.Oomen explains increasing activism on the part of the youth-students in the light of the intensification of urbanisation and argues that the spread of higher education and the consequent occupational diversification led to spatial mobility and the subsequent demand for more freedom by the two traditionally subservient segments in the family- the women and the youth. Accelerated by social and ideational mobility the growth of individualism among them became a source of inter-generational conflict.[11]

6.   Ghanashyam Shah, Social Movements in India: A Review of literature, (New Delhi, Sage, 2004), p.111.

7.   Philip G. Altbach, "The Transformation of the Indian Student Movement", Asian Survey, 6(8), August, 1966.

8.   W. J. Hanna, and J. L Hanna, "Students as elites," in W. J. Hanna and J. L. Hanna (eds.), University Students and African Politics. (New York: Africana, 1975).

9.   Aditya Nigam, "Student Movement and Education Policy", Social Scientist, Vol. 14, No. 2/3 (Feb- Mar, 1986), pp. 79-86.

10. Lloyd I. Rudolph, Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, Karuna Ahmed, "Student Politics and National Politics in India", Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 6, No. 30/32, Special Number (Jul., 1971), pp. 1655+1657-1659+1661-1663+1665-1668.

11. T.K Oomen, "Twentieth Century Indian Society in Retrospect", in. N.N. Vohra, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (eds), Looking Back: India in the Twentieth Century, Ed, (National Book Trust, 2002).

Youth protest, in fact, was a world phenomenon in the 1960s and its reverberations were felt in India too in the form of widespread unrest among college students. "If Swaraj was the main motive force of the Indian youth in the 1930s, 'nation building', seen in terms of participation in politics, professions, and the bureaucracy, was the propelling force in the first three decades (1959-1980) of free India. With the onset of globalisation and liberalisation of the economy 'nation-building' is perceived primarily as creation of wealth. Thus, there was a considerable shift in the value orientations of the Indian youth which was reflected also in their lifestyles by the 1990s. However, these shifts/changes in the value orientations were/are not entirely shared by the older generations and are in fact an important source of inter-generational conflict."[12]

Some later studies on postcolonial settings suggests that educated unemployed young men engage either in democratic social action by acting as intermediaries between the rural poor and local state[13] or in reactionary class-based political activity, as when they become involved in aggressive forms of brokerage.[14] Echoing similar viewpoints recent studies by scholars like Craig Jeferry concludes that economic reforms in India have triggered both progressive and reactionary practice within a lower-middle class of students.[15] Existing work on lower-middle-class youth suggests that those in this section of society may respond to the vicissitudes of neoliberal economic change either by exploiting their advantages vis-à-vis the poor, as self-interested entrepreneurs exploiting their advantages relative to poorer groups,[16] or by joining with the poor to protest against the bourgeoisie and powerful institutions as instigators of broad-based social development.[17]

Nature and Character of Youth Movement and Politics in North East India

Niru Hazarika in her book 'Profile of the Student organizations in Assam' (Guwahati, 1998) identifies some broad points that highlight the 'general' context of student politics in northeast India. Some of these she sites as,

- The deep rooted feeling of negligence, deprivation, exploitation and the sense of insecurity.

- Persistence problems relating to land, language and employment issues.

- Manipulations of youths by the political parties to gain power.

- Poor analysis and evaluation of government policies as well as lethargic administrative response in the said context.

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12. Ibid, p.185.

13. Anirudh Krishna, Active Social Capital: Tracing the Roots of Development and Democracy, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); Craig Jefery, "Time pass: Youth, class, and time among unemployed young men in India",American Ethnologist (Vol. 37, No. 3, 2010), pp. 465–481.

14. Thomas Blom Hansen, "Recuperating Masculinity: Hindu Nationalism, Violence, and the Exorcism of the Muslim "Other." Critique of Anthropology (16-22, 1996), pp.137–172.

15. Craig Jefery, "Time pass: Youth, class, and time among unemployed young men in India",American Ethnologist (Vol. 37, No. 3, 2010), pp. 465–481.

16. Barbara Harriss-White, India Working: Essays on Society and Economy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2003

17. Chatterjee, Partha, The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World. Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004.

- Dysfunctions of institutions like family, education, political parties, and administrative departments.[18]

The substantial introductory essay by A.K. Baruah, "Approaches to the study of student movements" in his edited volume, "Youth Power in North-east India" deals at length with various theoretical problematic and methodological issues that one encounters in trying to conceptualise the phenomena of student movements in the region. Baruah also contends against a Parsonian understanding of student movements as the self-conscious sub-cultures and movements among adolescents that tend to develop when there are sharp distinctions between the values and the expectations embodied in the traditional families in a society; and the values and expectations prevailing in the occupational sphere. Bringing on a Marxian analysis for understanding student movements, Baruah points out that since the societal position of each class and its consciousness in the final analysis are determined by the position of these classes within the process of production, the students belonging to various classes in a society cannot, therefore, have similar consciousness. Baruah locates the capability of students to unite as a social group partaking in a movement, in the dynamics of the Gramscian concept of 'hegemony', and not definitely as an outcome of processes of unmediated social change alone.

Later Sanjib Baruah in his significant publication India against itself: Assam and the politics of nationality[19] approaches the study of these social movement from the perspectives of "the continuation of a "contentious politics" as explained by the diffuse presence, often in the background, of an inchoate constituency that feels unrepresented. In another place commenting on the perseverance of the movements and the organisations he writes, "this constituency can derive a sense of representation, meaning, and even identity through a social movement, an insurgency, or a political party—not necessarily in that order. Not only can these political phenomena all relate to one another, but together they can be understood in the context of a society coming to terms with historical social change."[20] Recently Pahi Saikia in her work Ethnic Mobilisation and Violence in Northeast India[21] also draws from the literature on contentious politics, particularly the mobilising process approach that focuses on the development of movement-supporter networks, as well as the political process approach that emphasises the relationship between movements and the responses of the political system. She prefers the usage of 'contentious politics' as it encompasses a range of movement outcomes from small-scale protest demonstrations to large-scale violent rebellions. In this sense, the violent and non-violent ethnic rebellions of the Bodos and Misings can be considered two different.

During my fieldwork period of the project, I tried to meet some of the student-youth organisations in these states that have had an active and prominent presence here over a long period of time. I had the following specific questions to ask them, apart from the many other aspects that had come up during our conversations:

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18. Niru Hazarika Profile of Youth Organisations in North-East India, (V.V.Rao Institute of Micro Studies and Research, Guwahati, 1998), p. XV.

19. Sanjib Baruah, India against itself: Assam and the politics of nationality, (Oxford university press, 1999).

20. Sanjib Baruah "Separatist Militants and Contentious Politics in Assam, India: The Limits of Counterinsurgency",Asian Survey, (Vol. 49, No. 6 November/December 2001), pp. 952.

21. Pahi Saikia, Ethnic Mobilisation and Violence in Northeast India, (New Delhi, Routledge, 2011).

- Q1: Does your organisation have any election specific program? If yes, can you please elaborate?

- Q2: What in your organisations view should be the most important issues from the region that should get top priority of the electoral agendas of parties in coming election 2014?

- Q3: Are you aware of the Campus Ambassadors project undertaken by the Election Commission of India under Systematic Voters' education and Electoral Participation programme (SVEEP) in your state?

Student-Youth Politics in the NER: A Contentious Area

From the conversations one sensed that the 'mainstream' Student and youth groups in northeast India today are fragmented along ethnic lines, each representing particular ethnic groups or groupings and aspirations which have become the main rallying force behind the different autonomy and identity discourses. Most crucially these developments have an impact on the way they perceive or approach elections.

The background of change is the historical sense of neglect that has marked the region's narrative about itself. A narrative that influenced its oppositional politics and manifested in the movement against illegal immigration and in the emergence of regional political formations deemed necessary for articulating aspirations and fears otherwise ignored by successive central governments. The impetus for change is also provided by the continued violence in the region and people's growing disillusionment with the agents responsible. But the actual shift, however, has been brought about by skilful use of the oppositional discourse. There is here at the same time a relationship to the Centre expressed in acknowledging that the Northeast cannot continue to be out on a limb by itself (so the acceptance of facts like students having to study outside the region, or the region having to appeal to the central government for talks and changes in policy) and a denial of such relationship in wanting a separate status. And this is the inevitability of the Centre-state relationship in a political system that is partially federal, and in a country that is large and multi-ethnic is bound to resort to such a duality of approach. In most parts of the northeast it takes the form of a play between a neglect narrative with a long history and an emerging narrative that is both oppositational and participative.[22]

An understanding of the politics of student movement thus refers to an understanding that the boundary between "movement" and "context" can be quite blurred, reflecting the interpenetration of institutional and extra-institutional agents of social change and that the boundary between institutionalised and non- institutionalised politics has been sufficiently challenged.[23] Thus one useful way for understanding Student Movements and the politics implicit in becoming and unbecoming of it is by looking at it as instances of contentious politics defined as "episodic, collective interaction among makers of claims and their opponents when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims or a party to the claims, and (b) the claims would, if realised, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants."[24]

22. Nandna Dutta, "Civil Society Politics", Seminar, (December, 2012), http://www.india-seminar.com/2012/640/640_nandana_dutta.htm (Accessed on 10.01.13).

23. Doug McAdam, S. Tarrow and C. Tilly, Dynamics of Contention, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), p.2.

24. Ibid: 5

Part Two

Youth and elections in India's NE: the findings on the crucial parameters

In this research paper I approach the question of attitude of the youth in the NER towards the electoral process based on few key behavioural indicators as well as co-relations between these indicators. Based on the survey conducted containing the 35 questions, we have identified the following broader inquiry themes co-relating the different questions:

- How many youth who votes (indicative of the nature of participation) have taken part in different protest actions and thinks that their vote has real effect (indicative of the level of political awareness)?

- Voting behavior of the youth viz a viz their socio-political background (membership in political party, student group, membership of family member in political party etc) as well as their socio-economic background of the respondent (income level, locality, life style choices etc.)

- Voting behavior of the youth viz a viz the sense of identity and notion of northeast in the political system in order to understand if participation in election or the lack of it is influenced by one's sense of identity and perception on the political system? (Sense of deprivation or empowerment)

We will take up section wise analysis under these themes as well as try to place the survey findings under these few themes. However, first it is essential to have a sense of the data one has in hand.

1. Profiling the sample

It would be useful here to provide an analysis of the data collected along few major axis of representativeness. The total number of sample is seven hundred collected from Seven University campuses (hundred each from all campuses), one campus each in the states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Sikkim and two University campuses in the state of Assam. We have measured the data under the following four heads in order to assess the diversity and extent of representativeness of it. These heads are: Gender, Income level, identity affiliations and locality type.

A. Gender: the data is almost equally divided between the two genders, the male being on the higher side with 54.2% and the rest 45.8% being female.

Figure One

45.80%

54.20%
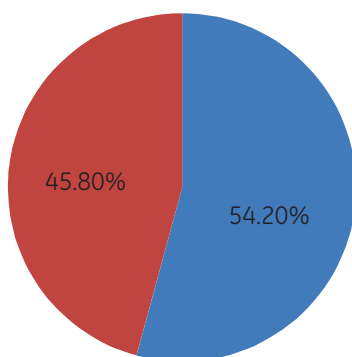
B. Community wise distribution: While analysing the data as per the different community categories/identities we found that more than half the respondents (54%) belong to Scheduled Tribe (ST) category, followed by the category of the General, non-scheduled population at 23.9%. This is followed by the categories of the Other Backward Castes (OBC) at 17.4 % and Scheduled Caste (SC) at 4.7% respectively.

Figure Two
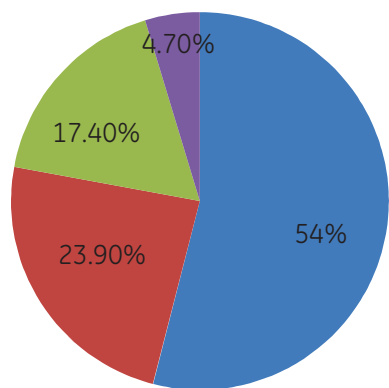
C. Household income categories: Analysis of the data shows that an overwhelming majority at a staggering 82.4% records their monthly household income at Rupees 5,000 or less. This is followed by 8.8% respondents recording their household income level at 5,001-10,000. Rest 4% records the income level at 20,001-50,000, 3.8% records it at 10,001-20,000 and a mere 1% recording the monthly household income level at 50,000 and above.

Figure Three
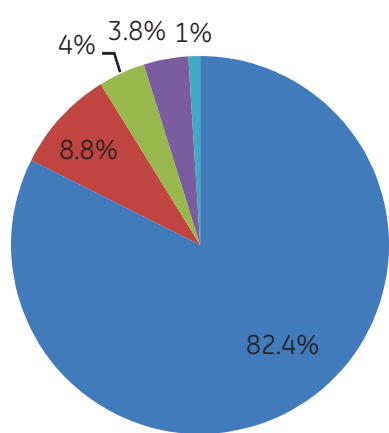
D. Locality wise distribution: Analysis of the data shows a more or less equal rural-urban divide, with a slight edge towards the rural. 49.5% respondents record their location as village (rural), followed by 42.0% respondents recording it as town (with population below a lakh). 8.5% of the respondents record their location as City (population above a lakh).

Figure Four
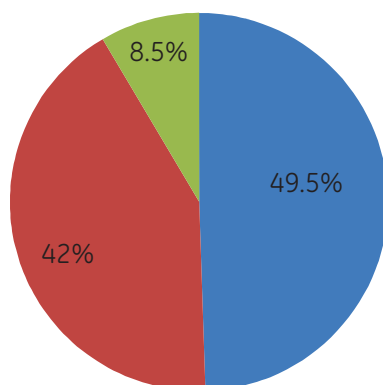
2. Findings along the parameters

2.1 Political participation, the nature and ways

Studies have shown that political interest and political participation are not only connected, they also implicate each other.[25] Political participation is a part of micro level analysis of political behavior which affects the behavior of macro political system. Democracy is well grounded in the concept of public participation in political matters. Indeed, citizen participation is the very raison d'etre of democracy. Not surprisingly widespread support exists for the argument that participation of citizens is essential if democracies are to be viable, sustainable and healthy.[26] Political, and more broadly civic, participation occurs when citizens become part of the body politic/polity as an engaged member.

How many and who are voting?

Voting is a significant indicator of democratic engagement, a minimal sign of an individual's democratic participation as a citizen and a useful indicator of the health of a democracy. Though there is some debate about the importance of voting in a democracy, there exists widespread support for voting as a valuable expression of one's participation in a political entity.[27] If these arguments are accepted, then it is clear that young people need to participate in their democracy and to vote. However, the first and foremost question that comes to mind is that, who votes?

Our findings show that a significant majority of 57.3% of the interviewed youth in the NER claims to have been voting regularly, whereas rest 42.7 % does not vote regularly. However a bigger majority of respondents are confident of voting in the upcoming general elections in 2014 and a slightly lesser majority of them thinks that students should take active part in politics. 66.6% of the youth interviewed recorded their decision to vote in the 2014 general elections. 25.2% of the youth have not made up their minds against a minor 8.2 % ruling out voting in the upcoming general elections.

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25. Almond and Verba, 1963

26. Crick, 1998, 2002; Power, 2006; Putnam, 2000

27. International IDEA, 2002

Amongst this figure, 62.9% of men claim to be voting regularly against 50% women who seem to be voting regularly. And when one analyses as per the income category the higher the income category, the voting percentage inclines to lower down. The small section of highest income bracket seems to have only 14% regular voting. The income group with highest regularly voting percentage (75%) followed by the middle income group segment at 60%. The other two higher income groups register regular voting percentage of 57% and 53%. Therefore, the data shows the higher the income levels backgrounds the lesser the regular voting percentage is amongst the youth. Community wise the division within the ones who vote regularly and ones who don't seems to be broadly similar.

How do the Youth in NER look at election phenomena?

We tried to assess the expectations from political parties and their electoral agendas that the youth in the NER has in upcoming 2014 elections.

The following diagram reveals priority issues that the youth of the NE wants to see implanted or taken up by the parties in the coming elections.

- Better Health and sanitation facilities (9.37%)
- Reforming the educational system (14.30)
- Providing Employment (13.32%)
- Stopping Illegal immigration and influx (10.2%)
- Preventing Corruption (10.5%)
- Infrastructure and better roads (12.6%)
- Women safety and security (2.54%)
- Developmental issues including removing poverty and bringing jobs (19.17%)
- Environmental issues (6.9%)
- Peace and security (0.9%)

Figure Five
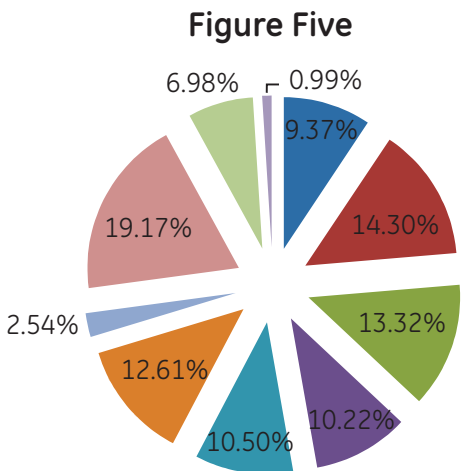
Thus developmental concerns being the topmost expectations and priority, how the youth of the NER thinks of election? Simply put what images comes to their minds when one thinks of elections? The answer to this question has been extremely interesting as well as

revealing. The predominant one is seemed to be one associated with a sense of negativity mixed with indifference cum ignorance as well as confusion. As images of Corruption and Violence (39.6 %) and inability to come up with any concrete/particular image (28.3%) constitutes an overwhelming majority of the responses. However, one cannot miss the strong take of a 14.1% who envisioned the Elections with possibilities of changes and Developments. This is followed by a take on the Elections as systemic phenomena, with the respondents associating it with the Campaigning process (8.3%), the Voting process (6.3%), and political parties (3.4%).

Figure Six
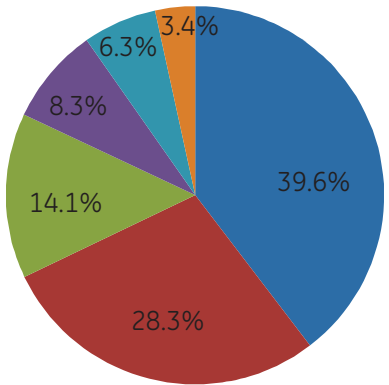
The duality of protest and participation

However, despite the negative opinion on elections, 51% of the respondents do believe that their vote has an effect on how things are run in this country, followed by a significantly lesser section of 28% who thinks that their vote makes no difference. This is closely followed by the 21% of the youths who is not sure about the impact their vote has on the state of affairs.

Figure Seven
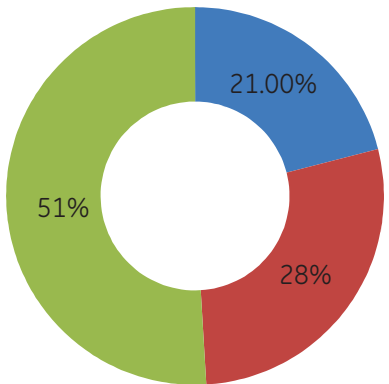
Thus if the later two categories are clubbed together under apathy and ignorance, the voting behaviour is almost neatly divided between rights and duty based ones and cynical ones. When asked about their opinion on if the youth should take active part in politics in terms of contesting in elections, 52% respondents 'fully agreed', followed by an equally

sizeable 41.1%, who thought it should 'depend on the context'. Only 4.2% respondent ruled it out, with a meagre 2.6% being 'not sure'. So together the first two options favouring youth involvement with electoral politics is an overwhelming yes at over 90%.

How many times an average youth of the NER participates in any protest, demonstration, struggle or some kind of movement? A substantial figure of 40.9% of the respondents admits to take part in these activities at least once or twice, whereas 23.2% of the youth have records involvement of several times. Taken together a big figure of around 64% of the youth has some experience or the other of some social protests/movements. At the same time 31.4% of the youths admits to have never participate in any such affairs and 4.4% of the respondents preferred not to comment on it.
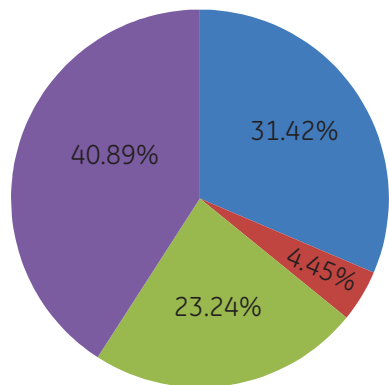
Figure Eight

On the question of possible continuation of agitations and protest activities of the student-youths in the Northeast, we can perhaps relate to a frame developed by scholars like Dick Hebdige who has observed that the two key themes in modern representations of youth are "youth as trouble" and "youth as fun."[28] Mass consumption and influences of mass media fester's the production of "youth as trouble." In the sense that youth in the developing societies will be tantalised by the offerings of global culture, yet unable to afford the commodities of their dreams or get access to public spaces in which to enjoy the pleasures associated with such products. This gap between aspirations and realties can explain some of the youth dissatisfaction.

Influences affecting the political behavior of the youth

Extensive research on political socialisation over many years shows three primary sources of influence on young people's learning about politics and democracy - the family, through role modelling, discussion, and media use; the media, mostly television and newspapers; and third, school experience providing knowledge, skills and values from non-partisan educators.[29] Other sources such as peers, the extended family, community and church, count for little. One of the ways that young people are seen as taking a lead in political participation is through their use of new information and communication technologies.

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28. Hebdige,1999. 441-50

Influences on Voting patterns and behaviours

Who Influences the Voting choices on the youth? Contrary to the trend changing and transformative image of the youth, the statistics show that the largest section of the youth are influenced by their family members in their electoral choices (32.6%), followed by the impact of the local political leaders and their performance etc. (26.3%). What however is of real interest is the revelation that the impact of the community leaders (caste/tribe etc.) on the electoral choice is rather low at 11.2%. Peer groups counts the lowest at 9.1%. However, a significant 20.7% of the youth gives their response as 'other factors' apart from the usually focused and assumed ones.

The difference of influence across gender is also interesting. Whereas the influence of 'local political leaders' is nearly same for both young men (25.5%) and young women (27.2%), the significant gap is on the higher influence of 'family' on women at 41.3% compared to 26.1% for the men. Significantly the influence of the 'community leaders' is lesser on young women at 8.7% against 13.6% on young men. The influence of 'friends circle' seems to be more or less similar on both men (9.4%) and women (7.6%). However another big gap exists in the exercise of 'other influences' with women recording a far lower number at 15.4% against 25.2% recorded by men.

Our data analysis also shows that a big majority of 74.5% of the respondents records that their family members vote regularly, while for 15.4% members in their family votes irregularly and for 10.1% other members in their family has no interest in elections.

Thus regarding the family influence factor it seems that usual Western frames of analysis of youth, such as the notion of the "generation gap," can likewise be misleading in cases like the northeast.

Table 1
Table Depicting the Influences on Electoral Choices

|	Frequency	Percent
Local political leader	176	25.1
Caste/tribe leader	75	10.7
Family member	218	31.1
Friend circles	61	8.7
other	138	19.7
Total	**668**	**95.4**
Missing System	**32**	**4.6**
Total	700	100.0

How Many family members regularly vote?

In another interesting finding an overwhelming majority of the respondents (74.95%)

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29. Delli- Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Hooghe, 2004; Patrick, 1999; Print, 2006a; Saha, 2000; Verba et al., 1995; Youniss et al., 1997

confirms that members of their families votes regularly, against a small number of 15% of respondents whose family members are very irregular voters or 'not interested' in elections.

Remaining 10.05% respondents chose not to answer the question. This finding is especially important in the light of corresponding finding as depicted in Table No. 1 where amongst the host of influences on the electoral behaviour of the Youth, the category 'family members' tops the list.

Figure Nine
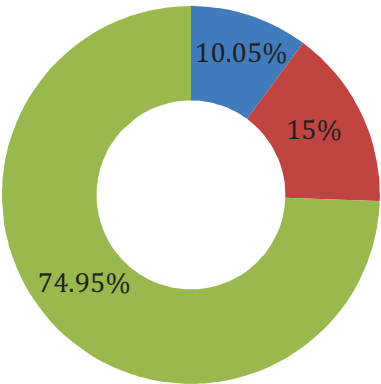
## Influences of the Media on the Voting Behaviour and Choices

We tried to asses which media has the largest impact on the youth while making their electoral choices? And what are the relative impacts of the different media in this regard? The following picture has emerged that shows that News papers still has the highest influence on the youth in the region, 65% respondents claiming very high influence of the press. Television comes at a close second at 58%. However, the rise of the internet as medium of strong influence at a significant 32% is an important point to note. It has far eclipsed mediums like the radio which only 10-12% youth considers very influential.

Here a word or two on the crucial onset of social media is called for. Numerous studies have explored the effects of the so-called "technology Tsunami" on politics and society more generally and young people are considered to be "the beneficiaries of advances to technology" as early adopters of these technologies.[30]

Talking about the strengths and vulnerabilities of networked politics, many scholars have focused on how this technology enables and promotes different forms of engagement. As a result, numerous studies have discussed the ways that activism and more institutionalised forms of political engagement—including voting—have increased through the use of these technologies. Another general finding of many researches is that information and communications technologies facilitate protest.[31] They conclude that "the hallmark of protest in the digital age appears to be rapid and dense networking behavior that can (though surely does not always) cross issue and organisational boundaries with a minimum of formal coalition brokerage and collective identity framing."[32] As we have seen in the previous section during the ethnography of the student-youth groups, the new forums

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30. Winograd & Hais 2008

31. Van Aelst & Walgrave 2002, B´edoyan et al. 2004, Fisher et al. 2005

that has come up online often bypassing the traditional youth forums have often taken up issues hitherto not addressed by the 'traditional' groups and have come up specially in societies where room of public dissent is socially rather limited.

Chart 1
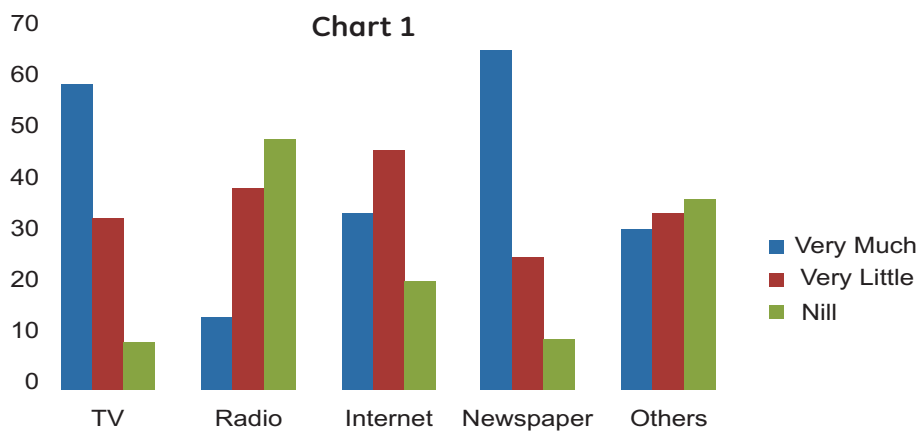
2.2: Access, involvements and awareness: the complex picture

Access to the political representative is another important angle to probe. 92.2% of the youth admits to know who is the local MLA, whereas 7.8% of the youth does not have the information on this. The number of male with the information is about 6% higher compared to the woman has the same information. However, 47.3% of the youth have never met the representative. The rest 37.9% of the respondents have met the MLA 'occasionally', whereas 14.4% claims to meet the MLAs 'very often'. However, only 41% of youth are satisfied after meeting them. Therefore out of the 52.3% of the Youth who have met the MLAs ever, around 11-12% feels disappointed or dissatisfied.

Satisfaction level after meeting the political representative

Figure Ten

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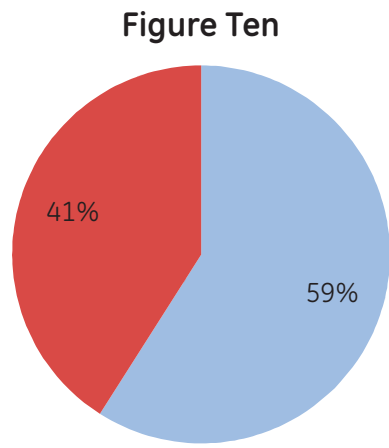
32. Bennett et al. 2008, p. 286

Awareness on election related activism

Only 26.1% of the respondents are aware of any campaign by any group/organisation demanding fair/free/responsible elections, 51.3% are not aware and 19 % are 'not sure.'

Again, only 15.3% are aware of any call for election boycott being given by any groups/organisation. 62.3% have never come across any such election boycott. 19.6% remains 'not sure'. Thus it seems that both about electoral reforms as well as electoral apathy and critique the youth interest is rather low. Or in other words, even if activities for reforms as well as boycotting are taking place they have largely failed to address the youth in both instances.

Poor policy level information and awareness

When asked about the Schemes of Campus Ambassadors appointed by Election commission in their university/town, as per our data only 23.3% have heard about the scheme. More than half the youth at 54.8% doesn't know about it and 21.9% are not sure if they know it.

Same poor level of information is demonstrated in the case of National Youth Policy. Only slightly more than a quarter of the youth (37.7%) have heard of the last National Youth Policy, 2012. A bigger number of 47.5% have not heard of it and a 14.8% youth are not sure about it.

Awareness on 'security' environment

Interestingly only 46.1% of the youth have heard of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), 40.8% of the youth records of never having heard of it and 13.1% are 'not sure' if they know about it.

This matched with the fact that 47.1% of youth are aware of any curfew imposed/operation conducted by the security forces their area, 42.2% are not aware of any such measures and 10.7% are 'not sure' on it.

On a similar issue, it is found that a big majority of 63% of the youth are aware of the presence of the security forces in their area, whereas 21.7% are not aware and 15.3% are not sure. However, only 24.6% records of being personally threatened by the security forces or of having any knowledge of any such measures being done on someone known to them. 64.6% recorded as not having any such experience and 10.9% preferred 'don't want to tell' option.

These figures show the near neat division of the perception and experiences of reality for the youth in the NER and speak in favour of the argument that when it comes to contentious issues like AFSPA and the issue of security forces, the felt experience is divided and not uniform for all the youth in the region.

Preferring 'national' identity over regional one?

Contrary to the image of regionalism and parochialism, the majority choice at 44.8% for the preferred 'identity' ordering for the youth in NER seems to be the following: "National> State> ethnic/tribal> linguistic> religious", followed by at 17.3% the for the order of "Religious> National> State> ethnic/tribal> linguistic". The first preference for the state identity, i.e.

"State> National> linguistic> ethnic/tribal> religious" comes only at third with 14.6% of the youth opting for it. The other choices given were "Ethnic/tribal> National> State> linguistic> religious" (8.3%) and "Linguistic> State> National> ethnic/tribal> religious"(4.9%).

The aspiration quotient: Youth driving for change?

A big area of concern for the youths in the Northeast, as elsewhere in developing economies, is the issue of employment and resources. As Swamy writes, "Demographers have no more ironclad demographic rule than this: surpluses of frustrated young men lead to catastrophic deficits of peace. In an exhaustive 2006 review of the evidence, Henrik Urdal concluded that "large youth cohorts are associated with a significantly increased risk of domestic armed conflict, terrorism and riots [or] violent demonstrations."[33]

In this regard, how do the Youth in NE look at the larger world? A hand down 74.5% majority of the youth in the NER would like to get settled outside the region/state for a better career and job prospects. Only a 15.4% of the respondents prefer not to leave the region/state and 10.1% of the youths are undecided on it.

And how do the Youth in the NER view the globalisation process? The majority opinion seems to be that it is a mixed force (54.3%), followed by a positive take on globalisation (29.8%). Only 10.5% of the youth looks at it as a negative force, whereas 5.5% of the respondents feel that globalisation has no impact on the region.

Conclusion

Based on the data analysis few broad trends that can be discerned are as follows:

- There exists both a sense of dissatisfaction as well as a sense of engagement with the political system amongst the youth of the NER. A big majority of youth, around 64%, has some experience or the other of some social protests/movements. At the same time, 66.6% of the youth recorded their decision to vote in the 2014 general elections and a significant majority of 57.3% of the interviewed youth in the NER claims to have been voting regularly.

- When it comes to the electoral phenomena, the overall image and expectations out of it is low, yet the degree of participation is high. Amongst many the image of the elections as forums of violence, corruption and manipulations tops (39.6%), but yet the majority seems to believe at the same breath that their vote do impact the state of affairs (51%).

- The higher the income level background the lesser the regular voting percentage is amongst the youth. At the same time the opinion at favouring youth involvement with electoral politics, in terms of contesting for elections is an overwhelming yes at over 90%.

- The youth in the NER seems to be influenced by the opinions of family members and elders the most while making electoral choices, while among the media sources traditional media like TV and news paper remains the bigger influence, though new media like social media forums and internet based information media is catching up

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33. Swamy, 2014.

fast.

- The awareness level amongst the youth about youth policy implications and policy information relating to youth and electoral education is found rather low indicating poor policy programme outreach. Compared to the policy information, the information of the youth on local political apparatus is better and even the interaction is better. Though the satisfaction level after meeting the political representatives is on the lower side.

- Out of the priority issue that the youth of the NER wants focused in election 2014, the issue of the development of their region gets the top most priority with additional priority sought on issues of infrastructure and healthcare. However politically contentious issues like the 'illegal immigration' problem and anti-corruption thrust also comes within the top five of the youth's priority.

- Men and women are voting and participating in the political process almost in the same numbers, but through different influences and expectations. Women are significantly more influenced by 'family members' while exercising electoral choices and has far lesser avenues to 'other factors' while making their choice.

- More youth wouldn't mind settling outside the region for better carrier prospects (74%), and contrary to the dominant image more youth put the national identity over the state/regional one (45%).

Elections are a key activity around which a representative democracy evolves. The success and legitimacy of elections hinge on citizen involvement in voting, and also in the overall election process. Besides voting, citizen engagement in campaign activities can momentarily bridge the gap between the elite and the ordinary mass of citizens. Such engagement also prepares the ground for more participation by citizens in politics even when there are no elections. Most discussions of participation in the 1990s refer to this "democratic upsurge", first systematically outlined by scholars like Yogendra Yadav.[34] But analysis of the last few elections reveals that this upsurge had slowed down. Yadav and Palshikar recently drew attention to not only a "saturation" of the democratic upsurge but also the inherent dynamics of liberal democratic politics.[35] So, the celebration of participation notwithstanding, voter participation does not effectively bridge the gap between the voter and the political elite.

The popular wisdom is that representative democracy has the capacity to restrain popular upsurges within the confines of routine electoral participation. However, the northeast gives us a different story, where the bullet and the ballot more often than not, go hand in hand. As Sirnate and Verma aptly observes, "High voter turnout in the northeast should not be mistaken for compliance with New Delhi. An election in the northeast is seen by the Centre as an exercise in generating legitimacy, but it may be seen differently in the region. In the northeast, assembly elections are contests to control the politics of the State, as is the case in any other State in India."[36] Thus as our data shows, overwhelming majority do vote and take part in elections and yet a near similar number of youth holds the event of

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34. Yadav, 1996

35. Yadav and Palshikar, 2009

36. http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/where-bullet-and-ballot-go-hand-in-hand/article4498962.ece

election in some kind of negative light. The dual narrative of resistance and reciprocity needs to be understood here yet again. The many continuing acts of violence in the region point to a larger reality. That the whole of Northeast India is sitting on a powder keg of violence. Northeast India has become a sad battleground of ever changing ethnic coalitions between political groups who feed on the logic of ethnocentric political developments, changing their stakes as per the political exigency of the day. The state opting for the mere formalities and prosaic procedures has, in fact, tried to manipulate these very vacillations amongst social groups and communities, eventually leading to protests of various kinds and even generating some of the conditions for violence. What has perturbed observers are the increasingly visible links of the nature and pattern of this violence to the multifaceted realities of the phenomenon of 'elections' in this part of the country. These observations make one critically reflect on the crucial but often unnoticed gap that sometimes develops between formalities of democratic practices and the fulfillment of the democratic ideals. The urgent need of the hour is to move well beyond knee-jerk reactions and ad hoc measures towards well defined, concrete policy formulations. Repeated upsets for Indian democracy in its north-eastern region is a constant reminder that in a better democracy the substantive promises must be met right alongside the procedural requirements.

As students unions and other youth organisations have been at the forefront of many of the social and political movements, it can be said that youth culture in Northeast India is predominantly one of protests against perceived or felt odds. In other words, depending on how it is channelised the political attitude and the behaviour of the youth in India's Northeast potentially might pose challenges to the democratic governance of the state affecting the process of development in the region or it might perhaps reinforce democratic participation in the region. However, as the findings of this research shows, the youth of the NER is and has been ready for change for some time now. Their acts of protests have to be understood by placing it alongside the equally zestful participation too. Thus policy formulation needs to understand the relationship between the activism in the streets, in campuses and the politics in the realm of legislations. By tracing the full arc of contentious politics from direct action and protest in the streets to political maneuvers within the halls of government, we will gain a much clearer view of political participation and the political process more broadly. In what ways the continuing youth upsurges in India's northeast be converted to a process of democratic upsurge ushering in a process towards peace and development? That remains the crux of challenge for policy makers engaging with the region. An attempt has been made in this paper to give some pointers towards the answer(s).

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Why Peace Accords Falter? Comparative Mapping of State's Praxis of Peacemaking

RITA MANCHANDA

This paper develops a conceptual and comparative framework of analysis of the South Asian states' praxis of resolving 'ethno nationalist' conflicts via partition-based peace accords that create special autonomies and federal arrangements. The analysis is derived from South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR) and International Development Research Centre (IDRC) supported field-based, audit studies of peace making in Northeast (India), Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bangladesh), Madhesh (Nepal) and Balochistan (Pakistan). [See Sage Series in Human Rights Audits of Peace Processes Volumes: 2015]

There is evidence of stalled and faltering peace processes all across South Asia. Even the 'success' stories of ending violence, establishing stability and entrenching national integration – the Mizo Accord in Northeast India and Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord (CHTA) in Bangladesh – are deeply compromised as regards the quality of life changes the accords have brought to the conflict affected peoples. In the context of Mizoram the price of social cohesion is eternal social vigilance of a hegemonic and exclusionary ethnic Mi-Zo society; in the CHT it is a violent peace and the postponement of the core issue of the conflict, indigenous peoples' control over land and the competing demands of settlers.

This skepticism about what 'peace' delivers to the 'receivers' of peace, the people of the conflict affected peoples/the struggling groups in these top down peace accords – is reflected in the ambiguity and anxiety that emanates from the shrouded Indo-Naga Framework Agreement (2015). After eighteen long years of ceasefire and six decades of India's oldest self-determination struggle, interspersed by a series of inadequate and flawed Naga peace accords (1947, 1960, 1975 and 1997), this latest peace agreement promises to trade the Naga demand of Sovereignty for an uncertain power sharing deal within the constitution (a shared sovereignty). Integration demand is once again to be postponed or shelved, thus abandoning the Nagas in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and across the border in Myanmar.

The Agreement brought back to mind, an earlier conversation in the Naga dominated district of Ukhrul: Manipur, a bastion of the NSCN I-M group. "Peace has broken the spirit of the Naga struggle", a respected educationist at a civil society dialogue said of the cold peace the ceasefire had brought. "It has lowered the image of the cadres, led astray our leaders making them dependent upon ill gotten wealth. In the initial stages, the Naga movement was like a people's movement. But now it's like a factional movement." With the lived memory of peace accords - 1947, 1960, 1975 and 1997 that have divided Naga peoples and the Naga movement, was it surprising that the Nagas were afraid of such peacemaking.

A leap of faith in such 'partition' based peace accords creating ethnic homelands entitled to special autonomies seems even less credible if you are a minority within the territory, i.e. a Santhal, a Koch Rajbhangshi, a Bengali speaking Muslim or even an ethnic Bodo living in Bodoland: Assam in the aftermath of the 1993 and 2003 Bodo accords. 'Peace' in Bodoland

has produced endemic cycles of inter-ethnic violence in 1994, 1996, 1998, 2008, 2012, 2014 resulting in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of 'permanent' internally displaced persons. Competitive outbidding amongst armed 'national' groups has made the 'outlier' ratchet up the demand for full Bodo statehood. Disadvantaged minorities within minorities are now demanding a separate homeland. (However, there is some evidence, in the context of power becoming more dispersed, that the contagion of violence is being contained as evident in the recognition among influential student leaders of the mutual interest in defeating vested interests with a stake in the ethnic project.)

Prairie fires of insurgency in the 'troubled periphery' of northeast India and failed accords are a grim reminder that the mere deployment of the word 'peace' should not insulate from critical scrutiny a peace process that is of questionable durability and produces a poor quality of peace. Where peace processes and peace accords minister to conflict manifestations than causes, reinforce rather than challenge inter group divisions, attend to the interest of armed groups but neglect less vocal and more vulnerable constituencies and fail to deliver quality of life changes to many inhabitants - there is need for a critical peace impact assessment. Roger MacGinty is one of the few in the stream of peace research who boldly asserts "a peace accord that fails to deliver positive social and economic change, perpetuates inter group hostility and is accompanied by a crime surge- is in need of revision". (2006: 106)

In view of the focus on Northeast, the paper will largely focus on this geo-political area. However, it bears reiteration, that there is a common pattern in the nature of South Asian conflicts and their conflict management, which overrides the issue of whether the state is a rambunctious democracy or a military dictatorship. The paper contends that these self-determination conflicts, while distinct at the level of analysis and explanation, are united by a common problematic rooted in the nature of the post-colonial modern state system of South Asia, and its legacy of anti-democratic institutions, laws, practices and hierarchies of exclusion. These diverse South Asian states have used military power and special laws as a dominant strategy to contain 'self-determination' movements. But when the state has chosen political accommodation, there is the template of the peace accord. It reflects the international hegemony of the liberal peace paradigm with emphasis on procedural democracy and free market economy.

The paper focuses on a particular method of peace making for resolving ethno-nationalist conflicts via 'partition' or division-based accords. It is in consonance with the global trend of acquiescing to special autonomies as a method of dealing with groups asserting nationhood. The paper critically questions the effectiveness of territorial autonomies or federal arrangements for resolving self-determination conflicts. Can the devolution of power to ethnic 'homelands' address the issues of social justice and the rights of historically oppressed communities? The rights based audit of these autonomies in socio spatial areas that are no longer mono-ethnic, showed that such political arrangements are not necessarily enabling of democracy or pluralism and are likely to be hostile to gender and minority empowerment.

The audit analysis focuses on what peace brings in terms of rights and entitlements indexed on the conflict-affected peoples' sense of security, livelihood and development, justice and reconciliation. A rights based audit de-centres the state as the referent in the methodology of peace impact assessment and centres it on the people most affected by the conflict with special attention to vulnerable communities. It encourages local communities to think

critically about the quality of peace they have experienced. It widens the range of actors and informants to include less well heard voices – women, vulnerable groups, refugees/displaced peoples and non-dominant minorities. The experience of peace from their perspective may be quite different.

The field studies suggested that dysfunctional peace processes are due to the gap between the perceptions of the national elite's view of conflict management (restoring law, order and normalcy) and the conflict-affected peoples' vision of peace (delivering systemic change and structural transformation). The problem may lie in the top down way peace is made. A normative assumption of these rights based audits was that people had to be more than just the 'receivers' of a top down peace. In this context, the paper alludes to the capacity of 'civil society' groups to bring to these power sharing processes inclusive democracy and social justice.

The SAFHR-IDRC field audits draw upon quantitative and qualitative methodologies and show that peace accords, in shifting the locus of struggle from the domain of peoples' struggles to elite power-sharing arrangements, end up empowering the ethnic elite, who soon become like the state authority in the new federal or autonomous arrangement. Peacemaking thus becomes an exercise that consolidates a statist status quo. Elite directed ethno-nationalist movements do not challenge the fundamentals of the prevailing super-structure, they seek to be part of it. The nature of the structure of power in the state remains fundamentally unchanged, though elite circles of power are expanded to include the counter elite.

Peace Accords: A Modular Framework

Predominantly, the political model of conflict resolution between the state and the contending 'rebel' group is the 'peace accord'. It is a stratagem marked by legal ambiguity but it can be held aloft by political will and commitment. For example, the Bodo Accord (2003) is a contract between elected governments (the Indian Union and the state of Assam) and the Bodo Liberation Tigers, a 'terrorist' formation; the CHT Agreement (1997) is between the Bangladesh government and the PCJSS, representing an armed movement. It is an 'executive' accord that technically flouts the unitary constitution of Bangladesh. The ruling Awami League majority government has avoided giving it a constitutional status. In such asymmetric peace processes between unequal parties – a constituted state and armed movement – it is the state that chooses when, with whom and what to talk about. Until the signing of the Mizo Accord (1986) with Pu Laldenga, head of the Mizo National Front, the South Asia accord model empowered a moderate civilian adjunct of the armed struggle. The 1960 Naga accord creating Nagaland state was signed with a 'civil society' group – the Naga Peoples Convention, which was propped up by Indian covert agencies. The Ceasefire Agreement (1997) marked a departure in its nomenclature - 'Indo-Naga Agreement' positing an agreement between the 'highest' contracting parties and (initially at least) in a third country.

Contests of Power: Sidestepping Grievances

The field audits showed that these accords are embedded in a discourse of power and are exercises in working out power-sharing with the 'ethnic' elite of these movements on the government's terms. Scholars scrutinising the texts of these peace accords have been

struck by the asymmetry of power that marks them. In the CHT Accord (1997), the only time bound clauses are those that refer to demobilisation and return of refugees, the two issues of interest to the Bangladesh government. When it comes to the objectives of the 'rebel' group – demilitarisation, restitution of land rights and self-governance – commitments are vague or non-implementable.

In the case of the Tripura Accord (1988), the text mocks at the movement's aspirations, given that the gains get reduced to providing skills training for tribal youth, or in the Assam accord (1985), in setting up an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). Was this what the self-determination struggle was about? The 1975 Naga accord with a clutch of representatives of Naga armed movement is a demobilization accord that postpones the political question.

The Assam Accord reiterates concern about the core issue of the detection of 'foreigners' and the inadequacy of the Illegal Migrants Determination Tribunal (IMDT) Act to check the influx of Bangladeshi migrants, but makes no concrete provision for its more effective implementation. (A decade later, the Supreme Court struck down IMDT as unconstitutional and failing to check the influx of 'foreigners'.) A senior government negotiator at the 'peace table' of the Assam Accord (1985) claimed that everyone at the negotiations was aware that the core issue was to get the movement's representatives, the All Assam Students Union/Asom Gana Parishad, to come to power. "All else was incidental."[1] Twenty-five years after the dysfunctional Assam Accord, peace talks are ongoing, now with the armed group, ULFA.

Peoples' Assessment of Peace Accords

Consolidated survey[2] data on peoples' assessment of the accord (s)'ability to deliver a meaningful 'peace' showed disillusionment.[3] Barely 22 per cent believed it could build sustainable peace, 24 percent believed it to be reinforcing the status quo and 24 percent rejected the accords as an eyewash. Missing data levels were high – 30 percent. The majority of the respondents across the five conflict areas believed that the accord's major contribution was in controlling violence.

Table 1.
Appraisal of Accord

	Bodo	Mizoram	Nagaland	Madhesh	CHT
Build Peace	42.1	9.9	20.3	8.8	28.7
Status Quo	23.7	5.5	16.2	11.1	48.8
Eye Wash	8.6	8.8	25.7	37	21.7

1. See Home Secretary R Pradhan's reflections in Mani Shanker Aiyer, (1998) (ed.) " Nationhood, Ethnicity, Pluralism and Conflict Resolution. Rajiv Gandhi's India A Golden Jubilee Retrospective." New Delhi, UBSPD.

2. Survey data refers to two surveys, the Lokniti-CSDS Election Survey of Nagaland (2008); and SAFHR Sample Survey 2011 of Nagaland, Mizoram, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Madhesh (Nepal) 2011. It used a standardised questionnaire designed with the aid of the Lokniti group. As the sample was relatively small with the number of respondents ranging from 280 (CHT) respondents to 80 (Nagaland), it was thought advisable to draw upon the 2008 survey findings to consolidate our findings. Further, in view of the limited sample, it was decided to club the range of responses – 'somewhat' and 'absolute' into values of Yes and No. See also Patricia Justino et al, 'Data Collection in Violent Contests : Methodological Challenges' in IDS Bulletin vol. 40 (3), May 2009, pp41-49.

3. In view of the restricted numbers for analytical purposes, it was found advisable to club –'not much' 'not at all' as a 'No' value and 'some extent' and 'great extent' as a 'Yes' value.

Satisfaction levels

	Bodo	Mizoram	Nagaland	Madhesh	CHT
Satisfied	52	13.2	39.2	48.5	55.1
Dissatisfied	27.6	9.9	20.3	8.8	38.8

A pro-people Accord?

	Bodo	Mizoram	Nagaland	CHT	Madhesh
Yes	61.9	47.3	56.8	76.7	69.7
No	10.5	25.3	31.1	19.4	25.9

Addressed Grievances

	Bodo	Mizoram	Nagaland	Madhesh	CHT
Real causes	27.6	8.8	28.4	16.5	29.5
Controlling violence	48.7	42.9	48.6	66.3	51.9

Assam-Bodo accord recorded 42 percent crediting the accord as building peace. But data disaggregated on the basis of ethnic/linguistic groups shows that while 90 percent of ethnic Bodos were confident about the accord building peace, 53 and 54 percent respectively of Assamese and Bengali speaking respondents feared it reinforced an exclusionary status quo while 20 percent of the Rajbhongshis, 17 percent of Bengalis and 3 percent of Assamese dismissed it as an eyewash.

In Mizoram, only 40 percent of ethnic Mizos believed the accord had delivered effective peace, 25 percent regard it as reinforcing the status quo and 35 percent as eyewash. (Chakmas and Brus declined to respond). Less than 10 percent felt the accord addressed real grievances and 43 percent felt its objective was to control violence. To offset the narrowness of the sample and capture more of the majority ethnic Mizo voice, figures were compared with the CSDS 2008 election survey. This revealed that 13.6 percent agreed the accord was a 'wise decision', 9.6 percent felt it was a 'mistake' and 1.0 percent felt it was a sellout. Here too, missing data is significantly high.

Selection of Negotiating Party and Exclusion of All Stakeholders

In such asymmetric peace processes between a constituted state and movements for self-determination, it is the state that chooses when and with whom to talk. Routinely, the state, when challenged by competing national movements, questions their legitimacy and whether there is a sole spokesperson who can deliver on an agreement. While this strategy succeeds in weakening the negotiating position of the 'rebels', in the long run it has undermined social cohesion, and destabilised peace. Moreover, it pressures the 'outlier' rebel group to go in for ethnic outbidding thus making more extremist claims and ratcheting up of violent resistance to get the government to negotiate terms.

Empirical evidence shows that state designed peace processes seem either to deliberately

exclude, or are unable to include all stakeholders, reinforcing a crisis of unity and legitimacy. As the long genealogy of Naga accords (1947, 1960, 1975, 1997 and 2015) demonstrated, such peacemaking divided the Naga territories and the Naga movement, making the Nagas afraid of such peacemaking. The 1947 Hydari Agreement was singular in that it was premised on the complete authority of the Naga National Council over Naga territory and its resources. Subsequently, the question of the legitimacy of the representatives negotiating the accord has haunted the Naga accords. Indeed, the crucial significance of establishing the authenticity of representation explains the symbolic value of the 1951 plebiscite in which 99 percent of the Nagas favoured independence.[4]

That representative consensus was foundationally undermined by the 1960 accord. The GOI chose to empower a 'civil society' group fostered by India's myriad agencies, the Naga Peoples Convention,[5] to speak for the Nagas. The 1960 Agreement territorially and ideologically divided the Nagas. In the third round of peace making, the 1975 Shillong accord, the legitimacy base of the signatories got whittled down to six self-selected leaders of the Naga rebel army. The Indo Naga Ceasefire Agreement 1997 between the GOI and the NSCN (Isak-Muivah) group the state chose to negotiate only with the NSCN I-M group, even though the excluded the NSCN Khaplang group controlled swathes of territory. In 2001, a separate ceasefire agreement was struck with the NSCN (K) group.

State agencies, instead of working for a common peace table, pitted the factions against each other, exploiting intra-tribal tensions in the Naga movement. As Manchanda and Bose's forthcoming study "Endgame in the Naga Peace Process and the Future of the Northeast"[6] shows, the unity issue is an active presence in the troubled history of Northeast accords. The CSDS pre-poll survey (2008) showed 54 percent of the respondents did not agree that the I-M spoke for all Nagas. SAFHR's 2011 survey showed that only 19 percent agreed that the 1997 accord process included all stakeholders; 35 percent said 'No'.[7]

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4. The crucial significance of establishing the 'authenticity of representativeness' explains the symbolic value of the 1951 plebiscite in which 99 per cent of the Nagas favoured independence. There are many versions of the plebiscite, including some which highlight its restrictive nature, since it was confined to Kohima and Mokokchung districts and excluded women. See N K Das 'Naga Peace Parleys: Sociological Reflections and a Plea for Pragmatism' Economic & political Weekly vol XLVI (25) June 18 2011; p 73.

5. Subir Bhaumik: 'An accord that never was – the Shillong Accord' in Jehan Perera (ed.). Peace Process in Nagaland and Chittagong Hill Tracts, SAFHR Paper Series –5, 1999; p7; Sajal Nag describes the NPC as a peoples' movement drawn from every tribe with the Kohima Convention attended by some 1756 traditional representatives and 2000 Naga observers; See Nag, Sajal.2002. Contesting Marginality: Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism in North East India. Manohar, pp255-259 ; Consolidating this, Charles Chasie in The Naga Imbroglio (1999) drew attention to the many consultations that took place p 150 ; for a more critical presentation See Kumar, Ram Narayan and Murthy, Laxmi. 2002. Four years of the ceasefire agreement. New Delhi: Other Media Communications pp52-53, and for a eulogistic account, the Congress Party's White Paper 'Bedrock of Naga Society' (2000) Anonymous.

6. Rita Manchanda and Tapan Bose, "Endgame in the Naga Peace Process and the Future of the Northeast". in Manchanda, Bose and Nag Why Peace Accords Falter? India's paradigmatic counter insurgency & peacemaking in the Northeast" forthcoming, publication Sage.

7. Survey data refers to two surveys, the Lokniti-CSDS Election Survey of Nagaland (2008); and SAFHR Sample Survey 2011 of Nagaland, Mizoram, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Madhesh (Nepal) 2011. It used a standardised questionnaire designed with the aid of the Lokniti group. As the sample was relatively small with the number of respondents ranging from 280 (CHT) respondents to 80 (Nagaland), it was thought advisable to draw upon the 2008 survey findings to consolidate our findings. Further, in view of the limited sample, it was decided to club the range of responses – 'somewhat' and 'absolute' into values of Yes and No. See also Patricia Justino et al, 'Data Collection in Violent Contests : Methodological Challenges' in IDS Bulletin vol. 40 (3), May 2009, pp41-49.

A similar pattern can be identified in other peace processes in the region. In the Assam-Bodoland peace processes, the Bodo Accord, 2003, is with the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT). The National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) was excluded. Was it meant to undermine the authority of BLT leaders in controlling the Bodo Autonomous Territorial District (BTAD) Council? The result has been higher levels of violence, including inter-factional BLT-NDFB violence. As Monirul Hussain in the field based audit pointed out, it was almost as if such partial peace processes provided an incentive to the NDFB to crank up the violence levels to force the state to negotiate with it.

The accord process has been cynically dubbed as 'accords that sow discord'. In evaluating its 'genuineness', a key variable is peoples' understanding of whether a credible representative of the movement/armed group and the government was involved, or only a splinter group and a non-authoritative government representative. The figures across five conflicts showed that 58 percent identified the main ('rebel') group and the government as the signatories.

Table 2.
Signatories

	Bodo	Mizoram	Nagaland	Madhesh	CHT
Main Group & Govt	61.2	24.2	37.8	36.4	97.6
Splinter Group & Govt	7.9	0	14.9	8.7	0
Govt	4.6	0	2.7	6.1	0.8

'Genuine' all Stakeholders	Bodo	Mizoram	Nagaland	Madhesh	CHT
Genuine	34.2	14.3	18.9	8.8	38
Not Genuine	30.9	9.9	35.1	47.1	42.2
No opinion /N A	34.8	75.8	46.0	44.1	19.8

Exclusion of oppositional perspectives

In the accord making process, the structure has no process to enable rival perspectives (political opposition) or rival claimants to be involved. It is a curious pattern, intentional or unintentional, that crucial stakeholders, especially 'spoilers', are excluded, making the accord non-implementable. In the case of Punjab and the Rajiv Gandhi-Longowal Accord, Haryana was not made a party to the process, effectively undermining the accord's provisions for the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab, internal boundary realignment and distribution of river waters. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord, competing claims over land is at the core of the conflict, but the Bengali settlers are missing in the accord making process

In the resolution of the Naga imbroglio, the integration of the Naga populated hill areas is a key demand, with implications for the territorial integrity of the neighbouring states of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. But there is no process or multi-layered structure that might allow civil society groups in these states explore a non-confrontational dialogue. Keeping so called 'spoilers' out is a recipe for renewed violence.

Strengthening Governments, Weakening Movements

Peace processes tend to isolate the movement's leaders from their source of strength, the armed cadres. In Ukhrul, Manipur, the bastion of the NSCN (I-M), a Naga educationist said, "Peace has broken the spirit of the Naga struggle. It has lowered the image of the cadres, led astray our leaders making them dependent upon ill gotten wealth." In Bodoland, the unfinished agenda of the rehabilitation of unemployed (and unemployable), armed cadres makes for a ready available supply of muscle power for elections and lawlessness. Besides, the presence of rival armed groups that reject the peace accord, as in Bodoland, CHT and Nagaland, ensure turf wars over land, people and 'taxes'. Importantly the financial dependency of these often economically unviable autonomous units and the structural problems in the transfer of real power are disempowering of the self governing political institution and disillusioning.

In the 'successful' Mizo Accord, the conflict legacy of protracted violence, brutalisation and institutional disruptions continues to undermine the growth of an open, tolerant, democratic and accountable culture even after 25 years of peace. Ironically, what is at the core of Mizoram's post-conflict stability – its cohesive society – also drives its xenophobic intolerance. Mizo social organisations, Young Mizo Association (YMA) and Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP),[8] are socially mandated to create a cohesive and peaceful Mizo society where all are integrated into the homogenous Mizo way of life. As Sajal Nag's audit of the Mizo accord showed, MYA and MZP, "continue their ubiquitous and punitive role of the insurgency days of 'community policing' targeting vulnerable communities, the Brus, Chakmas, Indians - the Vais (outsiders), and 'errant' women who transgress their 'customary' role in Mizo society.

The field based audits showed high levels of disillusionment and alienation, especially over rampant extortion. In the Naga case, the government decision to recognise separate, designated camps of the I-M (Camp Hebron), Khaplang (Camp Khehoi) and the Phizo group's FGN (Chedeema Peace Camp) has produced a context in which the 'armed' groups are jousting for power and control in Naga territories and there are overlapping tax (extortion) regimes, as central funds, contrary to practice elsewhere, are not provided for their maintenance.

SAFHR Survey data shows sharp decline in the popularity of the armed groups. These are popular struggles with necessarily high levels of support for the armed groups. Across the five conflicts, it averages at 68.7% with CHT as high as 77.5%, Nepal 70%, Nagaland 66%, Mizo 63% and Bodo 56%. The armed cadres or 'national workers' were believed to be fighting for the people.

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8. These two are youth organizations. The YMA is inspired by the Christian ethos and organised along the lines of the Young Men's Christian Association and had originated in 1936. It primarily is pre-occupied with social service but with the infiltration of Mizo National Youth Front (youth wing of MNF) from 2001 onwards, it began to have political biases and often engaged in moral policing. The MZP is basically a student organisation engaged in students' welfare. But often it engages in checking the inner line permits of non-tribals and harassing them and wants that non-Mizo should get employment Should or should not? in Mizoram and that Mizoram quotas in various educational institutions should go only to Mizos. It frequently encourages communal conflagration against non-Mizos.

Table 3.
Extent of Local support for Armed Forces during conflict (per cent)

	Bodo	Mizoram	Nagaland	CHT	Madhesh
Yes	55.9	62.7	66.2	77.5	70
No	40.8	13.2	27	19.4	24.9

Support for Armed groups post accord (per cent)

	Bodo	Mizoram	Nagaland	CHT	Madhesh
Increased	9.2	1.1	16.2	7	16.2
Decreased	61.2	20.9	33.8	48.4	47.1

In the Naga Hills, the mystique and awe of a distant fighting force sacrificing all for a sovereign, integrated 'Nagalim', is giving way to the banal reality of elections determining politics. In that game, the NSCN has to demonstrate that it can transform itself into a democratic political organisation capable of winning elections. Moreover, a generation has grown up that has not bled under the boot of India's military suppression. It is open to the rhetoric of appeasement and development.

Self-governing Councils: How democracy enabling?

The Bodo, Tripura, Darjeeling/Gorkha and the CHT accords all envisage the setting up of democratically empowering self-governing councils. But a closer look at the functioning of these councils revealed the perpetuation of interim bodies of non-elected nominees. The CHT Accord provides for a three-tier administrative structure – Hill Districts Council, Regional Hill Districts Council and the Dhaka based Ministry of CHT Affairs (MOCHTA). But the councils are not functioning as democratic bodies as elections have not been held to the CHT Regional Council since its establishment in 1998 and the CHT HDC since 1989. The holding of elections hangs on determining the eligibility of Bengali residents to be included in the voters list. Popular legitimacy of the council leadership has been eroded. In the vacuum, the Dhaka-controlled MOCHTA has produced govermentalisation, not democratisation.

Shrinkage of representation for Minorities

The text of accords in the Northeast and CHT guarantee protection to 'minorities' but cap representation. Moreover, in Bodoland, despite the Bodos being a minority, in several segments of the ethnically delimited BTA in Assam state, the structure of power institutionalised by the peace accord is weighted in favour of the Bodo tribes 5:1, disadvantaging non-Bodo 'minorities'. The Santhals, descendants of indentured labour, have been made into refugees, and stand disenfranchised. Researcher Bethany Lancia, in a comparative analysis of the Bodo, Gorkha and Mizo accords, showed that these accords have fostered localised autocracies that have eliminated democratic oppositions and repressed minorities.[9]

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9.   Bethany Lancia "The Problem of Political Stability in North East" Asian Survey Nov-Dec vol 49, (6), 2009; p1010

Absent elected third tier self-governing bodies

Autonomous councils created under India's VI Schedule are not covered under the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Caste Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA), which extends Panchayati Raj institutions to tribal areas. Representing the lowest tier of democracy, they could have enabled non-dominant minorities clustered in a Panchayat unit to be elected in a first past the post electoral system. The substitute village development committees are nominated bodies, vulnerable to capture by former armed cadres.

Shrinkage of representation of Women

"Token" reservation in council bodies is the only recognition of women's active public role and contribution to these movements. In the CHT interim councils, there are no women, though the Regional Council provides for a 6:1 gender ratio. After the conflict, especially in indigenous struggles, tribal tradition that bars women's participation in the public sphere is reified and exploited to bar educated and professionally better qualified women from claiming a seat in traditional (Tribal Village Council) or modern representative institutions (councils, village development committees, urban municipal bodies, state and national assembly). In Nagaland, the courts have upheld 33 per cent reservations for women in the metropolitan and town council elections in Mokokchung district but the Naga male elite blocked and suspended the election process.[10] The women are now before the Supreme Court of India to demand their rights. The patriarchal backlash targets Naga women as threatening the Naga community identity by undermining Naga customary laws and practices, which are integrally related to that identity and constitute the ideological foundation of the Naga national struggle.

In political movements articulated through identity conflicts, re-constituted notions of tradition and customary practices are played out on women and women's bodies as the reproducer of the community. Women are assigned a specific role in the private sphere that delegitimises their post-movement engagement in the public sphere. The exigencies of ethno-nationalist struggle may have the demanded mass mobilisation of women in public space in support of the movement or during the conflict. But post conflict, these totalising movements push women back into the private sphere. The survey figures showed 85 per cent awareness of women's participation. But as men return from conflict, negative gender stereotypes are used to reinforce the derogatory aspects of the traditional patriarchal attitude towards women. Whether it is in the Northeast, the CHT or the Madhesh, male-dominated political formations end up being especially hostile to the entry of women into formal politics, their access to property rights and importantly their challenge to customary structures of arbitration that tend to trivialise violence against women. The absence of any reference in peace accords to demanding removal of impunity and in particular for sexual violence in conflict, is a reflection of patriarchal bias and gendered victimhood.

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10. Chozhule Kikhi "33% Women Reservation Bill in Nagaland: An analysis from women view point", The Morung Express 2010, URL accessed 22 /2/12 http://www.morungexpress.com/express_review/66074.html Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland and two districts of Assam are not under the ambit of the Panchayati Raj tier of self-governing institutions, which are statutorily mandated to reserve a third of the seats for women.

Exclusionary dynamics of ethnic accords: Disabling Pluralism

The peace audits explored our fundamental thesis that the logic of ethnic elite-led identity movements is hegemonic and homogenising. Arguably, peace accords structured around an ethnically determined 'homeland of one's own' produced an exclusionary dynamics in what had become a multi-ethnic space, leaving the minorities more vulnerable and isolated than before. The xenophobic impulses attendant around identity-based movements tended to produce reactive ethnic assertions, and new violent contestations claiming exclusive rights and entitlements. Citizenship as the basis of equal rights gets further undermined.

The trajectory of such 'ethno-national' movements showed that at their peak, these popular self-determination movements drew in many disparate groups (and women) to coalesce around an oppositional consciousness pitted against the hegemonic and homogenising power of the state. In the case of the CHT – the Jumma nation embraced 13 hill tribes; the Mizo movement drew in Zo, Hmar, Kuki-Chin tribes; the Assam movement included Bodos; the Madhes assertion folded in indigenous Tharus, Dalits and Muslims. Following an accord that unity fragments, especially when a new hegemony threatens to displace the previous one. Often, the moment of accord acts as a catalyst for minority communities whose interests are sacrificed at the peace table, producing a mirror autonomy movement – Assam: Bodo movement; Bodo: Koch Rajbhongshi, Mizo: Hmars, Chakmas and Brus; Terai-Madhesh: Tharus; Baloch: Pashtuns-southern Pakhtunkhwa.

Concluding Remarks

Essentially, accords are discourses of power, not a movement for remedial justice, restructuring of power relations and of expanding participation. Rarely do they have the capacity to deliver plural politics or more just and inclusive societies. An analysis of the audit studies showed that the dynamics of such peacemaking can frustrate democratic aspirations and shrink democracy. The Bodo, Tripura, Darjeeling/Gorkha and the CHT accords all envisaged setting up democratic self-governing councils. Instead, often there is the perpetuation of interim non-elected bodies. The structure of power in these ethnic homelands disadvantages non-dominant minorities, and women who are denied participation in the public sphere in the name of customary practices which are guaranteed in such ethnic peace accords.

Most conflict resolution and policy discourses are locked in the problem solving mode of 'fixing' accords, and betray a conservative bias in favour of stability and replication of existing power relations while co-opting the new elite. Policy managers have their eyes trained on ensuring there is no recurrence of conflict. What such violence containment policies do to the conflict-affected people seems a matter of indifference. To frame peace building as a continuous and transformative process, to recognise the continuum of the pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict as cyclical and to prioritise issues of social justice and inclusion, is relegated to the luxury of being a theorist. The policy practitioner is concerned with the immediate task of containing violence, restoring law and order, holding elections, granting special economic packages and bringing back normalcy.

But as the above comparative analysis of a rights based audit of accords showed, by not making the root causes of the conflict part of the negotiating agenda, by displacing the issues of democracy, accountability and social justice, peace processes find themselves in a deep paradox of losing peoples' support. Peace accords are conventionally projected

as instruments for accommodating a marginalised/discriminated minority, but the audits showed that they run the risk of becoming acts of violence and domination over the diverse peoples living in the 'homeland' area, especially for those belonging to vulnerable groups and minority communities.

The overview analysis of these field based peace audits consolidates the basic thesis that such peace processes for devolving power rarely seek a transformation of unequal power structures or enable robust plural cultures. Moreover, the co-existence of 'normal' electoral politics with endemic cycles of violence fuelled by the patronage networks of politicians and armed cadres; of ceasefire normalized as 'peace' amidst continuing post conflict militarism and a culture of impunity; of appeasement and corruption in lieu of development and growth - has produced a regional conflict system with high risk cross border consequences.[11]

11. Rita Manchanda, Tapan Bose and Sajal Nag (2015)' Bridging State and Nation: Peace Accords in India's Northeast' Sage series in Human Righs Audits of Peace Processes, vol 2, Delhi, Sage.

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The South Asia Forum for Human Rights (SAFHR) is a regional network whose mission is to "promote respect for universal standards of human rights with emphasis on universality and interdependence of human rights." SAFHR views human rights as interlinked with peace and democracy, and this vision informs its programmes of regional and cross border dialogues, research & publications, peace studies courses and peace audits, training workshops and advocacy campaigns. In addressing the core concerns of the human rights and peace agenda, SAFHR focused on areas affected by conflict and building sustainable and just peace processes with attention to the perspectives of vulnerable groups, minorities, indigenous peoples, refugees, internally displaced peoples and women. SAFHR was created in 1990 as an offshoot of the Third World Congress on Human Rights in New Delhi.

The Other Media (TOM) was established in 1992 as a center for supporting people's organisations and movements, focusing on a broad spectrum of social and environmental justice issues in India. TOM has through its advocacy and research work supported the rights of indigenous peoples and provided opportunities for civil society engagement with the identity-based aspirations of communities in the Northeast and Kashmir. TOM has sustained a support programme for Burmese refugees since the 1990s as a part of its larger focus on refugees in India. Its media activities include films and publications. The Other Media also served as a centre of the National Fishworkers' Forum and the Campaign for Justice in Bhopal.

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