Sixth Schedule: Negotiating Ethnic Autonomy Discourses in Northeast India

Ch. Sekholal Kom and Chintu Brahma, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India, skom742@gmail.com

Abstract

The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution is termed a contrivance embedded with the idea of decentralization from the existing state structure with certain autonomy provisions. The aim of this constitutional schema was to see that the ethnic aspirations of this part of the region are met and to integrate the region into the mainstream. Marked by diversity in customs, cultures, traditions and languages, the region is a home to over 200 of the 635 tribal groups in the country, speaking a variety of Tibeto-Burman languages and dialects with a strong tradition of social and cultural identity. Divided by language, religion and ethnicity, Northeast India has been passing through a series of predicaments explicitly exemplified by competing ethno-nationalist dissents. Of late, identity mobilization and counter-mobilization by various groups seems to spill into the political arena and deepen the sense of separation and self-identification in the region. The result has been cycles of mobilization and counter-mobilization which eventually aggravate ethnic relations. Thus, granting of territorial autonomy appears unfeasible to address the region's myriad ethnic aspirations. This paper intends to argue how this non-territorial autonomy (Sixth Schedule) can be appreciated as a suitable mechanism to paper address ethnic minorities' aspirations against their struggle from the dominance of the majority.

Keywords: Autonomy, Ethnic groups, Northeast, Region, Sixth Schedule, Tribals

Introduction

As democracy spread over the years, numerous mobilized groups throughout the world have demanded redistribution of power - power to govern and administer oneself, free from the dominance of others. In India too, questions about how power should be shared by national and sub-national governing entities, and about the qualities of such power at each level have continuously informed India's political evolution. To contend the aspiration of its various nationalities and groups, India has several laws and constitutional provisions, such as the Fifth Schedule for mainland India and the Sixth Schedule for certain areas of Northeast India, which recognize indigenous peoples' rights to land and self-governance.

A measure of autonomy for large linguistic and other communities is consistent with an Indian policy of "integration" of communities into a multicultural Indian nation, as contrasted with other policies that encourage the "assimilation" of individuals into a liberal Indian state. In India, regional distinctiveness is accommodated within the federal structure through the creation of peripheral states along linguistic or ethnic lines. Such arrangements however seem deficient given the continued aspirations for increased autonomy. Keeping in mind the impracticability of horizontal autonomy in the form of granting separate states based on ethnic or linguistic lines, the Sixth Schedule in the Northeast was framed basically to placate competing ethnic minorities' aspirations for self-governance. Essentially, it was an instrument of decentralizing powers and recognizing the rights of tribal self-rule. The autonomy package under the Sixth Schedule of the India Constitution is embedded with the idea of decentralization from the existing state structure in one way or the other. This special arrangement was first made
during the British rule in 1915 and later included under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution in Article 244(2) and 275(1).\(^1\)

In part, intense competition over the state's resources politicizes numerous cleavages, exacerbating an already restive political situation. Recent years have seen varied movements and the assertion of identities and claims for indigenous rights amongst several ethnic groups in Northeast India. On the one hand, these can be seen as processes of collective assertion yet they cannot be understood independently as many of these movements seem to have been shaped by factors like state intervention and deficient government policies. No doubt, ethnic intolerance and increased population pressures have also contributed. Time and again, dissatisfaction with the achievements of popular movements has often legitimized the creation of more radical armed groups with more stringent demands for self-determination.

**Ethnicity and Autonomy Discourses**

Northeast India, comprising the contiguous 'seven sister' states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura is a strategically located region with international boundary on three sides. It is bounded by Bhutan and Tibet region of China on the north, Myanmar on the east and Bangladesh on the south and southwest. Geographically, the region is connected by a slender linkage known as "chicken's neck" with the rest of India on the western side. The region covers an area of 2,62,179 sq. km., which is 7.9 percent of India's total geographical area. The population of the region as per the 2011 census stands at 44,980,294, which is 3.9 percent of the total population of India.

Though small in size, in terms of diversity, Northeast India is a locale to more than 200 ethnic groups each characterized by distinct languages, dialects, and sociocultural identities competing for their own space and control. Most of them have lived in splendid isolation, not only from the rest of the country but even from each other. Some of the notable ethnic groups in the region are the Kukis, Meiteis, Nagas, Komrems, Mizos, Lais, Maras, Hmars, Assamese, Bodos, Karbis, Dimasas, Kokboroks, Hrangkhawls, Darlongs, Khasis, Garos, and Santhals. Amongst them, Assamese, Khasis, Meiteis, Mizos, and Nagas have their own state leaving those others to continually seek similar autonomy. As such, the Bodos, Garos and Kukis are expressive in their demands for separate state. On the other, smaller groups like Komrems, Vaipheis, Moyon, and Anals of Manipur are struggling to have the Sixth Schedule in their areas extended.

From the largest ethnic Assamese to the smallest ethnic Komrem selfdetermination movement either in the form of sovereignty or autonomy has been strictly upheld on ethnic lines. In other words, despite one's numerical insignificance, identifications and demands for autonomy are strictly 'parochial' and 'chauvinistic'. However, due to incontiguous geographical settlements and connectivity, the much professed political assertions, are staked.

In the political parlance of India today, the very term "Northeast" has almost come to denote a region characterized by ethnopolitical movements. From the time of India's independence in 1947, the region has been a restive locale - where different ethnic groups aspire to have autonomy and some aiming to secede. The Nagas, Meiteis and Assamese\(^6\) movements have been the most active. These movements have numerical strength and are considered to be particularly problematic since they aspire to sovereign States of their own. Even today, citing
historical legitimacy, ethnic militants’ belonging to the Nagas and Meiteis continue to confront the Indian State through their armed struggles for a separate ethnic self-determination.

The social landscape, so to say, is characterized by a great deal of linguistic and cultural diversities that create ethnic tensions and conflicts within individual peripheral units and even across the dispersal settlements and peripheral states. The dividing line between this continuous battle for independence, varying degrees of autonomy and even for legal safeguards for certain communities, become indistinguishable. Often, these movements come to overlap with groups trying to achieve more or less the same or comparable goals with similar means. This leads to a more complex scenario when groups of different hues become engaged in turf hostilities that, more often than not, result in bloody inter-ethnic strife.

Ostensibly, ethnic movements directly or indirectly entail the pursuit of ethnic self-governance. Ironically, the region, besides its unconnected history with other parts of the country has experienced for a long time extreme repressive Indian state hegemony as well as spatial discrimination in comparison. Turbulence in the region, after all, is not merely from a quest of ethnic autonomy aspirations, but, are placated by armed separatist groups representing different ethnic communities fighting the central or the state governments by the recurring battles for territorial supremacy among the different ethnic groups themselves.

So much autonomy is seen to be a scheme of protecting one’s identity and asserted as a political contrivance for control, in the 1980s, the Boro (Bodo) ethnic agitators of Assam painted the words, "Autonomy or death" on their bodies. This dramatic position itself has been the product of years of systematic mobilization of political resources of the community that sees its position of marginalization as a failure of institutions of representation and participation. However, with the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement (Mos) of the Boro Territorial Council (BTC) in 2003 with the state government of Assam, Bodos political autonomy was greatly enhanced on the one hand, and Bodo ethnic upheaval was considerably contained.

Perhaps, new movements of political unrest, most of which resort to violent means, continue to reflect ethnic problems. The insular nature of identification as ethno-national entity not only affects their relations with "the outsiders," but also negatively impacts upon the inter-ethnic groups’ relations within the region. Today, the aspirations to realize economic and political ascendancy on the basis of constituting a distinct ethnic identity created paranoid relations within the region particularly due to demand and counter demand for autonomy. The ethnic feud between the Naga-Kuki in the early 1990s was a lucid experience of antagonistic relations.

Primarily, the quests for ethnic and regional identity, nationalism, and ideological motivations have fomented a climate of insurgency in several parts of the Northeastern region, which has led to its political fragmentation. The fractious climate has been further fuelled by the slow pace of development (NE Region Vision Document 2020), that followed the aftermath of independence. These incessant conflict scenarios in the Northeast seem to be far removed from the "mainland" of India, not only from a geographical perspective, but also from the notion of how it is perceived.

Despite ethnic related surges, Mizoram and Meghalaya in Northeast India are ethnically more peaceful than Manipur, Assam and Tripura. This is because ethnic aspirations for autonomy have been conceded in the two former states, leaving some aspirations of groups within the states in the latter unheard. The assertions of Kukis, Nagas, Bodos today is nothing but a continued assertion for realizing similar or varying forms of autonomy. In other words, the comparatively high degree of ethnic aggravations and contestations in this part of the region
results from ascendancy where dominant ethnic group refuse to even concede internal autonomy to minority ethnic group(s) Therefore, in view of ethnic federalism or ethnic autonomy in the form of separate statehoods becoming complicated, the essentiality of Sixth Schedule is presented as alternative autonomy arrangement.

Nonetheless, ethnic assertions for self-governance are basically an offshoot of political memories, myths and emotions wherein many of the inter-ethnic conflicts in the region are rooted in such sentiments. Most of the political tussles in the region, from reorganization to protracted violence, are inherent with the problems of ethnicity. Perhaps ethnic homogeneity is hardly possible in any territory in multi-ethnic states, due to the diversity of peoples across ethnic boundaries. Therefore, new minorities are likely to be created within the sub-units, which are in danger of being swamped. Often, the dismissiveness of the majority may be responsible for provoking ethnic demands, encouraging secessionist or autonomist tendencies.

The majorities who have an edge over the minorities often consider that the demand for the similar privilege of having their own state is simply unfeasible. For example, in Manipur, tribal's aspiration for extension of Sixth Schedule is viewed as a 'ladder to statehood' by the Meiteis though it provisions works well for minority groups elsewhere. Thus, ethnic communities like the Kukis, Nagas, Komrems, Hmars of Manipur are still just minnows when it comes to having their political aspirations address.

Inter-communal and partisan violence being common, popular demands for local autonomy, boundary changes, and new states continue to proliferate, irrespective of the centre and states' supposed military intervention in the region. The region's contemporary conflicts are basically driven by local rivalries—particularly resource disputes between tribal areas; between hills and valleys; and between "sons of the soil" and migrants from the Bengali plains, Nepal, or central India.11

Over the years, ethnic mobilization not only leads to counter-mobilization but also culminates in counter-demands from other corresponding ethnic groups. Given this trend, it is in fact quite difficult to assert that the Sixth Schedule would be a panacea to quell and contain the soaring ethnic urges. The ethnic situation is so complex - every ethnic group aims to have a separate state - that total autonomy appears to be the only solution acceptable to them. However, although some selective states like Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya were created along the lines of ethnic identities; such similar arrangements have become unfeasible due to complex ethnic demography of the region. Thus, ethnic based autonomies become complicated despite the sense of attachment that each group has to the territory. Most often, the demand of one group morphs into the demands of another. Even today, the Nagas claim for their ancestral lands to come under a single political administration remains unacceptable to the Kukis and others who fear that they will become a victimized minority under such a settlement. Similarly, due to the mixed settlements of ethnic groups, the Kukis demand for separate statehood as 'Kukiland' has been deterred by the Nagas and others who fear a similar fate. In this sort of situation, it is a glaring difficulty to set aside a specific territory to suit one ethnic group's demand. The complexity however remains as ethnic assertions often tend to be radical. In such an environment, where identification and self-government surge together, the only alternative is to negotiate the existing diversities by conceding autonomy of a kind that would be endorsed by all - both the majority and the minority. Moreover, as 'identity' and 'governance' form the basis of ethnic polarization and conflict and debilitates an inclusive process of governance, Sixth Schedule may be uniformly implemented to dissuade ethnic propensities.
Emergence of Sixth Schedule

Till the colonial intrusion, except for the states of Manipur and Tripura, the remaining areas of Northeast India formed parts of the erstwhile British province of Assam. The British occupied Assam after the first Anglo-Burmese war in 1826. It took more than half a century for the British to colonize all the areas of erstwhile Assam. Until then, most of the tribal areas were autonomous territories governed by tribal chieftainship. The colonization of Assam resulted in linking the region more and more with mainland India. Such linkage and later on that facilitate integration with mainland India was due to the British colonial interests with the discovery of tea, oil and coal in the region.12

Surprisingly, in the colonial period no significant tribal or non-tribal nationalism crystallized in the region. What was explicit was the Assamese incipient reaction to the early Bengali penetration; however Assamese nationalism was not a kind that avowed for separate province. In post-independent period, however, different kinds of tribal and non-tribal nationalisms emerged in the region. With this in mind, the Indian state has tried to settle ethnic issues but not to the complete satisfaction of the ethnic groups. This is evident from an historical overview of the steps taken to solve the issue. Under the Government of India Act, 1919 (Section 52A), certain areas of British India were declared as "backward tracts". Under the Government of India Act, 1935 (Chapter 5, Sections 91 and 92), these areas were redesignated as "excluded areas" and "partially excluded" areas. According to these provisions, control over these areas was retained by His Majesty's Government and not given to parliamentary institutions. While the executive authority of the provinces extended to these areas, the law provided that no act of the federal legislature or of the provincial legislature would apply to these areas unless the governor by public notification so directs. The governor could also direct that such acts be applied to those areas subject to such exceptions or modifications as he deems fit; and the governor exercised these functions at his discretion.

Under the Government of India Act, 1935, the hill areas of Assam were dually classified as Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas. The Lushai Hills (now Mizoram) the Naga Hills (now Nagaland) and the North Cachar Hills were under the excluded areas, over which the provincial ministry had no jurisdiction. Expenditure incurred in these hill areas was also not voted by the provincial legislature because there were no representatives from these hill districts. Not only this, even no federal or provincial legislation extended to the districts automatically. On the other, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills (all the three now forms a state of Meghalaya), and the Mikir Hills were categorized as partially excluded areas. These districts had five representatives in the Assam Legislative Assembly but in the Garo Hills and the Mikir Hills, the franchise was limited to the traditional village headmen. Briefly, these areas were administered by the state government subject to the special powers of the Governor. This, in fact, did not change the administrative machinery of the districts. In effect the 1935 Constitution did not afford local self-government or political autonomy to the hill tribes of the excluded and partially excluded areas to manage their local affairs according to their own genius and ability. No political activities of any kind in these districts were permitted. There was also no political entity, which could voice the people's aspirations and grievances. The British Superintendent and the local chiefs in most of the districts of the excluded areas used to rule the people as virtual dictators.

After Independence, there were demands for regional autonomy and better status within the constitutional framework from the tribes of the hill areas of Assam. The Interim Government of India in 1947 was sensitive to
the political aspirations of the tribal people of the hill areas of Assam in the backdrop of assurances given by the outgoing British rulers. In order to ensure their participation in decision making and management of the affairs and safeguarding tribal interests, the government appointed a Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly – the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Committee – under the Chairmanship of Gopinath Bardoloi, Chief Minister of Assam. The Bardoloi Committee made a spot assessment of the demands and aspirations of the hill tribes and submitted its recommendations for a simple and inexpensive set-up (District Councils) of the tribal areas, which were later accepted and incorporated into the Article 244 (2) of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The Bardoloi Committee also made provision for Regional Council for the tribes other than the main tribe. This scheme sought to build up autonomous administration (District Councils and the Regional Council) in the hill areas of Assam (United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District, Garo Hills District, Lushai Hills District, Naga Hills District, North Cachar Hills District, and Mikir Hills District) to enable the tribal people to preserve their traditional way of life, and safeguard their customs and cultures. Further, the Committee also recommended the abolition of the excluded and the partially excluded areas and representation of the hills districts in the legislative Assembly on the basis of adult franchise. It expected the state and the central governments to help the tribals in securing the benefits of a democratic, progressive and liberal constitution of the country.

After the Indian Constitution was brought into force, the Government set up an Interim Tribal Advisory Council in each hill district and also desired the participation of the tribal representatives in the administration of the areas, even during the interim period pending the formation of the District Councils. The councils had no statutory basis and the councils used to advise the District Superintendent/Deputy Commissioners on various administrative problems and development schemes of the district. Thus, such pattern of involvement became an exercise for the hill tribes in matters of their self-governance. Under paragraph 2 of the Sixth Schedule to the Indian Constitution, the Government of Assam farmed the Assam Autonomous District (Constitution of District Councils) Rules 1951 and the Pawi-Lakher (Constitution of Regional Councils) Rules, 1952 for the autonomous region in the Lushai Hills District. Accordingly, the District Councils and the Regional Councils were constituted in 1952 and 1953 respectively.

After the Mizo Hills was elevated to the status of the Union Territory of Mizoram in accordance with the North-Eastern Areas (Re-organisation) Act, 1971 the Mizo District Council was abolished in 1972. The Pawi-Lakher Regional Council which was constituted for the Pawis, the Lakhers and the Chakmas, was also trifurcated into three District Councils in 1972 under the provisions of the said Act. Similarly, but with differing autonomy provisions, the Government of Manipur as per the provisions of the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971 passed by the Parliament also constituted six Autonomous District Councils for the tribal people for the hill areas of Manipur. These councils were however outside the purview of the Sixth Schedule. Presently, there are eighteen District Councils in Northeast India– five in Assam, three in Meghalaya, three in Mizoram, one in Tripura and six in Manipur. Here, it is interesting to note that the Nagas, for whom the Sixth Schedule was mainly engineered, having a state of Nagaland curved out in their favor have disclaimed the existence of such councils in their state.

The changing status of the areas under the 1919 and 1935 Acts after Independence is shown below.

Backward Tracts under 1919 Act Present Status of the Areas
Renamed as Excluded Areas in 1935 Act. Included in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution in 1950

Garo Hills district, Reconstituted as Meghalaya, Meghalaya became Khasi Hills district an autonomous state in Assam a full-fledged state in 1971. And Jaintia district in 1969. The three districts continued to enjoy autonomy under the Sixth Schedule

Mikir Hills renamed as Karbi Anglong
North Cachar Hills Renamed as North Cachar
Naga Hills District Became a part of Nagaland in 1963
(Earlier constituted as Union Territory)
Became Mizoram state in 1973
Lushai Hills District (Earlier constituted as Union Territory)
Sadiya Frontier Tract These three tracts were first reconstituted as
Bali para Frontier Tract North-Eastern Frontier Area (NEFA) and
Lakhimpur frontier Tract subsequently as Arunachal state

After the adoption of the Constitution of India in 1950, all these areas were incorporated in what is known as the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. A certain degree of autonomy was granted in the administration of these tribal areas in the state of Assam and NEFA. With the passage of time, people however felt that this measure did not sufficiently satisfy their aspirations. The Naga Hills district and the Naga tribal area had to be taken out of this list and were constituted as the state of Nagaland in 1963. In 1969, a new provision, Article 244A—"formation of autonomous State comprising certain tribal areas in Assam and creation of local legislature or council of Ministers or both therefore"—was inserted into the Constitution to take care of the demands from the Khasi Hills, Garo Hills and Jaintia districts for greater autonomy. Subsequently in 1971, Meghalaya became a full-fledged state under the North-Eastern Areas Reorganization Act. The Mizo (Lushai Hills) district under the Sixth Schedule was reconstituted into the state of Mizoram in 1987 to meet the aspirations of the Mizos. Thus, a close scrutiny reveals that except for the North Cachar Hills district and the Karbi Anglong district, all the other areas which were originally included under the Sixth Schedule became in stages either union territories or a state within a state, and ultimately full-fledged states.

Subsequently, as more demands for autonomy arose, new areas were added to the Sixth Schedule. The Chakma, Mara and Lai districts of Mizoram and the Tripura Tribal Areas district were added in 1985. Certain new areas have been given a status similar to the Sixth Schedule but under separate laws made by the Union or state governments.

Despite its lack of uniformity in the application of Sixth Schedule, there are various autonomous councils designed to pacify ethnic assertions for self-governance. Notable among them are the Khasis Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC), Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC), Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) in Meghalaya, Twipra Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) in Tripura, Bodo Territorial Council (BTC), North Cachar Hills
Autonomous Council which has been rechristened as Dima Hasao Autonomous Territorial Council (DHATC), Deuri Autonomous Council (DAC), North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Councils (KAAC), Rabha Hasong Autonomous Councils (RHAC), Mishing Autonomous Councils in Assam, Mara Autonomous Council (MAC), Lai Autonomous Council (LAC) and Chakma Autonomous District Councils (CADC) in Mizoram, and the Manipur (Hill Areas) Autonomous District Councils though it is comparatively less autonomous than the others.

Experience of Autonomous Councils

Assam: Assam has the most number of autonomous councils in the region. They are DHATC, KAAC, RHAC, Mishing Autonomous Councils and BTC. Mentioned autonomous councils may be described as a "State in miniature" having all the paraphernalia of a Government like Legislative, Executive and Judiciary. It has full autonomy to legislate and administer the subjects like land, revenue, primary education, customary laws etc. assigned to it under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

Significantly, the most significant political development in the history of Assam in containing ethno-nationalist tendency is the formation of Bodo Territorial Council in 2003. The BTC is a territorial privilege established according to the Memorandum of Settlement of February 10, 2003. BTC came into existence immediately after surrender of Bodo ethnic militants known as Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF) under the leadership of Hagrama Mohilary. The BTC has 12 electorate members each looking after a specific area of control called somisthi. The area under the BTC jurisdiction is called the Bodo Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD). Presently, the BTAD consist of four contiguous districts Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang carved out of seven existing districts of Assam

Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur- an area of 27,100km² (35% of Assam) under the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India. However, this arrangement has been opposed by many other organizations. Despite this odd, however, the creation of BTC may be attributed as a successful political engineer in integrating and accommodating the most intimidating group. Numerically, the Bodos are nearly 2 million and constitute the largest stateless ethnic group in the whole region. They are two to three times more than the Mizos of Mizoram, Manipuris (Meiteis) of Manipur and Nagas of Nagaland states of Northeast India. Thus, despite contesting views on BTC, it is more stabilizing ethnic cauldron.

As mentioned earlier, as part of restructuring and empowerment process, the existing North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) has been rechristened as DHATC. Accordingly, on October 8, 2012 the Central and the State Governments signed a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) with both factions of the Dima Halim Daogah – the Dilip Nunisa faction (DHD-N) and the Jewel Garlosa faction ([DHD-J] also known as Black Widow (BWJ)], eight years after the signing of a ceasefire agreement with the undivided DHD. Herein, the struggle for a separate homeland for the Dimasas started with the formation of the Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF) in 1990. According to the Ministry of Home Affairs release dated October 8, 2012, the MoS provides for enhanced autonomy for the NCHAC, which recently got rechristened as DHATC, and a special package for socio-economic and educational development of the area has also been announced. Under the MoS, a committee would be constituted to deal with matters relating to the Sixth Schedule Councils. The DHD will disband itself as an
organization within a ‘reasonable time’, specified as six months, as a precursor to the Government initiating further processes to implement the decisions of the agreement.

The settlement further agrees to increase the strength of the Territorial Council to ensure suitable representation to all communities. Politically, the agreement also enhanced autonomy to the district with special package for speedier socio-economic development. Notwithstanding the MoS, it is evident that the horizon remains unclear, and it remains uncertain whether the accord will bring lasting peace to the District. Only fair political accommodation of the non-Dimasa tribes within the Dima Hasao, can ensure and enduring peace in the state.

Mizoram: The present Indian state of Mizoram (literally "Mizoland") was called the Lushai Hills and formed a district of the then Assam, before it became a Union Territory and afterwards a full-fledged state. In this struggle, one of the powerful factors was the movement to call themselves Mizo, rather than by distinct tribal names such as Lushai, Ralte, Gangte, Paiet, Mara, Pawi, Chakma etc. Their languages (of which the largest is Lusei Duhlian dialect) belong to the TibetoBurman, their brethren are the Chins in the adjacent Chin State of Burma, as well as those of the Kukis.

Like all other Northeastern states of India, Mizoram is a multi-ethnic and pluralistic one of that exhibits a co-existence of different communities, such as the Mizo or Lusei, Gangte, Pawi, Lakher, or Mara), the Riang (known as Tuikuk by the Mizos), and the Chakma (as Takam by the Mizos). Till 1987, the Mizo-dominated areas particularly the Lushai Hills of the then Assam were a part of the Mizo district of the Assam state. Having not satisfied with the autonomy entitled to them under the Sixth Schedule, various Mizo organizations, particularly the Mizo Union, complained of step-motherly treatment at the hands of the Assam Government, and demanded a separate state for the Mizos.

In 1954 the central and Assam governments granted regional council to the Lakhers (aka Mara) and the Pawis (aka Lai) in the name of Pawi Lakher Regional Council (PLRC). Large number of Chakmas also fell into the PLRC's geographic boundary. However, the PLRC could not function since the very beginning. The main reason was that there was no common language among the three tribal communities namely Chakma, Mara and Lai which they could understand. The first meeting was reportedly held without understanding each other's language. Mizo was used as official language but Chakmas and Maras could hardly understand anything, and ultimately in 1958 the Maras decided to boycott the Regional Council's meetings. Much before, Mara people, a predominant community of the southeastern district of Saiha of Mizoram demanded autonomy in the form of a separate Lakher hills district in 1945 under their political party called Mara Freedom Party. Thus in 1972, as a means of integrating and also to overcome the linguistic barrier, the PLRC was divided into three regional councils and upgraded to 3 district councils for Maras, Lais and Chakmas.

Presently, there are three Autonomous District Councils in Mizoram namely; Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC) for ethnic Lai people living in Southeastern Mizoram bordering Myanmar and Bangladesh, Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) to the south for Mara ethnic people and Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) to the west Chakma ethnic people.

Tripura: The main objective behind forming the District Council as Tripura
Tribal Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule was to remove within a short time the material disparities between the advanced and backward sections of the societies, to strengthen the bonds of unity between
the tribal and non-tribal masses, to emancipate not only tribal people but all the deprived people from all types of injustice and exploitation. Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council is a symbol of integrity, harmony and unity of the tribal and non-tribal people of the state. The tribal people of the state had been struggling for autonomy since the late sixties of the last century but their struggle finally achieved success with support extended to them by the non-tribal people of the state and with both the state and central government taking appropriate initiatives for constituting the Autonomous District Council (ADC).

Encompassing 68.10% of the state's total geographical area or 7,132.56 square kms, the ADC was launched in essentially tribal-compact areas with the aim to introduce internal autonomy and thereby protect the social, economic and cultural interests of the tribal population as a whole. The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council was initially constituted under the provisions of 7th Schedule of the Constitution of India which empowers the state governments to form such councils on the basis of the provisions contained in the 5th schedule of the constitution. The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council Bill, 1979 had been unanimously passed by the Tripura Legislative Assembly on March 23, 1979.

While some northeastern States still grapple with militancy, Tripura has overcome it. As in the case of the other States of the region, Tripura was, at different points of time, caught in the wave of militancy that arose from Nagaland in the 1950s. What brought the region in its sweep was the geographical trap, the abysmal socioeconomic-physical deficits in contrast to the mainland, dysfunctional governance in the region in general, demographic changes and the alienation of tribal land as a result of unhindered migration from former East Bengal and subsequently from Bangladesh. The tribals were pushed to the hills, and the politics and administration in the State was dominated by the Bengali speaking locals and migrants. Insurgency started as a protest movement against this phenomenon.

The first organized-armed tribal movement Sengkrak originated in mid 1960s as a reaction to settling down of non-tribal refugees in the tribal reserve forest areas. This was followed by the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) in 1981 under the leadership of Bijoy Hrangkhawl and National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) on March 2, 1989 and its armed wing, the National Holy Army and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), in July 1990, queering the pitch. However, after 1990, the State having formulated a multi-dimensional and fine-tuned construct to respond creatively to the situation on the problems in a strategic and resolute manner under the sagacious and visionary leadership of Chief Minister Manik Sarkar such ethnic aggravation was considerably abated since then. The control mechanism was subsumed in counterinsurgency operations intent on swift area-domination and ascendancy, as well as psychological operations and confidence-building measures. An accelerated development thrust, management of the media, civic action programmes of the security forces, and the political process were additional factors. Those strategic interventions paved the way for defusing militancy. These helped soothe the ruffled tempers of the tribal people, the pivotal support base of the insurgents. The fire of enmity against the state and the non-tribal population was doused. Now, a report of Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) in June 2009 shows Tripura standing third lowest in insurgency-related incidents in the northeastern region after Mizoram and Meghalaya.

Of all the political process initiated by Chief Minister Sarkar went a long way in dissolving the malaise of militancy. Micro-democratic institutions such as autonomous development councils, gram panchayats and village councils were strengthened, revitalised and legitimised. They turned vibrant and actively functional as local governance modules. This brought all the communities, notably the tribals in particular, into the development
stream, bringing about substantial empowerment and a sense of fulfilment. Perhaps, with Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) Act 1979 under the provision of the 6th scheduled of the Indian constitution fully made to function, Tripura has turned out to be ethnically peaceful and politically vibrant state in the region.

**Manipur:** Ethnically, Manipur is inhabited by three main ethnic groups- Meiteis, Kukis and Nagas besides other smaller groups like Nepalese, Manipuri Muslims, Komrems and Zomis. The Meiteis whose settlement confine in the valley constituting one-tenth of the total geographical area of the state constitute more than 70 percent of the population. The hill areas comprising of five districts are predominantly peopled by the tribals who are broadly identified as Naga or Kuki. Unlike its counterparts, Manipur is neither under the Fifth Schedule nor under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

From the British colonial period, hill areas in present day State of Manipur, India, were administered separately. Traditional laws and customs of the different tribes were the basis of administration in the hill areas and this continued with some modifications for all intents and purpose, even after India gained independence. With the introduction of the Government of India Act 1935, the then principality of Manipur immediately joined the negotiation for hammering out the terms of federation with the Government of India. The signing of the Standstill Agreement and The Instrument of Accession both on the same day 11 Aug 1947, and the Merger Agreement on 21st September 1949, through which the Manipur principality became part of the Indian Republic, did not change this scheme of governance.

In the 1960s, when the demand for the Union Territory of Manipur to be converted into a full fledged state was gaining momentum, the need for maintaining a separate administration for the tribals in the hill areas was acknowledged. From 1967 onwards, the drafting process for a law applicable to the hill areas of Manipur commenced. The Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act was enacted by the Parliament of India on 26th December 1971 when present day Manipur was still a Union Territory. The Act, amongst other, established six (6) Autonomous District Councils in the Hill Areas of Manipur namely; Chandel Autonomous District Councils, Churachandpur Autonomous District Councils, Senapati Autonomous District Councils, Sadar Hills Autonomous District Councils, Tamenglong Autonomous District Councils, and Ukhrul Autonomous District Councils. As highlighted earlier, the Kukis and Nagas of the hill districts are in constant turf for autonomy in their own favour. Despite such antagonism, the demand for Sixth Schedule extension in Manipur is the only common tribal political assertion since the independence of India.

The Autonomous District Council in Manipur (Hill Areas) is uniquely different from other Autonomous District Council in North-East India. Primarily, the autonomous councils in Manipur are made to function under the state legislation in contrast to other councils which draws their autonomy provisions from the Indian Constitution. Practically, the subtle decisive control exercised by the State Government has rendered meaningless the theoretically sound provisions under ADC. They end up as toothless Institutions because they are shorn of the vital legislative, financial, and judicial powers that could have made the difference. So, in the form they are implemented in Manipur, they neither safeguard tribal interests, nor meet their rising aspirations.21

Ironically, though some are yet to benefit from the Sixth Schedule, certain autonomous councils, like the BTC, KAAC and NCAC have greater powers granted by specific amendments made to this schedule. Even under the autonomous councils constituted under the Sixth Schedule, there is no adequate devolution of powers to the
village level and most power is concentrated at the district level itself. For example, commenting on the working of the autonomous councils in Assam, the Advisory Panel to the Constitution Review Commission observed: "The scope for initiative at the level below the districts has been minimized by the political leadership. Consequently, the participation of people in the development process has been found to be absent."

Typically, Sixth Schedule was not intended to protect all the Schedule Tribes (STs) of Northeast India. Only those that were considered to be relatively concentrated in the old Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas, and for which the Constitution uses the term tribal areas, came under the purview of Sixth Schedule. The Bordoloi Subcommittee did not consider the situation of other regions. Under this arrangement, those districts which fall under the purview of the Sixth Schedule became not only autonomous but are decentralized with twenty-four person elected and two nominated. Until recently, Sixth Schedule was not extended to Tripura. This scheme got extended in response to tribal militancy in the state, after which, the Tripura Tribal Areas District Council (TTADC) was made to function.

Thereafter, the Sixth Schedule has been extended in many parts of the region with the objective of accommodating and protecting tribal minorities. Today, some areas which have not benefited from this provision seek its further extension. For instance, in Manipur the demand for its extension was made in 1973 alongside the introduction of Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act. Although the Sixth Schedule has evolved to meet the political aspirations of the tribal groups in the region and enables them to protect their cultural distinctiveness, the practical functioning of the Schedule does not demonstrate much autonomy in its practice.

Rationale of the Study

The autonomy envisaged under the Sixth Schedule was considered to be decisive enough and was even referred to as a "Constitution within a Constitution" in several accounts. Primarily, the affirmation of this autonomy was intended to cater to the aspirations of minority groups and to protect them from the threat of marginalization, domination and homogenization by the majority. Based on its provision, the justification of Sixth Schedule was not only to create a privileged position for minorities or tribal communities but to give them effective responsibility in matters of governance concerning them and instill a sense of belonging and participation. Significantly, it was thought to facilitate the minorities to acquire a stake in the system, which would further enable them to contribute to policy making and in administration. The paper thus argues the necessity of granting autonomy to minorities who exhibit distinctiveness in matters of culture, language and customs.

Decentralized autonomy is also necessitated by the notion that democracy ought to respect and promote its cultural mosaic without placing them at the mercy of the majorities. With this in mind, with or without constitutional provisions, tribal communities and minority groups must be allowed to develop and safeguard their cultural heritage. They must be entitled and privileged with every possible opportunity by the government to enable them to participate themselves in governance. On the other, however, ethnic problems would remain unabated if autonomy ensured by Sixth Schedule remains impeded by the states. Under such circumstances, it is doubtful that even the delivery of Sixth Schedule for tribal selfgovernance in Manipur will adequately address tribal political aspirations. Nevertheless, the fact remains undisputed that the politicization of identity is a legitimate instrument in the pursuit of political power particularly in demanding a more democratic and representative version of governance.

On the other, it is plausible to assert that autonomy envisaged by the Sixth Schedule is still in its nascent stage; it has never been able to take off. Although it is a welcome instrument of decentralizing powers and
recognizing the rights of tribal self-rule, the lackadaisical operationalization of the schema has estranged disparate tribal groups. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) bid to establish a separate hill state and the Mizo movement for 'Greater Mizoram' during the 1960s, within the erstwhile state of Assam, were both glaring examples. In view of these unprecedented ethnic assertions, the paper also further seeks to opine that Sixth Schedule is a viable option to manage and negotiate various ethnic demands for selfgovernance. However, it is not to mean that Sixth Schedule provision is a panacea in itself. The argument is based from the fact that self-governance scheme capable of protecting one's identity and managing one's political affairs ensured by the Sixth Schedule is less problematic and less contested rather than conceding separate ethnic-based statehoods. Otherwise, statehood to one would mean relative deprivation and minoritization against the conceded group.

The Constitution of India provides multiple forms and degrees of autonomy, which not only lays down the principle of group accommodation on an asymmetrical and differential basis but also reinforces integration. With this in mind, it is asserted that autonomy facilitates integration because the secessionist aspirations of ethnic groups get transformed into claims for autonomy, and national identification is reinforced among the minority groups. Accordingly, autonomy provisions and arrangements in the Northeast region which comes in the form of the Sixth Schedule or the Fifth Schedule are considered as a meaningful political contrivance.

Although questions of autonomy continue to be a worry, the range and forms of autonomy in India are very wide. It has been used not only as a mechanism to accommodate the claims of territorially-organized ethno-linguistic groups but simultaneously as an attempt in shaping the public space for the expression and maintenance of identity of the territorially dispersed minority groups and communities. For instance, the principle of federal autonomy has been applied to accommodate the claims of ethno-linguistic groups by creating federal institutions and developing the power and responsibilities to them with regard to determining and getting control over the domains of their competence. Moreover, the reorganization of States on ethno-linguistic criteria, and going beyond the partition mind set and the consideration of creating administrative units of convenience is one of the major indicators in this regard.25

Importantly, the asymmetrical form of accommodation is substantiated in the special autonomy provisions in the Constitution of India (Articles 370 and 371371 I). The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India exclusively grants autonomy through District and Regional Councils to the tribal/ethnic groups of Northeast India. The institutional structures of autonomy in the forms of District Councils and Regional Councils provide an opportunity to the respective tribal groups to maximize their claims of identity, rights and control. However, this form of autonomy is organically linked to other institutions or layers of federal governance in terms of sharing of power, responsibilities and self-governance. Beyond this institutional form of territorial autonomy, the strengthening of a third tier of governance through the seventy-third and seventy-fourth amendment to the Constitution of India is also important both from the perspectives of autonomy and accommodation. The Panchayati Raj specifically aims at revitalizing the institutions of self rule at the local level. This exercise of empowering local community through the federal institutions and sharing of power and responsibilities is worth a mention.

Autonomy arrangements in the Northeast have been designed to meet the ethnic aspirations of groups in the region. Though the ethnic question in the region has not been permanently resolved, there could have been more difficulty without those arrangements to manage the complex case of accommodation of ethnic diversity. The simplistic understanding of national identity, uniformity and homogeneity of national construction and the
extension of the idea of nation-state would have been more alienating and counterproductive. Whenever such efforts have been made, they have led to an intensification of ethnic claims, conflict and violence. Though the working of the District and Regional Councils in the Northeast as asymmetrical federal institutions of autonomy and 'self rule' has its own dynamics and problems, this has also strengthened the organic inter-linkages with other layers of federal institutions, which, in turn, offer opportunity for national identification.

Though the power and functions of various autonomous councils vary, yet it is expedient in providing autonomy within the framework of the Constitution. The objective of setting up the administrative authority is to provide maximum possible autonomy within the framework of the Constitution of India for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the people in the region. On the other hand, the aim is to provide administrative authority in the name of respective councils for certain matters incidental thereto and connected therewith.

Ethnicity being one of the most commonly alluded-to sources of contestation and threats within states, intra-state conflicts between different ethnic groups, or between ethnic minorities and the state, are much more common than inter-state conflicts today. This propensity has therefore made it indispensable to find institutional devices which can ensure democratic participation from the whole spectrum of ethnic groups within a state while and at the same time managing ethnic tension to prevent violent conflict, instability or state disintegration. In search of such devices, federalism has become a popular formula for theorists and policy makers alike. But, since most states are unwilling to recognize non-dominant minorities’ aspirations for self-governance, the expressions of such groups remain unattended to. Though minorities’ demands remain unaddressed, ethnic mobilizations to achieve a meaningful degree of self-governance on the other do not subside. Consequently, such phenomena became indelible and made ethnic relations glacial thereafter.

In Northeast India, different groups have different demands invariably differing and intersecting with each other. The rationale of constituting a majority in their specific settlements appeared to be the driver behind a competing micronationalist venture in the region. Ironically, marked by diversity in customs, cultures, traditions and languages, the region is home to over 200 of the 635 tribal groups in the country, speaking a variety of Tibeto-Burman languages and dialects with a strong tradition of social and cultural identity. Divided by language, religion and ethnicity, Northeast India has been passing through a series of predicaments explicitly exemplified by competing ethno-nationalist dissents. Of late, identity mobilization and counter-mobilization by various groups seems to spill into the political arena and deepen the sense of separation and self-identification in the region. That is, much of the politics in the region appears to center on the question of preserving one's ethnic identity. The result has been cycles of mobilization and counter-mobilization which eventually aggravate ethnic relations, causing the region's political temperature to rise.

In view of ethnic propensities, the granting of territorial autonomy in the form of separate states appears inadequate. Taking into account the complex nature of ethnic relationships and demographic settlements, I argue that the autonomy enshrined in the Sixth Schedule as a suitable mechanism to address ethnic minorities' aspirations against their struggle from the dominance of the majority.

The sense of marginalization and discrimination lies in the employment of persons unaware of the region and its people. Fair treatment is essential to social peace and stability. The extension of the Sixth Schedule vis-à-vis the reformulation of its autonomy provision can also be justified as providing cultural diversity within, and thus enriching, the wider society. As Ghai opines, diversity challenges the dominant ideas and values of society,
it promotes comparisons and debates, keeps society open to new ideas and protects it from narrow orthodoxies. Participation by minorities helps to put old policies in new contexts, often highlighting their weaknesses or ethnic bias, and drawing attention to the need for new policies and approaches.28

Further, an extension of the Sixth Schedule or the granting of a higher degree of autonomy has become essential to preserve and protect the region's myriad identities. Even now there are cases of some cultural or linguistic dominant groups in some parts of the region threatening the existence of minorities' existence. The swarming influx of non-tribals from the main belt of India has been quite alarming to the autochthonous population despite various laws and acts to protect the region's diversity. For instance, the state of Tripura though initially emerged as tribal state with Kokborok tribes as most dominant but in contrast the demographic landscape is reversed with Bengalis from neighboring Bangladesh overwhelming the autochthones. Similarly, in Manipur, the Kukis and Nagas lived at the risk of being marginalized. The repressive policies by the Meiteis through passing of various draconian Acts like Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, Abolition of Chiefship Right Act, Manipur Hill Area (Village Authority) Act, Manipur Wild-Life and Forest Act adverse affect the minorities.

It appears that prolong denial of autonomy atleast in the form of Sixth Schedule is the tendency to ignore emerging movements until the situation turns violent. Incredibly, although Tripura was once a militant infected state, the extension of Sixth Schedule has drastically transform the state into a more consolidated and peaceful state in the region. Perhaps, poor governance and lack of accountability of the officials and the official machinery engaged in ushering in development of the region is equally accountable to the paranoid situations. Ironically, the autonomy embedded with the Autonomous District Councils as modern liberal institution aimed at democratizing traditional institutions in the region is so much impeded by the state government that it does not appear to succeed in coping ethno-cultural aspirations becoming more exclusive than democratic. Thus, 'political consensus' becomes an arduous task with persistent demand for autonomy on ethnic line, a reverse trend of strict inclusion of those culturally or linguistically shared.

Problems and Constraints

Despite autonomy forming a basis of its existence, it is also pertinent to note the bleak performance of the Sixth Schedule provisions in light of the financial domain ADCs are empowered to. They are also statutorily assured a financial grant from the Union via Article 275 (1) which would, in turn, supplement their income and resources. It is disheartening to note, however, that ADCs could not satisfactorily mobilize their own resources which were, at best, limited. The thesis of non-viability of a 'state within a state' in a situation of economic insufficiency seemed to be buttressed by the mismatch in terms of receipts and expenditure of the ADCs. From the foregoing discussion it is clear that autonomy enshrined in the Sixth Schedule provides institutional mechanisms to preserve and protect tribal groups' autonomous 'societal culture'. Being hedged in by the institutional paraphernalia of Union and state control, it has never been able to take off in the true sense of the word. Soon after its operationalization, it got enmeshed in a paradoxical situation where the state became the 'main culprit' in denying 'full autonomy' to ADCs. As a matter of fact, in less than a decade of its working, it convinced the hill tribes that the Sixth Schedule is substantially inadequate to protect and preserve their land, custom, tradition and identity. Based on these grounds, a demand had been made to carve out a separate Hill State within Assam ever since the 1960s which culminated in the reorganization of the entire Northeast in 1971.27

Paragraph 2(2) of the Sixth Schedule, in its attempt to preserve and protect minority rights and identities, provides for the establishment of regional councils for minority tribes within ADCs, if at all they demand the
same. Unwittingly it implants a time-bomb within the ADCs. This is borne out by ongoing attempts by the Hmars and Paites, among others, to establish regional councils/ADCs in Mizoram. The Lai (Pawi), Mara (Lakher) and Chakmas had to undertake almost two decades of persistent struggle to upgrade their regional councils into ADCs in Mizoram. This was interspersed by the state government's bid to dissolve and disband the erstwhile Chakma Regional Council on the grounds that they are not an indigenous tribe but refugees. Instances like this provide opportunities to redefine and deepen grassroots democracy and at the same time recast the contours of majority-minority relations within a state.

ADCs are basically intended to give self-management rights in matters pertaining to, inter alia, marriage, social customs, culture, land, religion and tradition. Structurally, the Sixth Schedule is considered to give leverage to nondemocratic forces since it is based upon two institutional bedrocks having contrasting loyalties. Firstly, the village authority(ies) or village council under the leadership of the Village Chief(s), which is based on kinship relations; and secondly, the district council(s), which is based on territorial loyalty and, which in turn operates according to the principle of democratic citizenship. Social discourse must, of course, be encouraged, but the parties in this discourse must be made to realize that a negotiated settlement will necessarily have to involve a good degree of bargaining.

A rigid adherence to one's point of view cannot produce results, and the focus must also be directed towards current realities. Disregarding such an approach leads to intractable conflict situations and, in the case of a multi-ethnic situation like in Manipur and Assam, ethnic mayhem becomes unavoidable if any dichotomy between the lived realities and the position emerging through official arbitrations is evident.

As far as decentralization and local autonomy are concerned, the Sixth Schedule should be the present standard. Ironically, the autonomous councils constituted by the state governments do not enjoy all the powers available under the Sixth Schedule. Thus, the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act 1971 which is comparatively much deficient than autonomous councils under Sixth Schedule is bound to hassle the tribals against the majority Meitei led state government. Under such a state deprivation induced circumstances, ethnic minority discontentment and fear is bound to result in the demand for greater autonomy for complete detachment from the majority in whose hand their autonomy is at stake. In other words, it is the deprivation that radicalise ethnic aspirations.

Despite the massive success of autonomous councils in the region, different groups in Northeast India continue to demand the creation of new states and autonomous councils in their favor. Basically, this is because most communities in the region are under the impression that an adequate share of political power is a necessary condition for retaining their socio-cultural identities and development, not to mention the degree of alienation on the other. Thus, these cultural and developmental aspirations, though legitimate, are often exclusively guided by administrative demands for self-governance vis-à-vis ethnic areas. It is because of these phenomena that ethnic co-existence; conflicts over land and territoriality continue to blight the region with unending unrest.

In view of the historical factors that gave rise to the Sixth Schedule, the provision means autonomy capable of allowing the tribal communities to exercise self-governance and constitutional safeguards to protect their distinctiveness. In other words, these Councils are meant to devolve judicial, legislative, executive and financial powers to those upon whom it is conferred. However, the administrative logic that decreed autonomy under the Sixth Schedule is naïve and self-defeating as there was no autonomy in the real sense of the term.
Particularly, legislative and financial autonomy is put under the scrutiny and authority of the state government. Thus the drawbacks and incapacities associated with the Sixth Schedule require immediate reformulation.

Summary and Conclusion

The more the authority of the centre and state is institutionalized and the more accommodating the ruling strategy, the more likely that diversity will be negotiated. The underlying argument is that a well-institutionalized state sets firm boundaries within which political movements must operate and, on the other hand, an accommodating leadership provides room—of course, within limits—for the movements to achieve some real gains. The reason is that a well-institutionalized democratic state both provides room for self-determination movements to emerge and possesses a fair amount of legitimate coercion to repress these movements.

Decentralized autonomy is important rather than merely accepting that the existing federal structure as the most important explanatory variable in understanding the different intensities and aspirations of diversity. However, in view of the non-homogeneity and dispersal of ethnic settlements, it is difficult to state that ethnic federalism or autonomy would be capable of serving the urges and claims of ethnic communities. Yet, in situations where meaningful decentralization or devolution of grass-root governance is ensured, minorities may feel a sense of security and be enabled to promote their own culture and identity. Attachment to the land where they have been living for generations is an important socio-cultural reality. The issue of satisfying the cultural, social and, more importantly, political aspirations of these various ethnic groups needs to be adequately addressed.

Effective elected local government is an important foundation for democracy. Thus, there is a need to evolve an inclusionary public philosophy that not only emphasizes pan-Indian unity, but which also ensures institutional accommodation to its sub-national communities. In view of the propulsive frictions among the people of these regions, a serious rethinking of the current political arrangements needs to be undertaken. Decentralization is per se the key area that needs modification and change in order to enhance people's involvement in the governance which in turn might considerably abate assertive urges and minimize confrontational politics. Only then a true nationalism, based on shared sentiments and feelings could develop. However, if the state and dominant groups continue to discriminate and remain non-accommodative to ethnic demands, ethnic movements may intensify which may gravely aggravate ethnic co-existence, particularly if they see no space in the emerging polity.

End Notes

1. The Fifth Schedule of the Constitution of India deals with administration and control of scheduled areas and scheduled tribes in Tribal areas in 9 states of India namely: Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Rajasthan. Also, see [Articles 244] of the Indian Constitution.
4. Of all the Northeastern states, Meghalaya is the least ethnically stratified with mainly three ethnic groups—Khasis, Jaintias and Garos inhabiting the state. Herein, the Khasis and Jaintias being linguistically and culturally closer and numerically preponderant do not exert their feeling of alienation by the state. The Garos however aspire to have a state of their own considering the relative deprivation and regional imbalances. A movement towards genuine devolution of political and economic power could accommodate such tendencies, that is, establish a new "equilibrium" between demands and governance, and help strengthen democracy. The politics of exclusion can be minimized and justice be ensured through the recognition of various identity groups' assertions for self-governance. Lastly, the demand for Sixth Schedule in Manipur
by the tribal needs to be acknowledged to avoid intense and more radical ethnic assertions. It must be remembered that justice delayed is justice denied. Therefore, in order to ensure justice and equality, it depends on the authority of the government to deliver autonomy. Despite various ills associated with the region, what the Northeast region witness are essentially ethnontational movements of groups to further their sub-national aspirations, often triggered by the fear of losing their distinct identity. Thus, Sixth Schedule which is ensured with a provision of protecting minorities’ identity if free from whimsical interference can negotiate ethnic mosaic and aspirations, otherwise, this legal safeguards can encapsulated to sensitization of ethnic aspirations.

Most significantly, just as Tripura scripted a story of triumph over militancy and conflict-resolution, and demonstrated that militancy was not an insurmountable phenomenon, what is needed is to tackle the region's ethnic grievances through well-crafted, multi-dimensional strategy, a positive mindset, resolve will, the right vision and direction, sagacious and credible leadership, sincerity of intent, creative responses to the challenge, even socio-economic-infrastructure dispensation to all sections of society, and modulated and humane combat operations intertwined with psychological operations to set a change in the psyche of the turbulent mind. The Komrem is a proposed collective identity to those culturally, linguistically and ethnically comprehensive groups from Kuki-Chin identity framework. The Aimols, Chirius, Clothoes, Kharams, Koms, Koirengs who are predominantly settled in the present state of Manipur fall under this identity.

For understanding of the dimension and scale of ethnic movements and militancy particularly on the Nagas, Meiteis and Assamese in the Northeast, see, Sanjib Baruah 2005. Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India. New Delhi: Oxford University Press & Sajal Nag 1999, Nationalism, Separatism and Secessionism, Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications. The term ‘militancy’ and ‘insurgency’ is interchangeably used throughout in this paper without necessarily emphasizing on the theoretical variations of the terms.

For detail understanding and overview of ethnic situations in Northeast India, see, Ch. Sekholal Kom ‘Ethnic Movements in Northeast India: Predicaments and Concerns’ in Arshi Khan & Kushal Pal (eds), 2011, Federalism, Democracy and Conflict Resolution, New Delhi: Macmillan. The Komrem is a proposed collective identity to those culturally, linguistically and ethnically comprehensive groups from Kuki-Chin identity framework. The Aimols, Chirius, Clothoes, Kharams, Koms, Koirengs who are predominantly settled in the present state of Manipur fall under this identity.

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As per South Asian Terrorism Portal (SATP) report, there are more than one hundred terrorist groups in the region. Manipur top the list with thirty-nine groups. However, if one has to rely on the statistics given by the local and regional dailies, the numbers could be more.