

Chapter 3

History of Assam-Arunachal border: Negotiating with the past

- The story of borders and boundaries: North East India in perspective
- Contextualising and experiencing reorganisation
- Assam-Arunachal border: 1951 notification
- Focus area

3. 1 The Story of Borders and Boundaries: North East India in Perspective

“To rule means to rule people which also means (in most of history) to rule a territory. But just like rule has to be appropriate to the nature of a particular people, similarly the nature of a territory also has to be appropriate. Or, and it is the same thing to say, that the rule must fit the people and the territory. In this sense ‘right size’ and ‘right people’ become critical factors in rule” (Samaddar, 2011, 48).

North-East India is often projected in the national media as a “trouble-torn region”; it has a long history of topsy-turvy ride: from being under British rule as administrative unit to independent states. Its formation is a history of sub-nationalist assertions. The approach of the Indian state towards North-East India can be viewed from four paradigms: culture, security, politics and development says Upadhyay (2009, 89) while stating that the ‘cultural paradigm’ had dominated the 1950s and early 60s, focusing on the preservation of the cultural diversity of the region. Joining the voices from other parts of the country in demanding new states, North-East India got its heterogeneous identity with the creation of eight states; Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and now Sikkim. North East India pre-independence was known as North East Frontier or Assam. The region is a mixture of hills and plains with Assam consisting large part of plains and other states completely hilly. India's North-East which is commonly referred to by a mono-syllable North-East and its people as North Easterners¹, has really no social or cultural affinity with the rest of the Indian polity, which is of Dravidian or Aryan descent (Mukhim, 2005, 177).

North-East India is a challenge for the government of India as it is engulfed in serious inter-state border conflicts. The region is struggling with the issues of territorial dispute, ethnic aspirations, insurgent outbursts, regional loyalties, separatist and secessionist movements, crisis of identity and survival, tribe-non-tribe relations, tribal self-image and identity, infiltration of foreigners or outsiders (Ray, 1996, ix). The North-East region is replete with stories of affirmation and reaffirmation of identity. The region is considered strategically important as it shares international boundaries with China in the North, Bhutan in the Northwest, Myanmar in the Southeast and Bangladesh in the West. The

¹ Umbrella connotation for the people belonging to the eight states of North-East India

region shares only two per cent of its boundary with India, while the remaining 98 per cent is bordered internationally with other countries (Mukhim, 2005, 178).

Upadhyay (2009, 90) shares, “A characteristic unique to the state and society in North East India, is the co-existence of a strong sense of identity and shared community values”. Associating identity of the community to identity of the place such as *Hills* and *Plains* came up prominently in the discourses of the colonial administrators.

Barpujari (2003, ii), in his introduction to *British Policy in the Hills of North East Frontier of India*, observes that the region inhabited by hill tribes was a *terra incognita* to the outside world until it was made known by the East India company. The process of venturing into the hills had started from the time of the peace treaty of Yandaboo signed on 24 February 1826 between the East India Company and the King of Ava. The treaty ended the First Anglo-Burmese War and 600 years of Ahom rule in Assam. The Burmese renounced all claims over the principalities of Assam, Manipur and Jaintia Hills. The hill tribes were insecure and had ill feeling as the treaty ended their arrangements with the Ahom rulers. However, the British officials took over the administrative control of Assam from the last Ahom King, Purander Singha.

Prior to British colonial rule, the hill tribes of the North East frontier of India were in a way controlled by the Ahom Kingdom, the kingdom spreading across the Brahmaputra valley in Assam. The kingdom is known to have opposed the Mughal rule through several battles. It was in the year 1671, in the Battle of Saraighat that the Mughal Empire led by the Kachwaha king Raja Ramsingh got defeated by Lachit Borphukan, king of Ahom Kingdom.

Before the Ahoms various Mongoloid groups from the north and east of the North East India region came and settled in Assam. The early rulers of Assam were known to be the Indo-Mongoloids of various ethnicities (spanning a time-period from fifth to mid-eleventh century). The Ahoms ruled over Assam for approximately 600 years, from 1228 A.D. till the advent of the British in 1826. During the colonial period, the region was part of Bengal province.

In Alexander Mackenzie’s (1973) article ‘History of the relations of government with the hill tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal’ the North East frontier of Bengal hills

and forests were considered as the habitat of savage tribes, whose bloody raids and thieving forays threatened serious danger to the cause of tea. The Assam frontier was considered uninteresting by Dalhousie. As such, officers were asked to leave the hill men alone. The region was to be left alone more so because the people of the hills were yet to understand the concept of nation-state. It was in the year 1869 that the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Alexander Mackenzie wrote a 'memorandum on the North-East Frontier of Bengal' to look in to the relations of the Bengal government with the hill tribes inhabiting in the region and British policy in regard to their annexation (Barpujari, 2003, ix).

Traditionally, clan and chief system were prevalent in North East India and village settlements were clan-based; this was recorded in Mackenzie's memorandum of 1871. With spread of clan-based territoriality, the 'Posa' system was introduced by the Ahom rulers. The British colonial officials later termed this as 'blackmail' which points to the fact that it was a way to seek assistance from the hill tribes during wars by the Ahoms. The system is read by few authors as a means of conflict resolution between the hill chiefs and Ahom rulers. Under this system, the hill tribes would not meddle with the people of the plains and for this they would be paid a percentage of the agricultural produces by the cultivators in the plains bordering the hills. This was an effort of the Ahom rulers to make peace between the hill tribes and others in the plains. While it can be understood as mutual understanding between the hills and plains at that time, the act is also interpreted to be coercive and an attack on economic rights.

Barpujari writes,

The Posa or blackmail which, under the Assam government, was paid to most of the hill tribes bordering on the plains, was not as has been sometimes imagined, in uncertain ill-defined exaction, a fixed-well ascertained revenue payment whether it arose from pre-existent claims in the soil asserted by the hill men, or was imposed originally by them in the days of the weakness of the Ahom kings, we cannot tell. It had existed time out of mind when Britishers annexed the region. (Barpujari, 2003, 5)

The prevalent of Posa system during that time is taken as an indicator of land ownership and rule in the interstate border areas by the hill tribes. This system is presently under the

scanner to study the boundary demarcation of the Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. In the Bordoloi sub-committee report (SCR), North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded areas of 1949, it is mentioned that “In the Balipara Frontier tract payments called Posa which total in all to about Rs. 10,000 per year and certain customary presents are paid. These are vestigial payments of sums which the tribe used to claim in the days of the Ahom kings whether by way of quid pro quo for keeping peace on the border and not raiding the plains or in recognition of a customary claim on the local inhabitants or territory” (Bordoloi sub-committee report, 1947).

Figure 1. Statement showing Posa given to the different hill tribes in the District of Lakhimpur during 1899-1900

HNVE A U R C

Statement showing the Posa given to the different hill tribes in the District of Lakhimpur during 1899-1900.

Receipts. Descriptions.	Demand or allotment for 1899-1900.		Disbursement. Descriptions.	Amount paid during the year.		Balance for 1899-1900.	Remarks.
	Amount.	Total.		Amount.	Total.		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.		Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.	Rs. a. p.	
Abor Posa ...	3,312 0 0	3,312 0 0	Dakhu ...	...	201 0 0		
Posa for Ghasi Miris of Sisi Duar ...	218 2 10	218 2 10	Sili ...	...	100 0 0		
Bor Mithun ...	25 0 0	25 0 0	Padu ...	...	225 12 0		
Hukanjuri Naga Chief ...	450 0 0	450 0 0	Membu ...	...	225 12 0		
			Bomjur ...	...	75 4 0		
			Dambak ...	...	194 0 0		
			Kumku ...	...	75 4 0		
			Siluk ...	...	301 0 0		
			Bor Abors ...	...	831 0 0		
			Kebang ...	...	393 0 0		
			Passi Meyongs ...	...	465 0 0		
			Abor Katakis ...	84 0 0	84 0 0		
			Bor Abor Katakis ...	141 0 0	141 0 0		
			Ghasi Miris at Sisi Duar ...	178 12 1	178 12 1*	60 8 9	* Rs. 2-1-0 for 1897-98. 5-1-0 for 1898-99.
			Bor Mithun ...	...	...	25 0 0	
			Hukanjuri Naga Chief ...	...	...	450 0 0†	† Withheld under orders of the Chief Commissioner.
Total for Sadr ...	4,005 2 10	4,005 2 10	Total ...	398 12 1	398 12 1	3,622 8 9	
<i>Subdivision North Lakhimpur.</i>			<i>Subdivision North Lakhimpur.</i>				
Posa for Banskatia and Choiduarua Daffas ...	808 13 4	808 13 4	Posa of Banskatia and Choiduarua Daffas ...	508 5 1	508 5 1†	352 4 11	† Rs. 51-12-8 for last year.
Posa for Tarbotia and Panibotia Miris ...	930 4 9	930 4 9	Posa of Tarbotia and Panibotia Miris ...	531 9 8	531 9 8§	405 3 3	§ " 6-8-2 " "
Posa for Sarak Miris ...	287 7 9	287 7 9	Posa of Sarak Miris ...	249 7 9	249 7 9	38 0 0	
Total for North Lakhimpur ...	2,026 9 10	2,026 9 10	Total ...	1,289 6 6	1,289 6 6	795 8 2	
Grand total ...	6,031 12 8	6,031 12 8	Grand total ...	1,888 2 7	1,888 2 7	1,425 11	

Figure 2. Form for payment of Posa to hill tribes

FORM OF HAT CHITHA FOR THE PAYMENT OF POSA TO HILL TRIBES

Name of the recipient TANTO 7 Sahan TETI-24
 Amount of Posa, 8-8-0 Rupees 2/11 annas 5/11 pice

Date	Amount paid	For what year	To whom paid	Remarks
30/3/40	8 8 -	1940	TANTO	[Signature] 14/3/41
14.5.41	8 8 -	1941	TANTO	
		Palta combined with No 9 9 5		9.
23.4.2	9 9 -	1942.	Tanyo	[Signature]
18.2.43	9 9 -	1943	Tanyo	[Signature]
12.5.44	9 9 -	1944	Tanyo	[Signature]
10.8.45	9 9 -	1945	TANTO S/O TALO	[Signature]

The state government of Arunachal Pradesh claims certain plain areas in Assam to belong to Arunachal based on this Posa system. The state government of Assam however does not subscribe to it by claiming that it was to stop the hill tribes from plundering the people in plains and that the system does not mean the hill tribes were the owners of the land. On the other hand, the state government of Arunachal Pradesh states that the act of plundering was an asserting of their rights over the land adding that the modern day would have termed the same system as tax.

During the pre-colonial era of the Ahom days, the hills that border plains of Assam were inhabited by various war-like and “uncivilised” tribes with whom since the close of the Burmese war the British government had little to do. The exact socio-cultural conditions of the tribesmen of those times are not reflected upon sufficiently in contemporary studies. However, it is assumed that like the law of the survival of the fittest, the hills men had to survive by thieving, capturing men and material required from the bordering areas. This nature of the hillsmen was also pointed out by Mackenzie (1871), considering them as a potential threat to the cultivation of tea, which apparently was one of the reasons for the East India Company to plunge into Assam.

Bezbaruah (2010, 3) shares, “Despite the devolution of all rights enjoyed by the Ahom monarchy to itself, the East India Company brought under its district administration only those territories which it considered either economically or strategically important. In the process territories, earlier under the jurisdiction of the Ahoms, but economically or strategically considered insignificant were left outside the realm of regular British administration.” This was British administration’s smart way of dealing with topographically and geographically challenging hilly area. Before the British officials took possession of undivided Assam, the region metaphorically came to be known as a cave of treasures of rich folklores, myths and legends about Kings, Gods and evil, as being ruled by different kings and local chiefs maintaining their sovereignty.

The tribal villages of hill areas were under the control of chiefs before the British officials laid its claim on the region. Petty tribal chiefdoms were conquered by the new hordes of invading and migrating Ahoms from upper Burma. “The Indo-Aryans from the west also established political supremacy over the tribals and believed to have also Hinduized them. However, a new phase in tribal history of the region started with the penetration of the British rule into tribal areas, which were not earlier organised into proper principalities or states, though they had village level polity formations” (Jusho, 2004, 3).

Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Princely states of Tripura and Manipur were carved out of Assam to be administered on their own. This did not seem to have helped the region much, as “...visible level of division in the region is between the constituent states themselves. This is manifested in forms such as territorial disputes, competition of resources and restriction on employment opportunities and other economic avenues, to people from the neighbourhood” (Upadhyay, 2009, 93). The tribal situation in North East India cannot be properly understood without viewing it in its historical perspective (Chaube, 2012, 7). Traces of the past are being negotiated in the present. This is evident from series of reports on interstate border conflicts in the ground as well as legal disputes; these reflect the sense of rights of the hill and plains people. The inter-state conflict in this region may be understood in terms of conflict between hills and the plains which has a legacy of the past (Phukon, 1996, 15). In this context, Chaube (ibid) claims that until the British advent, the notion of territorial or political authority was unknown in the hills.

Phukon has highlighted the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ divide in the narratives and discourses of historians, British administrators and the natives as well,

It appears that in the late forties of this century there, had been a strong sub-regional and even a separatist urge among a section of the people of the hills. One of the reasons for this was that these hill tribes had very little scope of mingling with the people of the plains during the British rule. The British administered them separately from the plains and they were not sufficiently integrated with the people of the plains. Whether this was done deliberately in consonance of with the policy of ‘divide and rule’, as many local historians claim, or it was due to a policy of not disturbing susceptibilities of the hill people, is difficult to assess accurately. It may, however be argued that although the British might not have made direct efforts to divide the people of the hills and the plains, indirectly their policy had this effect. As a result, the hill people were afraid of the plainsmen more than they were of the British. They even laboured under a suspicion that the rule of ‘white people’ in the hitherto “excluded areas” would be replaced by their “more advanced” neighbours of the plains in free India. (Phukon, 1996, 15)

As stated by Phukon (ibid), the hills and plains categorisation that came up so prominently during the colonial era indicated the infamous divide and rule policy of the Britishers. It is difficult to understand if the boundaries of the hills and plains had anything to do with the betterment of lives of the people along the borders. However, it can be observed that the political demarcation and separate system of administration in the hills had always been a cause of division between the hills and the plains (Chaube, 2012, 15).

After annexing the hill tracts situated between Bengal and Myanmar in the nineteenth century the British named the region as North-East Frontier (undivided Assam). In order to administer the region, the British had taken over administrative control of Assam from the last Ahom King Purander Singha in the year 1838. With the intention to enhance trade and commerce in North East India, the East India Company sacked the Ahom king who had been its "protected prince" since 1826 (Maitra and Susan Maitra, 1995). The British colonial authorities focused on segregating the hills and plains and infused in them the feeling of being guarded against “potential exploitations”. These exploitations

were linked to socio-economic and socio-cultural condition of both hills and plains people. Unlike the plain areas of Assam, the colonial administration let the frontier function under very loose administrative control. It did not even allow the plains to meddle with the hill areas and practiced a policy of segregating the hills and plains people (Sarangi and Pai, 2011, 284).

This control was manifested in the regulation passed in the year 1873, which came into force as Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation Act in 1875. Also known as the Inner Line Regulation of 1873, in the pre-Independence period, the act worked as an imaginary boundary in the foothills that restricted physical crossings keeping social distance between the “insiders” and “outsiders”, thereby controlling social mobility along the tracts of the boundary. According to the Local Commission Report of 2014 “...adoption of Regulation V of 1873 empowering the then Lieutenant- Governor of Assam to prescribe a line called ‘Inner Line’ with a view to bring the commercial relations of the hills with the plains under more stringent control, ... to lay down rules for the possession of land and property beyond the ‘Inner Line’ without special permits.” The Inner Line Act of 1873 is said to be the giving of colonial institution which continues to survive.

The Britishers claimed that the introduction of the inner line regulation was with an intention to work on the “problems” faced by the hill tribes. This, nonetheless, created rift between hills and plains, where cross border activities minimised to an extent of only infusing and strengthening the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ divide. Baruah (2008, 17) writes, “The non-state spaces in the hills and the state spaces in the lowlands, however, were in a symbiotic relationship. There were back-and-forth movements between the hills and the plains. Wars produced movements in both directions. While the attractions of commerce and what the lowlanders like to call civilisation may have generated movements of hill peoples downwards, it was not a one-way flow.”

The boundary in the form of regulation was never removed in the period after independence. During the post-independence period, the Government of India permitted the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 to play a divisive as well as patronizing role, segregating the hill tribes and the plains. In this context, one is reminded of what Verrier Elwin said: “The policy of the government during the pre-independence period was to attempt no more than a skeleton administration in the foothills; to send out punitive

expedition in reaction to the more serious raids; to impose blockades and establish fortified posts at strategic points; and in certain cases, to pay what is called *posa* to the chiefs on condition that they kept their people under control” (1999, xvii). “Since only certain ethnic groups legally belong to these territories, it is not difficult to see why those living behind the Inner Line would develop a stake in defending this colonial institution. After all, it becomes a legitimate way of excluding outsiders” (Baruah, 2008, 18).

We can contend that during the pre-colonial period the idea of borders was virtually non-existent for people living in borders. However, the politics of cartography was set in motion after the advent of British colonials in North East India. In later years this was followed up by the postcolonial state by setting up the State Reorganisation Commission of 1953. Banerjee (2010, 93) who believes that British rule played its part in making the north-eastern region multi-ethnic, also adds that it created borders and boundaries between diverse groups of people, classifying them as civilised and uncivilised.

Schandel (2004, 3) says that borders merge with work on identity, ethnicity, citizenship and culture and that the focus to study borders be shifted from state strategies to the people living in the borders. North East India is a British imperial construct subsequently accepted by the post-colonial nation-state which emerged in British colonial discourses as frontier region. (ibid: 4) During the British rule most of these areas of this region were however brought under one administrative unit. Even after Independence, most of these areas remained as a single administrative unit in the name of Assam. But since the sixties, the process of reorganisation of the states in North East India started and consequently the states and union territories such as Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1972), Arunachal Pradesh (1972), Mizoram (1972) have been carved out of the original state of Assam. All these newly formed states cover a wide range of hill areas inhabiting various hill tribes with different traditions, culture, and social system characteristically distinct from the people of the plains who occupied the dominant position in the undivided Assam (Phukon, 1996, 14).

Hussain, in clarifying that there had always been close association between people of the hills and those of the plains writes,

The hill tribes however did not remain as isolated as it is often but erroneously supposed. Apart from the more perceptible results of interaction in the

marshlands there is evidence to suggest a continuous and close contact between the hills and the plains. This was a relationship that was later blurred by an overemphasis on the part of the British of the obvious physical and cultural differences. (Hussain, 1996, 16)

Chaube (2012, 88) contends that the story of the tribal area will not be complete without a reference to its administrative pattern. In the case of North East Frontier Agency, the administration was not isolating the tribal people rather bringing them a little too quickly into the main stream of modern life (Elwin, 2009, 3). The administrative approach in dealing with the hill tribes was a way to set control on mobility in the areas.

The British government was overall inclined to leave the tribesmen alone, partly because the task of administration, especially in the wild border area, was difficult and unrewarding; they were also inclined to such a line of thinking because of a desire to quarantine the tribes from possible political infection and many officers sincerely believed that the people were better and happier as they were (ibid, 1). Economically resourceful areas that were under the Ahoms drew the attention of the Britishers. It was then, when the territories over which the Ahom government earlier had exercised exclusive administrative powers, to the exclusion of all other neighbours, got separated from the territories now brought under direct British administration (Bezbaruah, 2010, 3).

The enactment of Inner Line Regulation of 1873 was not with the aim (as it is often thought) of isolating the hill people from the plains, but to bring ‘under more stringent control the commercial relations of British subjects with the frontier tribes’ (Elwin, 2009, 16). The regulation was a segregation of hills and plains, the tax-paying region and the non-tax paying region which separated tracts inhabited by tribesmen from the districts of Assam and from the British administration. The quarantined area restricted mobility of the outsiders (non-natives) for the expected benefit of the insiders where the traditional structure of governance continued.

In similar vein, Bezbaruah noted,

In tune with this policy, the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation of 1880 enabled government of Assam to appoint political officers to look after “any tract

inhabited or frequented by barbarous, or semi civilised tribes adjoining or with the borders of any of the districts included within the territories under the administration of the chief commissioner of Assam". The regulation empowered such officers to recommend boundaries between such tracts and the adjoining British territories. (Bezbaruah, 2010, 3)

The tribes were left to manage their own affairs except for interventions by the British officials under the Inner Line Regulation which covered the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Garo Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills and Cachar. Though the regulation intended to protect the living styles of the hill tribes, it was seen in several events that the Britishers had expedited beyond the Inner Line. This apparently created suspicion among the hill tribes as a threat to their way of life. However, there were several tussles not only between the hills and plains but it is reported that the Britishers had also run into trouble with the tribes on many occasions during the expedition carried out into the jungles. There were a series of expeditions carried out by the Britishers in the hilly terrains. In North Lakhimpur, one of the locations where the Inner Line was demarcated, the Britishers asked the chiefs/gams (village chief) to man their people failing which they would be befittingly punished. The hill men of Darrang and Lakhimpur (belonging to the Nyishi tribe) had reportedly raided inhabited areas of the plains in Chariduar and Lakhimpur.

In one such expedition of 1911, Noel Williamson, assistant political officer of Sadiya and his team were killed by Kebang and Rotung Abor villagers. This was the turning point for the Britishers to establish their military superiority over the tribal:

...[T]he disaster of March 1911 produced profound impact on the gamut of British policy towards the NE frontiers. Individual opinions expressed by officials regarding the necessity for bringing all the tribes under unequivocal British control in the backdrop of the Chinese threat now received the seal of approval as general policy to be pursued. (Bezbaruah, 2010, 56)

Subsequently, the British government introduced a new policy to maintain their hegemony over the hill tribes in the year after Williamson's murder. The policy by and large was to loosen political control over the hill tribes to inculcate in their mind a sense of independence and to pre-empt Sino-Tibetan meddling in the tribal life (ibid, 57). This

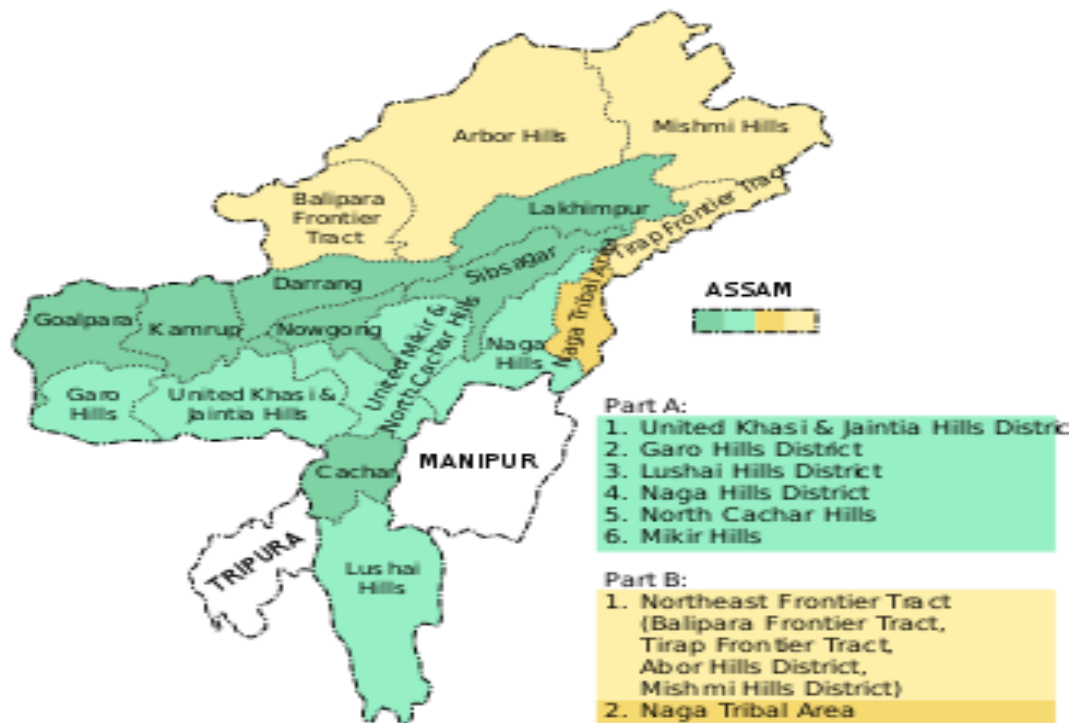
basically meant that there was a distinct possibility of the Chinese getting close to the tribals of Arunachal and if that happened, it would have been a hard-hitting blow to the hegemony of the Britishers over the hills. The news of Chinese reaching the frontiers was also doing the rounds in 1908: “Meanwhile, in February 1910, the Chinese reached Lhasa and the Dalai Lama escaped to India. By May 1910 alarming news of Chinese threat to Assam through the Lohit valley reached the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam” (ibid, 55).

The approach with respect to the hill tribes was thus to set a different governing pattern; it was perceived by the British that a direct show of power might lead to another conflict like the one with the Abors in 1911. This new style of governance was to focus on the area between the inner line and outer line. In order to have a complete settlement with the hill tribes it was imperative that the expedition teams reach the outer line that connected to other international territories.

Then in the 1914 notification of the Foreign and Political Departments, the government of British India, a new North-East Frontier tract was created under the jurisdiction of the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur. The three tracts were Central and Eastern sections, North East Frontier tract, the Western section, Frontier tract and the Lakhimpur Frontier tract. Basically, the frontiers converted to tracts during the colonial days. Assam-Arunachal boundary skirmishes of the present day reflect the creation of the tracts to separate the hills from the plains, the plains that by then were considered to be an integral part of British India.

The same year witnessed the Mac Mohan line defining the outer most boundaries of the North East Frontier. North East Frontier was also known as the Chief Commissioner's Province, which was Assam in 1874 when it got separated from the Bengal Presidency. The inner boundary of the Central and Eastern sections, North East Frontier Tract included the tracts comprising the hills inhabited or frequented by Abors, Miris, Mishmis, Singphos, Nagas and Khamtis. The tract was separated from Lakhimpur district and included former Dibrugarh frontier tract, the strip of country south of Brahmaputra that included five villages inhabited by the Assamese. This section was renamed as Sadiya Frontier Tract by notification of 20 March 1919 which was later divided into Abor hills and Mishmi hills (Fig 3).

Figure 3. The North East Frontier Tracts



Source: Retrieved on 3 May 2017

from https://www.google.co.in/search?q=NEFA&source=Inms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj7_ogettPTAhUDfLwKHe0ZAVgQ_AUIBigB&biw=1366&bih=638#tbm=isch&q=North+east+frontier+tracts&imgsrc=9vm3-cjJMsy6BM

The Western tracts were inhabited by Bhutias, Akas, Daflas² [Nyishi], Miris and Abors. It was separated from Darrang and Lakhimpur districts from Subansiri River westwards to Dikrong River which was also later renamed as Balipara Frontier Tract (ibid, 62-63).

As such the hill areas were separated from the Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of the province of Assam to form the North East Frontier Tracts. The Tracts were again renamed during the post-colonial period: Kameng Frontier Division, Subansiri Frontier Division, Siang Frontier Division, Lohit Frontier division and Tirap Frontier Division.

² The term has been discarded in favour of Nyishi considering the former to have contained derogatory meaning given by the people of plains (Bora, 1994, 1)

The state of Arunachal Pradesh before converting into a full-fledged state was initially divided into tracts. It was divided into tracts by the British officials for easy administration. The province of Assam which was largely plain was separated from the tracts that consists the hill areas. The division was clearly a geographical division and had nothing to do with the socio-cultural boundaries. As such the whole of region were divided into hills and plains territories. This division is being contested by present states of the North East such as Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya.

Figure 4. Frontier Division converted to Frontier tracts in the post-colonial period



Source: Retrieved on 3May 2017 from https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/North-East_Frontier_Agency

In 1926, it was suggested that the Lakhimpur Frontier tract be abolished but it was later retained by the Deputy Commissioner with some rearrangements between Lakhimpur district, and Sadiya and Lakhimpur Frontier Tracts. With the creation of the three new tracts, the inner lines became rigid. Social mobilisation weakened along the inner

boundary of the tracts. In the writings of Elwin (1959), Phukon (1996), Sarangi & Pai (2011), Upadhyay (2009) so on, the inner line is studied from the perspective of a separatist approach of safeguarding the way of life of the hills from the outsiders for easy administration. However, Elwin had categorically admitted that the line was not to isolate the tribes. In the writings of Bezbaruah, the inner line appears to restrict the hill men from coming down to the plains more than with keeping the tribal aspirations intact:

On 24 August 1928, T.E Furze, Political officer of Sadiya emphasised that in the interest of exercising “loose political control” over the independent hillsmen, they should be encouraged to visit the plains during the winter by removal of restrictions on their coming and going to and from the plains. Government of Assam has accordingly exempted hillsmen residing temporarily in the plains and returning to the hills after a stay not more than six months, from the prohibition against crossing the inner lines of Balipar, Sadiya and Lakhimpur Frontier tracts without a pass under the head and seal of the concerned deputy commissioner. (Bezbaruah, *ibid*, 71)

The grounds on which the Inner Line had been designed in 1873 appear shaky. On one hand, it appeared to be safeguarding the hill men’s cultural and socio-economic aspirations and on the other hand, it restricted social mobility, keeping the hills and plains divided. This leads to the understanding of hills and plains being divided in the lines of what Maitra & Maitra (1995) describe as the ‘apartheid law’. The British administered the hills separately from the plains and they were not sufficiently integrated with the people of the plains (Phukon, 1996, 3). Phukon (*ibid*) further states that it is difficult to assess accurately if this was done deliberately in consonance with the policy of ‘divide and rule’ or it was due to a policy of not disturbing susceptibilities of the hill people.

Maitra and Maitra (1995) believed that the first strategy of the British East India Company towards the area was to set it up as a separate entity.

To make sure that the tribals remained separated from the plains people, and the economic interests of the British in the plains were not disturbed. To ensure that all tribal aspirations were ruthlessly curbed by keeping the bogey of the plains people dangling in their faces; and to ensure that the tribal feudal order remained

intact, with the paraphernalia of tribal chiefs and voodoo doctors kept in place. Part of this plan was carried out through the bribing of tribal chiefs with paltry gifts. (Maitra, Maitra, 1995)

However, much later, under the government of India Act, 1935, the administration of hill areas of the province of Assam were classified into Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, with the Excluded Areas remaining under the jurisdiction of the Governor of Assam who exercised discretionary power without ministerial advice. The initiative in all legislative and executive acts in the Partially Excluded areas lay with the provincial ministers but the Governor of Assam had special responsibility acting in his individual judgement in this field (Ray and Agarwal, 1996, 6).

The hills categorised as “Excluded Areas” comprised of North East Frontier Agency, Naga Hills, North Cachar Hills, Lushai Hills, and “Partially Excluded Areas” included the Garo Hills, Khasi Hills and Mikir Hills. The excluded areas had exclusive tribal population while the partially excluded areas had mixed populations, both tribal and non-tribal (Sarangi, Pai, 2011, 284). In the tracts, the inner lines became more rigid in terms of restricting mobility and socio-cultural links between the hills and plains. “The inner line became a frontier within a frontier adding to the seclusion of the hills and enhancing the cultural and political distance between them and the plains” (Bhaumik, 2009, 7). The political demarcation and separate system of administration in the hills had always been a factor of ethnic division between the hills and the plains (Phukon, 1996, 15).

3. 2 Contextualising and experiencing reorganisation

“I felt that we should avoid two extreme courses: one was to treat them as anthropological specimens for study and the other was to allow them to be engulfed by the masses of Indian humanity”.

-Jawaharlal Nehru

In Indian-and South Asian-political-administration discourse, Assam was finally replaced by ‘the North East’. After the reorganisation, Assam became just another state in the region east of the Siliguri corridor, controlling a much smaller piece of territory made up of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys and the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. The other hill region that had been added to Assam by the British were all gone. It

is debatable whether India gained anything by creating so many small and some say, economically non-viable-states in the North East (Bhaumik, 2009, 19).

It is indeed debatable, if the rationale behind creating independent states in the North East region after India's Independence served its purpose. The reorganisation of states after independence did pave the way for some communities to benefit from the separations; at the same time, the ongoing inter-state conflicts seem to be a by-product of the reorganisation. Sarangi and Pai (2011, 23) are of the view that it is the theory and practice within which the rationale of reorganisation was conceptualised needs serious academic engagement. The duo also states that doing this will open up the debate on issues of vital concern such as the nature and form of political and cultural inclusion, democratisation of regional identities and centralisation of political power both at the centre and states.

After independence, regions across the country started demanding exclusive political spaces so as to protect their respective cultural identities, languages and resources from the influence of outsiders. The same undercurrent was also witnessed in the North East India with different ethnic groups appealing for a means to maintain their distinct identities. It was a tough ride for the Government of India as there were other political settlements to meet. The States Reorganisation Act of 1956 which was the driving force for reorganising the boundaries of Indian states saw the creation of separate states in India based on linguistic lines but in the case of North East India it was the call for socio-cultural identities on the basis of ethnic groupings.

In the process of such state-making, borders were drawn to allocate distinctive space and place to the people of the states. Phukon (1996, 1) opines that politics in North East India is the urge of different ethnic groups for maintaining their distinct identities. The border drawn as a result of the reorganisation of states after Independence can have different meanings attached to it. The region that emerged in the colonial discourses as frontier has the history of being created as tracts, divisions and then as different states of the present day. With India's independence in 1947, the wave of building states gained popularity. There were demands for new states from all quarters of the country with justifications as to why the creations be considered. It was during this time when political leaders belonging to different political parties shared and debated on different visions

about reorganisation of regions and province (Sarangi and Pai, 2011, 7). Various linguistic-cultural minorities in the then existing large states called for recognition of their linguistic and cultural identities (ibid, 12). North East India was touched by the same wave, with demands roaring high for regional autonomy and better status than the hill tribes of Assam within the constitutional framework.

After the Cabinet Mission Plan of May 16, 1946 which laid the foundation stone of power transfer in the country, the demand for reorganisation of the states gained currency. The Cabinet Mission stressed on introducing an Advisory Committee to address the aspirations of the Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas. The committee was constituted with Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel as the chairman, who then constituted a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi. Before the implementation of the 1956 Act, there were many other submissions by different committees constituted to consider the reorganization of the states.

In the words of Dhar (2011, 283) reorganisation in the case of Assam was not a post-colonial experience as the British had contracted and expanded its territorial boundary several times to suit their administrative and imperial interests. It is pertinent to note that India's independence did not come with just getting freed from the clutches of the British rule but the daunting task of 'integration of states' which required a careful and pragmatic political strategy on the part of national leaders combining cultural diversity with the political unity of the country (Sarangi, 2011, 29). The question of North East India figured prominently in the Constituent Assembly debates with the introduction of the Advisory Committee and this in turn, led to the formation of a sub-committee on 27th February 1947 to take note of the needs of the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribals.

Before Independence, the Government of India Act, 1935 experimented with an organisational structure wherein some of the territories in the North-East India were arranged for smooth administration. The hill areas of the province of Assam were classified into 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' areas at that time with the former resting under the control of the Governor of Assam. This concept of 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' areas conceived by the British officials was borrowed by the independent state of India. It became the parameter to approach vast areas of undivided

Assam. The framers of the Constitution of India introduced the Sixth Schedule to serve provisions for the administration of tribal areas based on the sub-committee report.

Gopinath Bordoloi developed his arguments very much in sync with the British concepts of 'excluded' and 'partially excluded areas'. He sought to categorise the tribal population of the North-East India according to their respective material and social progress.

Chowdhury explaining further writes,

In the first category, he included the plain tribals who were considered relatively advanced, the second category comprised hill tribals administered directly by the Governor of Assam (marked as 'excluded areas' in government of India act, 1935) and the third category related to hill people generally on the southern bank of the Brahmaputra proposed to be brought under the Sixth Schedule 'to be administered as autonomous groups'. (Chowdhury, 1996, 219)

Choudhuri and Choudhuri (1996, 93) believe that the national leaders as well as administrators did not have a clear perception about the diverse communities of North East India after independence, adding that it was a deliberate attempt on their part to bring all the communities under the rule of the then Assam province.

In the Sixth Schedule, the 'Excluded' and 'Partially Excluded' areas did find a mention. The 'Partially Excluded' areas were the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District, the Garo Hills, the North Cachar Hills and the Mikir Hills which were mentioned in Part-A of the schedule. North East Frontier Tract including Balipara Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract, Sadiya Frontier Tract (which were divided into two districts Abor Hills district and Mishmi Hills district in 1948), and the Naga Tribal Areas were defined in Part-B of the schedule. Prior to framing the Sixth Schedule in the Constitution of India, the subcommittee headed by Gopinath Bordoloi comprised of Rev JJM Nicholas Roy, Khasi leader, a minister of Assam and a member of the Constituent Assembly, Rupnath Brahma, a plains tribal leader, and AV Thakkar a social worker among central Indian tribes and chairman of the second subcommittee.

The Bordoloi Sub-committee co-opted two members from each of the hill districts of Assam but no member was nominated from the Sadiya, Balipara, Lakhimpur and Tirap frontier tracts (Dhar, 2011, 286). Sections of the hill tribes even today define the report

as being an apathetic approach for not picking their representative in the subcommittee. The members of the committee travelled parts of the hill areas to read and make sense of their socio-political and socio-cultural aspirations. “After studying their views thoroughly, the Bordoloi subcommittee submitted its report where it argued that ‘all the tribes of the province other than Assam, whether living in the plains or in the partially excluded tracts, should as a whole be treated as minority’” (ibid).

The chairman of the subcommittee wrote to the chairman of the Advisory Committee on Fundamental Rights Minorities in the general description section referring to the Act of 1935, the Government of India. He informed that Balipara, Sadiya and Lakhimpur are frontier areas inhabited by tribes in an early stage of development, adding that the Naga tribal area on Eastern Frontier and the Balipara, Sadiya and Lakhimpur or Tirap frontier tracts on the North Eastern fall under the same category. These tracts are now included in the Part-B of the Sixth Schedule. The sub-committee report was submitted in July 28, 1947 pitching for the autonomy of the hill tribes, just five months after it was constituted for the ground work in the hill region. The subcommittee suggested classification of the North East Frontier (Assam) into autonomous and non-autonomous region. Under the autonomous region, it included the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills, the Naga Hills, the Lushai Hills, the Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills and under non autonomous region Sadiya, Balipara and the Tirap Frontier Tracts and the Naga Tribal Area were suggested to be brought together.

Part B of the table in paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule which had mentioned that the Frontier Tracts be brought under its fold, was not practically applied. No autonomy in the form of autonomous council was directed at them. On its recommendation, the Sixth Schedule was incorporated into the Constitution of India which provided mainly administrative autonomy to the hill people of the region to preserve their unique culture or to maintain the multi-colour culture of the nation as a whole. Most probably it was the best politico-administrative strategy to be adopted by the country working towards ‘unity in diversity’ without destroying the multi-colour culture of the nation. Hazarika (2011) writes, “Interestingly enough within sixty years on independence of India different social groups have started searching for ‘Unity in Diversity’.”

While there were oppositions Dr Ambedkar, the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the constitution, too, expressed his views in favour of granting the hill people more autonomies by creating the Autonomous District Council. He said, “The hill tribes basically different with other tribes of India in several matters. Hence, they must be given certain cultural, social and religious and customary autonomies” (Singh, 2004, 55). Meanwhile, the subject of state reorganisation that gained momentum in the following year (1948) saw the constitution of Linguistic Provinces Commission also commonly known as Dhar Commission under the chairmanship of SK Dhar. The commission reflected upon the issues of organising states on linguistic basis. The idea of linguistic redistribution of state was put forward by the Indian National Congress, in its various sessions since 1905 (Dhar, 2011, 287). Language as a base for the reorganization of states was rejected and the Dhar commission instead laid stress on geographical contiguity, financial self-reliance, administrative viability and potential for development (DC, 1948). Extending recommendations of the Dhar commission of 1948, in the same year JVP committee was constituted to look at the reorganisation work with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbai Patel, and Pattabhi Sitaramayya as members.

Both Dhar commission and JVP committee expressed their concerns regarding new forms of inequalities and hierarchies based on the disproportionate spread of linguistic majority and minority groups in these reorganised provinces (ibid, 7). The JVP committee recommended the reorganization of States on the basis of security, unity and economic prosperity of the nation (JVP, 1949).

Before the States Reorganisation Commission of 1953, it was in the year 1954 in the North East India, under the North-East Frontier Areas Regulation 1954 administrative units like the Balipara Frontier Tract, the Tirap Frontier Tract, the Abor Hills district, the Mishmi Hills district and the Naga Tribal area were collectively known as the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). Under this regulation the Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into separate units of administration called the Subansiri Frontier Division and the Kameng Frontier Division. Later, Abor Hills district was renamed as Siang Frontier Division, Mishmi Hills as Lohit Frontier division and Naga Tribal area as Tuensang Frontier division. This was happening in the North East Frontier then when the administrators of independent India were trying to cater to the other growing demands for separate states in the South and the North.

In August 1953, the then Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru appointed the States Reorganization Commission (SRC), with Justice Fazal Ali, KM Panikkar and Hridaynath Kunzru as members, to examine the issue of reorganization of the states of the union objectively (SRC). The commission also known as Fazal Ali commission in its report on September 1955 called for reorganisation of states based on linguistic and cultural homogeneity, preservation and strengthening of the unity and security of the nation, financial, economic and administrative considerations and planning and promotion of the welfare of the people in each state as well as of the nation (FAC, 1955).

“It suggested the reorganization of 27 states of various categories into 16 states and 3 Union Territories. The recommendations of the Fazal Ali Commission were accepted by the Indian Government with minor modifications. As a result, the State Reorganization Act of 1956 was passed by the Parliament to give effect to the recommendation of the commission. It led to the formation of 14 states and 6 Union Territories on 1st November 1956” (Fazl Ali, 2013).

Figure 5. Four-fold distribution of states

Category	Description	Administrator	States
Part A states	Former British provinces	An elected governor and state legislature	9 states: Assam, Bihar, Bombay, East Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal
Part B states	Former princely states or groups of Covenanted states	Rajpramukh (former princes)	9 states: Hyderabad, Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Bharat, Mysore, Patiala and East Punjab States Union (PEPSU), Rajasthan, Saurashtra, Travancore-Cochin, and Vindhya Pradesh

Part C	Former princely states and provinces	Chief commissioner	10 states: Ajmer, Coorg, Cooch-Bihar, Bhopal, Bilaspur, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Kutch, Manipur, and Tripura
Part D	Union Territory	Governor appointed by the Indian president	Andaman and Nicobar Islands

Source: Retrieved on 12 April 2017 from

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States_Reorganisation_Commission#cite_ref-Showick2009_2-2

The SRC report advocated its decision and asked for removal of the “four-fold distribution of states” and as such the country was divided into 14 states and 6 union territories under the State’s Reorganization Act of 1956 by the Government of India. The act was implemented in November 1956 with creation of states; Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Bombay, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Madras, Mysore, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. The six union territories were Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Laccadive, Minicoy and Amindivi Islands, Manipur and Tripura.

In the process of executing the plan, it sharpened dormant ethnic identities. The tribes, residing in the hills areas of North East India, thought that the reorganisation criterion applied to other states of India could be also applied for the division of Assam. The ethnic aspiration of tribals came forth during the implementation of the reorganisation plan, though at that time their demand did not have a strong linguistic base. Dhar (2011, 284) shares that the conflict arose between ethnic majority and minorities or tribals and the issue of state reorganisation became much larger than just territorial division – it assumed the image of ethnic identity representation.

SRC's linguistic reorganisation plan though accepted in other parts of the country experienced a serious opposition from the Legislative Assembly of Assam. Bishnu Ram Medhi, the CM of Assam (1950-1957) stated that:

In any case, we do not favour reorganisation of state on the basis of language alone. There are so many dialects prevalent among the hills that if linguistic basis were pursued to its logical conclusion, every range in the hills would have to be framed into a separate state. Once the claim for language as the criteria for reorganisation of state is conceded it would be difficult to resist the force of disintegration, particularly in a state like Assam which it is feared would fall into pieces. (Dhar, 2011, 287)

It was clear from the statement that a linguistic based approach to reorganise the North East Frontier (undivided Assam) was untenable and that it would instead create chaos among the homogenous communities. The intentions appeared to be like an intense political exercise in exhibiting autonomy over a vast region fearing breakage in the cultural and historical mosaic of the region. North East Frontier was then undergoing fragmentation in the form of hills and plains, the core idea of reorganisation that was to integrate was being questioned when the Constitution of India was being framed.

After the State Reorganisation Act of 1954, in 1957 the region experienced territorial readjustments with the North East Frontier Tract, the Lushai Hills, the Tuensang division of the NEFA and the Naga Hills district trending as separate administrative units as prescribed in the Sixth Schedule. Mere 'administrative units' status did not address to the region's requests, as such there were undercurrents in striving for a full-fledged state. While the opposition voices on reorganisation of North East Frontier were growing loud, in other parts of the region, the hills united under the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) to challenge the ethnic Assamese leadership.

The APHLC demanded strongly for hill states. The hills finally received a sigh of relief when the much awaited-political commitment by the central government for territorial division of Assam was announced with a 'Federal Plan' of administration of North-Eastern state on 13 January 1967 which was again slammed by the political leadership as well as civil society organisation of Assam like the Asom Sahitya Sabha stating that "it

was not mere reorganisation or division of Assam but deconstruction of Assam” and they “termed it as undemocratic and unconstitutional” (ibid, 290-91).

It was in 1963, the state of Nagaland was born out of Assam. This achievement was like the light at the end of a tunnel for other administrative units of the North East Frontier (undivided Assam) to demand for the same. Bhaumik (2009, 16) shares, it was the prospect of Chinese military entering into the Naga Hills through eastern Arunachal Pradesh that weighed heavily on Nehru and his colleagues when they decided to break away from ‘Greater Assam’ model of administrations in India’s North Eastern Frontier and confer full statehood to Nagaland.

After the ‘Federal Plan’ of 1967 was put to place meeting the demands of the APHLC, five states and two union territories were carved out of Assam. Tripura, Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Assam were formed as states. Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh became Union Territories. All the newly formed states and UTs including Assam were placed under the North Eastern Council in August 1972 (ibid, 292).

SN Ray in the foreword of *Politics of Regionalism in North East India* writes,

The emergence of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Mizoram in the sixties and seventies through the process of reorganisation of states in North East India out of the original state of Assam, represented the fulfilment of the socio-political aspirations of the hill people with their distinct socio-cultural identities, who resented the long years of exploitation and insecurity within the administrative unit of greater Assam. The continuance of inter-state conflict in North East, especially the border disputes and the anti –Assam movement, is basically a hangover of the earlier love-hate relationship days during the pre-independence period right upto the sixties, in particular, the ‘imperialist policy over the Assamese’, alleged to have been pursued by the Assamese majority. (Phukon, 1996, x)

In what appeared to be the right way to process the rearrangement of the states in North East, it was difficult to take a decision that was acceptable to all. The views on the process found many expressions that scrutinised the future roles it would play in regularising the administration in the region.

Bhaumik (2009, 15) reads that the SRC was unwilling to recommend the use of the linguistic principle in the North East because it was uncertain about how the stability of a sensitive frontier region would be affected by such a move. As such in the case of the North-East it was reorganisation on the basis of ethno-cultural apparatus. The linguistic principle was not in any ways practically possible in the case of the North East India. This would mean creating miniature states economically not viable for the Centre to aid and difficult for the state administrators as well. The reorganisation of the states in India in ways advocates the significance of geographical boundaries as markers of administrative control with socio-cultural aspiration as its foundation.

BG Verghese (2011, vii) expressing his view on reorganisation of states also said, “India is not a territorial expression-it is an idea, a tradition and, lest we forget, an aspiration. It is a civilizational concept. Mere Geography does not tell us what India is about. The reorganisation of states focused on the territorial aspect. However, we cannot ignore the other and more important axis representing the people of India.”

In other areas, the reorganisation plan evolved with sustained political mobilisation, whereas redrawing boundaries in the North-East was more a top-down process with very little involvement of people involved (Baruah, 1990, 106). North-East India was under the radar as integration of the peripheral areas and people into the Indian union became rapid. “On the other hand, tribal population who had earlier been confined to what were termed partially and totally ‘excluded area’- that is, excluded from provincial governance to remain directly under the viceroy-wanted time to understand what was happening and where they were being placed and what all this might mean for them and their aspirations” (Sarangi, Pai, 2011, xi).

Experiencing the sudden jolt of territorialising, it took time for the people of the region to realise their political goals in state forming. Language and culture were the dominant factors though there were socio-economic factors behind the demand for a separate hill state, PC Biswas (1996, 155). This was the parameter to read the demands of the hill tribes on ‘Excluded’ and ‘Partially Excluded’ areas thereby stressing on the roles of language, culture, customs, dialect, tradition, and historical background.

Phukon (1996, 61) viewed the history of North East region as being chequered with the struggles for regional, linguistic and cultural identity of the nationalities inhabiting in the

region. Some of these groups were fighting for creation of separate states on the basis of their cultural identities and others pressed for special constitutional safeguards of their respective identities.

Administration was not easy in this part of the world as expressed by the British officials like Verrier Elwin (1959) and Alexander Mackenzie (1973) in their writings. During the pre-colonial era, however, the administrative ways were simpler. It was the village chief who looked after the community. Though the idea of segregation between hills and plains was existent one had very little experience of it then; the situation became complex during the colonial days and in the days, that followed it. Social and cultural exclusiveness of the region in all terms was the reason for the demise of ‘Greater Assam’ in 1972. Carving out six states from Assam did not put an end to territorial conflicts in the region. Instead, it intensified the claims and counter claims over the inter-state boundaries.

3. 3 Assam-Arunachal border: 1951 Notification

“At a time when the state seems pervasive and inescapable, it is easy to forget that for much of history, living within or outside the state—or in an intermediate zone—was a choice, one that might be revised as the circumstances warranted.” (Scott, 2009)

Widening the historical lens, the genesis of Assam-Arunachal border can be traced back to the pre-colonial days when the idea of nation-state was not ripe and people belonging to the North East Frontier Region (undivided Assam) was agog with a community way of life. It was considered as a unit of the British administration which in the year 1915 saw the origin of North East Frontier Tracts. The North East Frontier Tracts were designated only for the hill areas of the North East Frontier. After the nation’s independence, the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India as recommended by the North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded areas subcommittee of the Constituent Assembly further divided the tracts into ‘Excluded’ and ‘Partially Excluded’ areas. The ‘Excluded’ areas included Balipara Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract, Sadiya Frontier Tract and Naga Tribal area which were appended in Table B of the Sixth Schedule.

Much later after the hill areas were categorised (like the British officials did in the colonial days), it was the 1951 notification of the Union of India that changed the

geographical, cultural and social montage of the region. This has been the bone of contention till date between Assam and Arunachal. At present the matter is pending with the Supreme Court of India. Both the states are part of the judicial battle with claims and counter claims.

The 1951 notification notified that plain areas measuring approximately 3648 sq. Kms from the North East Frontier Tracts need not be included in the tribal areas as specified in table B of the Sixth Schedule. This meant that the plain areas earlier under NEFT used for agricultural activities by the hill tribes should not be included in the tribal areas. The provision in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India reads, “Provided that the tribal areas specified in Part B of the table shall not include any such areas in the plains as may, with the previous approval of the President, be notified by the Governor or Assam in that behalf.”

The process of state-making has often produced peripheries of exclusion and inclusion. The people who live in these peripheries are supposedly “state subjects” under the state’s territorial control. The administrations of both the states claim to be “in-charge” of the boundary areas, thereby claiming to classify who can have access to the land and who cannot.

The construction of schools, religious establishments, market, and Police stations alongside the Arunachal-Assam border is a political process of reiterating the claim of “our land”. On the other hand, it is the traditional boundaries like the rivers, forests, agricultural land, festival grounds that are used to validate land ownership. This allows us to explore the way in which the Assam- Arunachal border is manifested in the choices people (who live alongside the border) make in their discourses.

The British colonial policy of exclusion, partial exclusion and non-interference in dealing with the tribals and the imposed policy of isolation and deliberate intention to encourage continuation of tradition helped maintain separate entity in spite of existing ethno-lingual diversities within varied environmental conditions. Behera (1996) adds that the whimsical administrative divisions compartmentalised different ethnic sub-groups which strengthened their sense of independence.

As explained earlier, the Sixth Schedule was planned with recommendations made by the Bordoloi commission. However, the subcommittee which was technically constituted to recommend ways for proper administration of the hill areas instead went on to demarcate the hills and plains without much idea of the people who resided in the then NEFA. Records however reveal that many “hills people” also resided in the plains of Assam. But the new politics of cartography ensured that barriers were created in a place where none existed. The moot point is that in the pre-colonial era these lands, the hills and the plains were not exclusive and were resources that were shared.

State reorganisation in North East India was not of interest to the administrators of the nation. Moreover, unlike state reorganisation in the rest of India which was based on language, the reorganisation of this region was on ethnic identity. The hills are not simply a space of political resistance but also a zone of cultural refusal (Scott, 2009, 41). This can be seen in the case of Assam-Arunachal border, wherein the narratives are overburdened with cultural-ethnic, administrative, economic and political boundaries. In the words of Scott, it is the “cultural chasm” between the mountains and the plains that can be seen as part and parcel of the Arunachal-Assam border history.

The government of Arunachal Pradesh termed the 1951 notification as “defective”, “a curse”, “biased” and said that it was a whimsical approach on the part of the framers. This was evident in its appeal to the officials of Union of India through various representations and memorandums. These representations were even raised in the floor of the Lok Sabha in 1961. Daying Ering, the then Minister of State for Agriculture in the Union of India, had raised the issue in the question hour if the Union of India was aware of the boundary skirmishes in the North Eastern part of India. The notification also drew the attention of other states bordering Assam which exhibited strong opposition in their referrals through memorandums.

After six years of protest from the tribal people of the Frontier areas since 1951, it was in 1957 that the Union of India re-notified the 1951 notification. However, this did not appear any different from what was prescribed in the previous notification as it did not look into the issue of ‘transferred areas’ to Assam.

Challenging the 1951 notification, the government of Arunachal Pradesh stated that in order to deal with the issue of boundary demarcation there should have been a Tripartite Committee with representative from both the states and the Union of India. As such it claimed that the notification was “defective” because of its “arbitrary”, “ex-parte” and “unilateral” nature. When the issue was taken upfront, the reports of the subcommittee headed by Gopinath Bordoloi came under the scanner. He being the then Chief Minister of Assam, was another cause of suspicion. While it was hard for the hill tribes to see it as an effort in their support, the subcommittee did recommend what it could from the views it had gathered from the region. The efforts of the subcommittee were tagged as a failure as it reportedly failed to draw opinions of the hill tribes living in the foothills. “No tribes were consulted on the territorial plan. The present problems between the tribes in several north-eastern states are a proof of such limitation. They were all put together without even knowing whether they can be together” (Sarangi and Pai, 2011, 300).

About the same notification of 1951, the state of Assam had all together a different view. It considered the notification to be a practical and a realistic one. According to them the notification righted the historical wrong when sparse areas taken from the Darang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam was included in the North East Frontier Tract. In 1965, a meeting under the chairmanship of Governor of Assam was held to look into the claims of Likabali area.

It was noted in the Local Commission Report of 2014,

Galos numbering about 600 had settled there in five villages claiming the area occupied by them under NEFA. In the meeting, it was stated that as the boundary between Assam and NEFA had been statutorily defined through the issue of notifications, it should be clearly made known to all concerned that no claims for any change in the boundary line between NEFA and Assam would be entertained. It was decided that a plan for regular settlement of these areas should be prepared by Assam government, which should permit the allocation of compact blocks to the Adis of NEFA who may choose to settle in these parts. The people of these areas should be entitled to the usual tribal privilege of exemption from revenue, utilisation of minor forest produce, financial assistance for education and other

laws which protect their special rights for development and economic growth.
(LCR)

In the words of Laishram (2005), the above record expresses that “The people of North East India has failed themselves; they are suffering from a twin inability to evolve a common imaginary and say ‘we’.” He (ibid) is also of the view that the failure to imagine a common future has long been aggravated by a fragmentation of ethnic identities which got legitimated by the formation of ethno-linguistic states. This is obvious with the claims being made in series of meeting between the two state governments.

Considering the importance of demarcating boundaries between the two states, in the year 1979 a High Powered Tripartite Committee (HPTC) was constituted. The committee comprised of representatives from the Union Government, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh for settling the boundary demarcation issue. The task of delineating boundaries according to the existing notifications on maps, and survey on the ground and demarcation with pillars were to be taken by the HPTC. From 1979 to 1980 the HPT committee had several meetings wherein it presented three sets of maps (each set of 29 maps) with the boundary delineated on them that was signed on October 29, 1980 by the representatives of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and the Convenor of the Committee. The maps were furnished to both the states “for acceptance with mutually agreed adjustments to take further steps for survey on the ground for demarcation.” (www.gov.ap.in)

However, the Arunachal government did not agree to the boundaries depicted in the 29 maps and instead constituted a 25 member team that included public leaders and administrative officers. “In response, the Government of Assam filed Original Suit No.1 of 1989 before the Supreme Court seeking demarcation of boundary on basis of Section 7 of the North Eastern Areas (Reorganization) Act, 1971, which in fact excluded tribal areas given to Assam by the 1951 Notification from the territory of Arunachal Pradesh.” (arunachalpradesh.gov.in)

Earlier in the year 1971, the decision over the 1951 notification was such that it would be exercised in toto for demarcating the boundaries. The representatives from Assam, Arunachal and Survey of India were present at the meeting. The Assam-Arunachal

boundary dispute is manifested in the 1951 notification and till date it is being contested in the Supreme Court of India. The notification that had transferred some areas to Assam is being claimed by Arunachal Pradesh which remains excluded from it till date despite several memorandums served. Many representations were made against the notification. A high level meeting between the chief ministers of the two states was also held in January 1976. The states resolved to carry out a joint study team to be constituted and maintain status quo. Following this, the status quo agreement between the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh was introduced in 20th March 1979.

Both the states also asserted their rights over the Reserved Forests in the borders through encroachment. The government of Arunachal Pradesh highlighted that in the absence of a constitutional provision during the NEFA days it was the government of Assam that governed NEFA and under the provision of Assam Forest Regulation Act large parts of the NEFA territory were taken under its fold. Opposing the claims, the Assam counterpart retorted that there were no inhabitants in the notified area of the Subansiri and Jiadhal Reserved Forest as claimed by Arunachal and that the Reserved Forests were under the administrative control of the Government of Assam since 1970.

It may be noted that the inter-state conflict in North East region refers to the conflict in the form of border disputes between the Assam plains with its neighbouring hill states particularly with Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Mizoram. The basis on which the boundaries are demarcated also includes identifying the cultural practices and ethnic identity of the people living in the Frontiers. Land ownership being the most important factor of tribal aspiration has taken both the states to a ring fight. Bhaumik (2009, 61) shares that land in pre-industrial societies like the 'North East' is not merely an economic resource but is often seen as a symbol of the collective – loss of land is generally seen as the beginning of loss of social and political power and prestige.

The 1951 notification gave much impetus to the land as a tool to demarcate the boundaries of the two states. The demarcation was not on the basis of the ethnic origin of its inhabitants but on the basis of whether a particular area is in the plains or not (LCR). This meant that it was a direct geographical divide between the hills and plains not on the possibility that the hill tribes could have come down to foothills for convenience in cultivation or that there was a barter system involving people from both the states.

The representatives from Arunachal Pradesh of the HPTC of 1979 visited places and recommended certain adjustments of boundary between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh for Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit, and Tirap districts.

‘Adjustment proposal’ was made for Likabali which the state of Arunachal Pradesh claims to be its part with Rajgarh Ali as traditional boundary between the plains and the hills. To this proposal the Assam government responded stating that it was never a part of Arunachal since the Ahom days and that the Galo tribe residing now in Likabali were on high hills and on the north of present constitutional boundary. The Assam government, taking a dig at the proposal, said that Arunachal Pradesh’s understanding of the term ‘adjustment’ is misplaced and misleading adding that ‘adjustment means to alter in order to achieve a correct or desired result’ (LCR). The Local Commission (LC) was also of the view that the state of Arunachal Pradesh should have asked for minor adjustments instead of demanding unilateral transfer of large tracts of land.

Arunachal submitted proposal for adjustment of boundary to the state of Assam in 1983 and 1989. Assam further slammed the claim made by Arunachal stating that it is not “borne out by available records and facts” and also “the Commission of Arunachal Pradesh, who was present at the time of survey did not raise any objection to the boundary, pointed out by Survey of India nor the government of Arunachal raised any objection over the years. Hence, there is no requirement or good reason at this state to re-open the settled boundary in this area that too after almost three decades, when doubts regarding the ground position has been put to rest by the survey” (HPTC). The state of Assam out rightly rejected the ‘Adjustment proposal’ opposing readjustments of the inter-state boundary on the basis of traditional and customary right exercised by the tribes of the state in the foothills (LCR).

There were several rounds of meetings including the chief ministers of both the states since 1951 with an objective to resolve the boundary dispute. One such meeting of 1983 saw that it was a herculean task to bring the two states on board to accord. While Arunachal demanded for some adjustments with the boundary demarcation in Likabali and other border areas, Assam tagged it as an “unfounded belated demand” (LCR) and asked them to elaborate with concrete reasons and justifications as to why their request be accepted. It was vide letter No. HMB/3/83, dated 1983 that Arunachal had demanded

for return back of 1085.82 sq.kms out of the transferred territory of 3648.85 sq.kms in 1951 to Assam.

The meetings were not limited to higher level meeting; there were local bodies' meeting as well. An emergency meeting was held at Likabali on 27 November 1971 under Tanari Dai of Bogo Bango as chairperson. During the meeting, several resolutions were adopted such as demanding the withdrawal of central survey party of the North Eastern circle employed to demarcate the NEFA-Assam boundary in order to avoid unpleasant consequence. The meeting also demanded that the Central government of India constitute a boundary commission to enquire properly into the boundary dispute and finalise the NEFA-Assam boundary. Some notices were made in another meeting on 12th May 1979 held at Pasighat.

The resolution of the meeting read,

The notification of 1951-52 was issued by the Assam government arbitrarily without the consent of the people. The people are not satisfied and would not tolerate the ground-survey according to that notification... In the Bogum-Bokang meeting held at Likhabali in 1961, the public demanded in the meeting that if the ground survey is to be done, it should be done according to both the lines given in 1961 (1914) and 1951-52. Both the lines of approach must be referred to for the amicable settlement of the problem. The people further focussed their attention on the fact that after 1950 the entire area of Jonai (transferred area) was given to the Mising brothers as the big earthquake had devastated their land and settlement. They were given that area because we felt close affinity with them in matters of language, culture and customs and they were our kiths and kins. We felt that they too were our flesh and blood. Their whole welfare were look after the then NEFA administration. (Bogum Bokang Kebang, 1979)

The claims made in the meeting were also brought up by the Assam government. They believed that it was fault on part of the Arunachal to have chased away the central survey team. The Local Commission in its report of 2014 also stated that the field work of the demarcation of the boundary had commenced in 1983 but could not be completed due to local resistance and lack of cooperation from the state governments. The field work had

to be abandoned mid-way. In July 1989, the state government of Arunachal Pradesh urged the Survey of India not to involve itself in boundary demarcation between the state stating that the area was under dispute between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

In another meeting, the members vociferously said, “All territories carved out of Arunachal Pradesh and which were known and described as ‘transferred areas’ have been unilaterally and unjustly attached to the state of Assam” (Bogum-Bokang Kebang, 1983). It also appealed for withdrawal of Assam Police Battalions and Arunachal police till the boundary problem is solved and asked instead to bring CRPF for looking after the law and order situation. In several meetings at the local level, the 1914 notification was considered as the original, true, genuine and natural boundary of the region by Arunachal which otherwise is looked at as a historical mistake by Assam. In that notification, specific areas from the Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam were included in the North East Frontier Tract on the basis of tribes frequenting the plains areas.

Bezbaruah on territorial rearrangement informs,

In September 1914, a fresh division of the areas was made and three main units were established. On 21 March 1914, the Chief Commissioner of Assam made a formal proposal for constituting a new North-East Frontier Tract comprising of the two political charges and to define a new Frontier Tract under the jurisdiction of the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur. The proposed three new charges were to be known as 1) The Central and Easter section, North East Frontier Tract, Western Section, North East Frontier Tract and 3) The Lakhimpur Frontier Tract. The new territorial arrangements were approved by the Government of India. (Bezbaruah, 2010, 61)

The Survey of India which was made part of the HPTC in surveying the boundary areas in 1979 accordingly cartographed three sets of 29 maps which were given to both the states. The Survey of India had earlier in the years 1923, 1930, 1967 surveyed the North East Frontier. These maps in the present day serve as a parameter to look at the boundary demarcation issue. However, the survey team is being alleged of surveying only 396 km, leaving the rest of 308 km. As an offshoot to this, the boundary disputes still persist.

The state of Assam in their suit No.1/1989 filed to the SC mentioned that the state of Arunachal Pradesh is taking advantage of the fact that some segments of the boundary were not demarcated on the ground with the pillars. It asserted that the Arunachal Pradesh government is 'encouraging' and 'abetting' people from Arunachal to settle in 'contiguous areas on the border within the constitutional boundary of Assam with a view to claim that these territories form part of Arunachal Pradesh'.

In the year 2006, the SC appointed the Local Commission with a former Judge of as the chairperson to identify the boundaries between Nagaland, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The state of Arunachal Pradesh in its submission to the Local Commission sought inclusion of 1119.279 sq km within its territory based on historical records, old usages and practices as well as physical occupation and administrative control all along the inter-state boundary. This however was opposed by the state of Assam. Assam wrote to the commission stating that it would not accept the demarcation of boundary based on 'nebulous and ambiguous reference to traditions, customary usages, historical records and other aspects' (LCR).

The commission noted that the boundary dispute between the state of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh is long standing one (LCR). When the commission was constituted, places like Gumto, Kimin, Dullungmukh and Likabali were considered for the field visit. Bhalukpong, Kimin, Gumto and Gerukamukh were the list of places suggested by Assam government for the commission's visit. Arunachal Pradesh proposed visits to Tarasso, Likabali, Nari and Russa. The territories of the state of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have been defined in entry 2 and 24 of the first schedule of the Constitution of India. The Local Commission reported that while boundary of the state of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh is approximately 716 km long, out of this only 396 KM had been demarcated on the ground.

The Commission also directed both the states to jointly coordinate problematic areas to be visited by its members. However, the meeting as well as the proposed visit to disturbed areas by the Local Commission did not materialize due to various factors. The Local Commission noted that "prior to 1972, the said notification dated 23 February 1951 was not placed before the parliament for its passage. Reason for delay has not been

explained by the Union of India as well as the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh” (LCR).

This constitutional glitch is being questioned by other hill regions of the North East. Inter-state boundary conflicts have been reported in popular media. Some of the media reports are quite old. The researcher will be dealing with this in the subsequent chapter. A separatist approach was taken in dealing with the creation of states in the North East.

In this context, Behera’s understanding is suggestive, who writes,

Conflicts, tension and separatism are as much internal configurations on mental plane as integration and solidarity. The former sustains on the existence of apparent diversities in the form of divergent ethnic groups and sub-groups, languages/dialects, beliefs and faiths and environmental conditions; while the latter is an ideological concept of abstract dimension seeking justification in materialistic necessity. At a point of time, the former stands clear and dominant, but the latter being a latent factor, is beyond mass comprehension. (Behera, 1996, 222)

In the case of North East India, the idea of state formation was with the very intention of integration, it was however impractical to achieve. Multi-lingual and a multi-ethnic region like the North East India had already a clear cataloguing of ethnic groups and sub groups. The formation of new states is thus a process of reformatting linguistic-cultural and regional identities which over an extended period of time has given birth to the notion of ‘homeland’ to communities living within these states (Sarangi & Pai, 2011, 17). Boundary dispute and land ownership conflicts made its way in the interstate conflicts. On the one hand, it is the state of Assam that claims certain areas in the foothills to be theirs and on the other hand we have the state of Arunachal Pradesh playing its part in the claim. The Assam government also directed officials to collect revenue i.e. the *Patta* system from the tribal people of Arunachal residing in the foothills of places like Likabali. Violent resistance to this directive has been exhibited by the tribals.

Some tribals in order to come to terms with the officials from Assam, and in order to save their houses, have also taken the *Patta*. Others believed it to be a

submission to the claims of the Assam government and as such, refused to take *Pattas* for their land stating that they are the rightful owners and that the system does not apply to them.¹

In a joint meeting of the Deputy Commissioners of North Lakhimpur and West Siang district held at Dhemaji in 30 June 1985, it was decided that the *Patta* system would not be enforced by the Assam authorities on the tribals of Arunachal living in the disputed areas. The DC of North Lakhimpur informed that no new *Pattas* were issued that year.

Finally, the LC in its report reported that about 23 Arunachalee villages in 3 districts (West Kameng, West Siang and East Siang) said that they are within the territory of Arunachal Pradesh but their agricultural land and other properties are located in Udalguri and Sonitpur districts of Assam. It also mentioned that 15 villages and their corresponding agricultural land in two districts were ‘transferred area’ under 1951 notification. The Commission in its recommendation stated that “there is no point to change the boundary for including the agricultural land of the Arunachalee people falling in the Assam territory of Arunachal Pradesh. It would be appropriate that agricultural land of the Arunachalee people belonging to 23 villages in Assam territory may be regularised by the state of Assam based on records provided by the government of Arunachal Pradesh” (LCR).

State formation is an exercise of political control. Sarangi and Pai (2011, viii) state that rights were always illusory because Article 3 provides for the formation by parliament of new states and alteration of the area, boundaries and names of existing states. So, the argument goes, there is nothing sacrosanct about states or states’ rights because the centre can change all that by whim or fancy. Such an interpretation would be misleading as Article 3 was essentially intended to accommodate the impulses of growth and change to permit the integration of princely states.

The states in North East India were carved out in order to safeguard the aspirations of various communities. The process of regional mobilisation and the sub-nationalistic feeling among the ethnic groups in the region made it a compulsory move to have independent states out of Assam. Integration of North East India has become a complicated task with states like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and

Mizoram opposing the ‘constitutional boundary’ demarcated by the government of India. The states want the demarcation to be based on ‘historical boundaries’ as they claim to have not been consulted when the boundary was demarcated by the Union of India.

3.4 Focus area: Likabali and Banderdewa

Figure 6. Map of Likabali



Source: Retrieved on 15 May 2017 from <https://www.google.co.in/maps>

Likabali is located in the foothills of West Siang district, Arunachal Pradesh. Ironically it is also shown as part of Sissibargaon Tehsil of Dhemaji district in Assam. According to Census 2011, the total geographical area of the place is 48 hectares. Likabali with a total population of 2,055 has 165 houses. Silapathar which is in Assam is nearest town to Likabali which is approximately 8km away. Rajgarh Ali which runs approximately 8Kms from the foothills at Silapathar towards the plains is claimed to be the traditional and the logical boundary between the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. However, Rajgarh Ali is till date not been declared as the original boundary and the two states continue to maintain status-quo along the borders based on the constitutional boundary. According to the notification of 1951 the constitutional boundary does not consider Rajgarh Ali to be the original boundary as claimed by the state of Arunachal Pradesh and it is instead considered to be part of Assam. The people of the area do not accept the

notification of 1951 that included parts of Likabali area under Assam. It is also said that the extension of Arunachal land was up to the Akajan Gate (now in Assam) which is 12 kms from Likabali in the south. Likabali is a plain area and it is said that the Hill tribes of Arunachal Pradesh came down from the hills and settled there even before the Britishers took over Assam. The 1951 notification of the Union of India has been questioned by the state of Arunachal Pradesh on the grounds that the notification has neglected and denied “natural justice” to the hill tribes for sustainable livelihood in the plains.

There have been several cases of dispute in Likabali since then. Some of the cases are recorded from 1974 till date. Most of the recorded cases are that of the administrations using power to dismantle infrastructures and carry out eviction drive in the disputed territory. These have been from both the sides of the state due to unclear demarcation.

Along the foothills of the West Siang district is the Malinithan temple located under the Likabali Sub-Division. Due to disputes over the boundary between the two states, the area is often under political unrest. Both the states claim rights over the temple of religious importance believed to be as old as the story of Lord Krishna. According to the local legend associated with the place, Lord Krishna carried away Rukmini the daughter of King Bhismaka on the eve of her marriage with Shishupal. Krishna and Rukmini were welcomed at Malinithan by Parvati with garlands. Parvati thus acquired the name Malini and the place Malinithan. (<http://arunachalpradesh.gov.in>)

Figure 7. Malinithan temple



Malinithan is a ruin of three temples about 160 feet above the plains in the West Siang district of Arunachal Pradesh. Orissa style of art is engraved in the bricks of the temple. It is said to belong to the Pala king of Assam of about 10-12 century old. The Assam government claims that the temple confirms the political power in Brahmaputra valley extended to the hills of modern Arunachal Pradesh. However, Arunachal claims it to be brick producing factory and that it does not belong to any kingdom from Assam.

According to the state of Assam, the tribals of Arunachal Pradesh had no connection to such beliefs as the temple has been excavated and made a place of religious importance by them. The temple is located on the high hills around 1 Km east of Likabali. To which the state of Arunachal responds by stating that it was found by the natives of Likabali and they were the tribals.

Likabali is an area inhabited by the Galo tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and also Mishing, Bodo and Assamese people from the state of Assam. Reports of forceful construction of infrastructure by both the states to assert their claim often surface in the media reports and in discourses of the travellers that take the Likabali route to reach other parts of the two states. The resistance to such move by the inhabitants of the area has always taken a violent turn making the area a conflict zone.

Figure 8. Map of Banderdewa



Source: Retrieved on 15 May 2017 from <https://www.google.co.in/maps>

Banderdewa, a nerve centre between the two states, starts from the gate no.1 of the Arunachal Pradesh Police Training Centre to the fringes of the Dikrong River Bridge with National Highway-52 A as the boundary line.

Figure 9. Entrance gate to Banderdewa



On

entering Banderdewa from Narayanpur (Assam) or Police Training Centre Gate No-1,

locals of Assam dwell on the right side of this highway while the left side belongs to the people of Arunachal Pradesh.

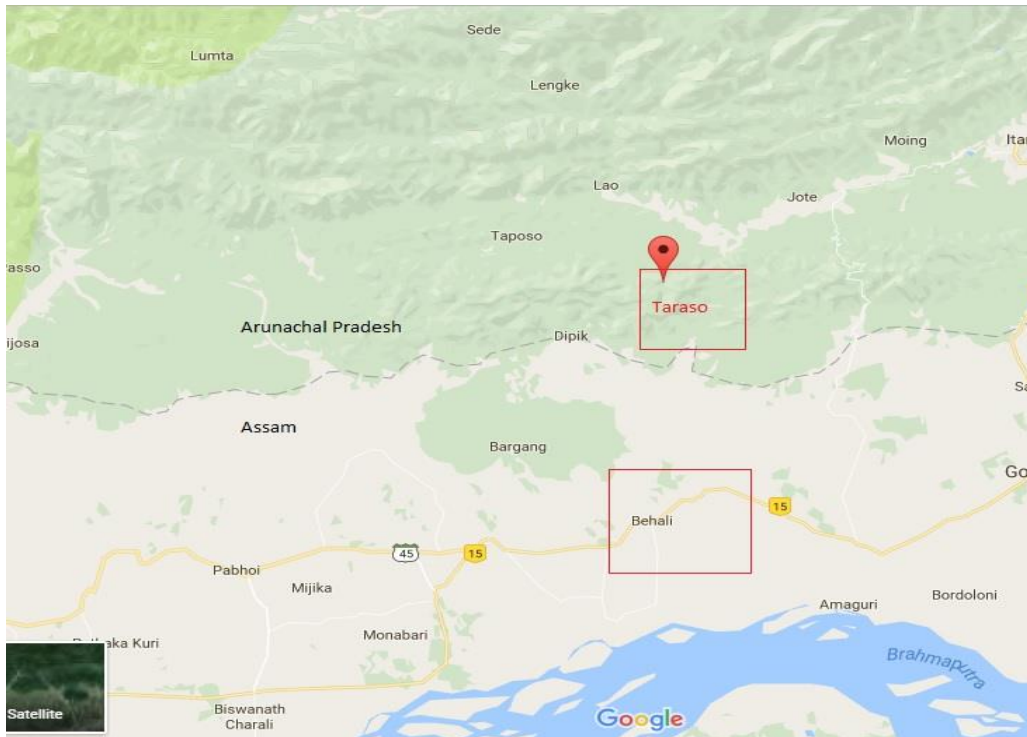
This highway is mutually agreed as the boundary line between these two neighbouring states for ages. And people living alongside it have respected this demarcation without questioning its legality. This commercial hub is teemed with shops, markets, schools and house people with different cultural affiliation, religious institutes. This border town is also replete with stories and shared memories concerning both the states.

Figure 10. Banderdewa, NH-52A



On the left side of the national highway is the Papum Pare district of Arunachal Pradesh and on the right side is the Lakhimpur district of Assam.

Figure 11. Behali-Taraso (*the map has been marked for convenience*)



Behali is a village panchayat under the Biswanath circle of Sonitpur district of Assam. Taraso village is located in Taraso circle of Papum Pare district in Arunachal Pradesh. The Assamese, Bengali, and Bodo are the inhabitants of Behali area and the Nyishi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh inhabits in Taraso.

Both the areas share a common boundary which is being disputed over time and again. The Behali Reserve Forest which has been the bone of contention for the two areas is located in the foothills of the Assam–Arunachal border. Infrastructural works taken up in the reserve forest by either side of the states has been witness to resistance in all capacities.

Reportedly due to works taken up by Arunachal government in the area people of Arunachal Pradesh considers the area under Behali as part of Arunachal's territory. This part of the border area has also seen cases similar to that of Likabali. Eviction and demolition of infrastructures has been a matter in the past as well as in the present. In the year 1992 Assam forest official had carried out an eviction in Taraso circle burning down more than 100 houses.

There is often reports on properties being destroyed, displacement of human settlement despite standing order of the supreme court for maintaining status quo. Media from both

the states report about the atrocities meted out to the people living along the borders and the tussle between the public and the administration. It is as such often been contested if the forest reserve areas dwelled by the people living along the borders should be left to the people or the government.

Chapter 3 overall gives an account of the inter-state border conflicts which is a reflection of the legacy of the past. It is also to understand that the Assamese-Arunachalee, Hills-Plains, Tribal-Nontribal identities emerge from historical geographies of conflict and difference and as such it is imperative to present a comprehensive outlook on the history of the region, more so, the inter-state border disputes.

The border dispute experienced by the two states is not a recent event, it has traces of the colonial way of administration that started off with the advent of colonial rule in the then undivided Assam. The present condition of the inter-state border areas cannot be read without taking into consideration the historical events. The chapter as such gives a comprehensive study of the problem in the Assam-Arunachal border. During pre-colonial days the movement of the hill tribes and plains were not restricted. The concept of border was in terms of community affiliation, land and resource ownership. The expansion of British administration and exploitation of resources lead to stringent controls over the hills and plains mobility. This segregated hills and plains and as such isolated the hill people.

Prior to the presence of British administration, the concept of hills and plains divide was not as rigid as exhibited by the British officials. People from both the sides shared trade relations and had labour relations. However, things took a drastic turn when the Britishers demarcated the hills and plains under regulations. When India got its independence nothing much changed in the frontier region. The region struggled with internal challenges of territorial division and state formation. In dealing with the North East the approach of the Union of India had to be different and that the reorganisation of the states had to be dealt carefully. State reorganisation committees for the North East which were asked to visit parts of the North East region and take into the views of the people and their representatives. In the present day, the states including Arunachal Pradesh carved out of Assam are challenging the demarcations made stating that the people of the hill tribes were not part of the decision in demarcating the present

constitutional boundaries. Under the 1951 notification, wherein certain parts of land claimed to be part of the Arunachal Pradesh and other states was transferred to the Assam. With the notification, many land holdings and farming practises of the hill tribes were included in the map of Assam.

This chapter as such looked at the role played by the British officials and the Union of India after independence in segregating the hills and plains and also the emergence of ethnic communities in the region. The demand for autonomy and separatism and the repercussions of such demands in the form of inter-state border conflict has been projected in this chapter in order to identify the origin and branches of the issues. Divergent viewpoints of the two states were included in order to understand the stance of both the states. While on one hand the state of Arunachal Pradesh claims the demarcation to be bias and defective, the state of Assam makes it a point to uphold the decision of the leaders of the Union of India and respect the ‘constitutional boundaries’. In all these struggles with the inter-state border conflicts a sense of regionalism has come up thereby constructing an identity of the hills and the plains.

The next chapter titled ‘Reporting the Border: Media narratives and stories’ brings about divergence of views about the hills and plains as projected in media reports and myths. The chapter accords a good deal of how media projects the issue and how myths from the region present the idea of hills and plains. Contrasting narratives on hills and plains are presented in the media reports and myths and as such the chapter explores the possibility of looking at borders from a multiple perspective considering the dynamic nature of the borders.

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End Notes

¹ Tagi Zirdo, Likabali, Personal communication, April 17,2014.