Man and Society
A Journal of North-East Studies

Contents

Editorial

North-east India is currently experiencing large-scale developmental activities led by the central government and supplemented and complemented by the state governments, the private sector, communities and civil society organizations. These scaled developmental activities and practices have their micro and macro-objectives. They do have their own anticipated and unforeseen impacts and consequences on the individuals, households, society, economy and institutions. It is often observed that developmental practices and efforts in the region either fail or their delivery becomes sub-optimal because of their skewed conceptualization and formulation based on the _apriori_ understanding of the bureaucrats and not being grounded on adequate research. Man and Society, the leading journal of the region, has been continuously providing an effectual platform to both experienced and promising social science researchers and developmental practitioners to get engaged on such issues of societal, cultural, political, institutional and economic developments and offer wherever possible, effective solutions in terms of policy prescriptions and developmental directions.

The current issue of our journal includes eight articles and one research note. They analytically deal with some critical issues of development in the region such as reimagining the Tribes in the online space, forests policy and land rights, Act East Policy and sustainable development, policing, media portrayal of women, recreating women's movement, NEP 2020 and its challenges and multidimensional poverty. We are sure that researchers, developmental practitioners and policy makers would find these articles highly relevant. I take this opportunity to thank the members of my editorial team, members of the editorial advisory board and the concerned office staff for meticulously working at every stage of examining and processing of these articles.

(Bhagirathi Panda)
Editor

I

(Re)Imagining the Khasi Tribe on Social Media

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Abstract : There has been a considerable scholarly concentration in the area of social media and the (re) presentation of the self and its many facets. However, this study departs from the self and engages to explore how do "small often marginalized tribal communities" of Northeast India not just distanced geographically from mainland India but also the so-called mainstream media maps themselves in the online media space. The study engages into netnography of a private Facebook group of twenty-five thousand members belonging to the Khasi tribe, to probe as to how social boundaries are drawn and communities are formed in social media, how do they construct a collaborative and collective identity in the social media landscape. The qualitative analysis of thematically drawn interactions in the online group reveals a homogeneous bounded private online space built around the aspirations and imaginaries of the community. It also locates ethnic affiliations and the active role of co-constructed common sense in sustaining the bonds and solidarity of human relationships in the networked environment. The empirical observations position the online space as a digital repository of community practices and resources of tacit knowledge.

Keywords: Community, social identity, social imaginary, common sense, tacit knowledge

The Contestation of Tribal Discourse

Northeast India is seen as the cultural corridor to South East Asia and is marked as the homeland to more than 150 different tribal, ethnic

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communities. The region comprises eight different states connected to the rest of India through a 22 km narrow strip known as the chicken neck located in West Bengal. The socio-political history of Northeast India as well as the contemporary discourses consistently lurk around identity politics often affiliated to tribes or tribal identity. The term tribe though can be used in many different contexts but most commonly it evokes images of people living in seclusion as primitive, uncivilised savage, poor, backward and deprived. The early scholarly understanding of the term has been towards a band of people mainly as forest dwellers (Parasher – Sen, 1998), hunters, gatherers, pastoralists or aborigines. Some references of the term are found in the early Brahmanical literature in phrases such as *Asuras, Rakshashas*, *Mleccha* (the demons and outcaste groups)*, atavikas (having the connotations of wild and savage)* because they lived in the regions that were outside *Aryavarta* (Aryan-land) (Dhanaraju, 2015). The conceptualisation of tribe in India's context as a group based on categorically distinct features has emanated from colonial ethnographers (Béteille, 1994/1998; Xaxa,1995, 2008; Baral, 2009). The Colonialists perceived tribes as pre-modern, or anti-modern, preferring isolation rather than integration or assimilation (Elwin, 1959, 1969; Pels, 1999). The colonial construct of the tribes has been a dominant discourse that imagines the tribe as close to nature and positioned at a strange and often at the opposite trajectory of modernization, development and technology (Singh, 1994). The colonialist's conception of the tribe has also been deeply territorialised through the process of mapping, surveys, settlements, categorization of people in census reports, and land classifications. The scholars have positioned the colonial construct as an impetus to the modern consciousness of the distinct and separate identity of the region and mainly of the tribes from that of the people from the plains often considered as non-tribal.

Post-Independence, India under the leadership of Nehru adopted an "integrationist" and "protective" approach towards the tribes and tribal

issues. However, the colonial epistemology of the tribe only got reinforced and strengthened with the passing of the Fifth and Sixth schedule. The Fifth and Sixth schedule not just rooted the tribal identity into geographically defined territories but also considerably changed the lens of tribal identity from secluded uncivilised deprived identity to a privileged and an aspired one. In independent India, the notion of "tribe" evolved from the primitive uncivilised category to the tools for the assertion of social, political and cultural articulation (Xaxa, 2015). The juxtaposition of the socio-cultural into the political space has resulted in various secessionist and autonomy demands across the North-eastern region of India.

In the diverse cultural context of India, the term tribe is interchangeably used with alternative terms such as aborigines/aboriginals (Risley 1903; Elwin 1944), 'so-called aborigines', backward Hindus (Ghurye 1963), ethnic minorities (Pathy, 1988), the fourth world (Sengupta 1982). Further terms have been coined in recent years, such as the marginalized, Dalits, and Adivasis (indigenous peoples). (Pathy, 1992, p.50) assimilates the anthropological thrusts on the conceptualisation of tribes in India on a set of key characteristics. These characteristics are - an absence of exploitative classes and organized state structures; multifunctionality of kinship bonds; all-pervasive religion; the segmentary character of socioeconomic units; frequent cooperation in the pursuit of common goals; shallow history; distinct taboos, customs, and moral codes; youth dormitory; low level of technology; common name, territory, descent, language, culture. This deluge of terminologies and defining parameters reflects the deep discomforts among the scholars often converging into the State's understanding of the term for a convenient reference. According to Indian Constitution, tribes are considered as those groups enumerated in the list of Scheduled Tribes. This categorization is linked with administrative and political considerations. The schedule tribe status ascribed by the Indian constitution is ingrained in the anthropological understanding of the term based on certain essential

characteristics such as primitive traits, geographical isolation, distinct culture, shy of contact with the community at large and economically backward.

Kim (2007) highlights the shift in ideological approaches in cultural identity studies in intercultural setups largely in America and other western cultures from traditional melting pot approaches to pluralistic and critical approaches challenging the dominant conceptions of cultural identity. Even in India, a growing body of scholars is resisting the claustrophobic confines of tribal identities which according to them has been imposed on them by others, be it the colonial administrator, the colonial anthropologist, the missionary or the neo-liberal, neo-imperialist forces that rule global economy today. According to (Nayak, 2020) the idealization of tribal identity by anthropologists, and its subsequent construction by historians disregards tribal multiculturalism. Such imposed identity narratives are criticised for been apathetic towards the tribal worldview. Rao (2017) argues that tribes construct their identities differently from those perceived by others. He presents a contrary perspective from the hegemonic objectified representation as he highlights the conscious construction of the tribes in their native territories often proclaiming "*ame raja loka"* meaning *we are born kings and we people are king like* (p.150). There is a scope to explore the tribal subjectivities and a range of studies have started to emerge confronting the dominant patterns drawing insightful inferences into tribal societies.

The term tribe therefore cannot be simply summarized into an administrative social category as it is an identity status encompassing the people, their culture, the way of life intrinsically defined in terms of their geographical territory. The homogeneity of the term tribe referring to about 550 diverse tribal groups comprising 8.6% of the total population (Census, 2011) located in India is a misnomer, "misleading and fallacious" (Xaxa,

2008, p. 15) to the diverse range of people, culture and practices. Béteille's (1994) argument is that any definition of a tribe based on language, culture, territory, or government is inadequate in the context of the complexity and diversity of modern Indian society. What then is the definition of a tribe especially in the emerging information technology landscape where geographical boundaries are shrinking and communities and social relations are transcending to online mediated space? What are the parameters of ascribing a tribal identity and who consolidates such ascriptions? There lies a need to critically engage in historical processes, the colonial ascriptions of tribal identity and the post-colonial discourses in neoliberal technology-mediated online spaces which are fast emerging as potent venues of social and cultural expression.

The global village phenomena propelled by information and communication technology has led to the world of interconnected networks. The overwhelming telecom usage statistics, slashed data packs, mobile phones, internet-enabled smartphone penetration figures particularly in rural India and rising popularity of several social media platforms suggests a wide scope to engage in understanding the diffusion of such a technology in its far-flung areas, especially among the minority, marginalized and indigenous communities. Tribal societies once conceived to be living in geographical and physical isolations are undoubtedly at the intersections of these technologies. The emerging technology-mediated space is reorganizing social organisation and redefining communities from geographically bounded terrain to disembodied entities on the online space. As evidenced through several studies in recent times, social media technology has remained at the centre of the formation of bonds and digital communities in the online space primarily based on the commonalities of shared interest. Though anthropologists have been slow and reluctant to follow social groups online (Beaulieu2004; Hakken 2002; Miller and Slater 2000) but it is increasingly reaching the consensus that they can no

longer adequately understand many of the most important facets of social and cultural life without incorporating the internet and computer-mediated communications into their studies. There is an emerging thrust to explore the dynamics of social relationships, operations of solidarity and bonding in digital online spaces and understand the complexity of social identity in and through online space. Acting primarily on these two key premises of contested tribal identity and user-generated, participatory online media landscape, this study engages to locate the role of technology-mediated space in articulating pluralistic voices. It attempts to understand the processes of the construction of tribal identities on social media. It focuses on the Khasi tribe of Meghalaya and attempts to map individuals and their social behaviour patterns in a collective social media space to understand the co-construction of social identities through their online daily discourses.

The Khasis of Meghalaya

The Northeastern state of Meghalaya was carved out of Assam to form a separate federal state on 21st January 1972. Meghalaya- a Sanskrit word which when translated to English means "*the abode of clouds*" is a homeland to three major ethnic communities i.e. the Khasis the Garos and the Jaintias. According to the 2011 census, there are 17 notified schedule tribes in Meghalaya comprising 86. 1 per cent of the tribal population. Khasis with a population of 49.54% are the most dominant tribal group in Meghalaya followed by 30.86% of Garos. The term Khasi is used in a generic sense, which includes the *Khasi*, the *Jaintia*, the *War* the *Bhoi* and the *Lyngam* and they are collectively known as the *Hynniewtrep* people. Khasis belong to the Austro-Asiatic language group and are mainly found in the East, West and South West Khasi Hills Districts, the Ri-Bhoi District and the East and West Jaintia Hills Districts of Meghalaya. The Khasis are unique and one of those few groups of people who trace their succession from the mother's side. Unlike the patrilineal descent group, the Khasis trace their descent

through the female line i.e. the children consequently take the mother's surname and become members of her clan and live in the mother's social group (Nongbri, 1996).

The origins of the Khasi tribe are shrouded in history and much of the historical facts have been buried in its myths and folk stories as the renowned Khasi poet and philosopher, *U Soso Tham* has rightly pointed out in his poem "*Ki Symboh Ksiar*" (Golden Grains), that much of Khasi history can be gathered from their stories and legends embodied in nature. The written literature arrived in the Khasi Jaintia Hills with the emergence of Welsh Missionaries and Thomas Jones in the 1830's. Jones introduced the Khasis to Roman script and transcribed the Khasi language into the Roman script. Until the arrival of the Colonial powers and the Missionaries, the Khasi and Jaintia hills were a cluster of 25 different *Himas* (Kingdoms) and each *Hima* had its own *Syiem* (ruler). In absence of any written literature, the understanding of Khasis, their cultural practices, customs and beliefs system was passed on to successive generation through the tribes' oral narratives. The collective Khasi consciousness is deeply rooted in its divine mythical origin of their belief to have been the descendants of the seven huts (*Ki Khun U HynniewTrep*), and their belief in God (*U Blei*), the Creator and its world view. Though a majority of the Khasi population have adopted Christianity, these mythical tales of the past are the driving force of unified Khasi consciousness.

The conception of Khasis as a tribe is incoherent to the epistemic of tribal identity enumerated in the colonial history and the post-independence epistemology of the Northeast region. Besides, the Khasi tribal imagination also took a distinct shape as a result of the Hill's State Movement which was deeply rooted in the cultural aspirations, political control, power and ownership of land and allied resources. Since the formation of the state, the politics, the social organisation, economy has largely centred around the dichotomy of tribal vs. non-tribal narratives and the several recurring

incidences of violence has only reinforced this narrative.

Collective identities on Social media

Social media is at the crux of rapidly expansive communication technology. Social media is undoubtedly a broad arena with a constantly evolving network structure making it not just challenging but difficult to comprehend. And despite the several controversies around privacy, hacking, fake news and all the other negative aspects of online life, the world seems to embrace social media and Facebook. As of April 2020, India ranks first in terms of Facebook user base size. There are nearly 300 million Facebook users in India alone, making it the leading country in terms of Facebook audience size (Diwanji, 2020). The data breach allegations following the Cambridge Analytica and the rising concerns of privacy on social media sites compelled Mark Zuckerberg to revisit the company's privacy policies. In his 2019 blog post, he wrote "*many people prefer the intimacy of communicating one-on-one or with just a few friends, the future is private*" and unveiled a subtle redesign for Facebook that places more emphasis on *Groups* as a venue for a more intimate and meaningful social interaction online. The group is an emerging area of Facebook network structure that enables people to form online communities over shared interests or hobbies. The groups on Facebook are bounded space with a range of privacy settings. Web 2.0 enabled social media technologies and particularly online groups to differentiate themselves from all other traditional channels of communication as it offers an equivocal space for participation and engagement.

The domain of social media scholarship has largely been oriented towards identity studies exploring areas such as the construction of the self, impression management, identity experiments, performative identities and the online and offline personas (Boyd and Ellison, 2007; McCorduck,1996; Bargh and McKenna, 2004; Salimkhan and Greenfield, 2010; DeAndrea

and Walther, 2011). In the past decade and with the changes in the social media design structures, the field of identity studies has broadened to growing scholarships exploring aspects of social identity and community relationship in the social media space.

Due to the ambiguity and relativity of the term "tribe", this section is broadened to include studies around the allied themes such as ethnic or indigenous communities, minorities, aborigines, diasporic identities. Cottle (2000) suggests that the expansion of the media industry is enabling more specialized and minority groups to gain access and control to the new communication technologies and thus empowering themselves. Sreberny-Mohamadi and Mohamadi (1994) and Gillespie (1995) also state that modern communication technology which has collapsed time and space is providing new communication opportunities for embattled or dispersed ethnic minorities to sustain their subcultures, keeping alive memories and myths of homeland as well as collective hopes for the future. The comparatively low-cost internet has enabled the diasporic communities irrespective of their size, a means to communicate among themselves on a massive scale (Xiaoming and Zhang, 1999). Besides as a networking platform, the various tools of social media such as profile images, wall posts, feeds etc. also offering performative arenas for individuals as well as groups to project themselves to an audience that's globally connected through the same technology. Georgiou (2003), emphasizes that the internet has become a new means of direct communication for ethnic communities and an alternative to mainstream media and community discourse. Grant (2016) highlights how Tibetans created a cyber-community on social media app WeChat in 2013 and 2014 and performed their ethnic identity in the face of perceived harassment by the Chinese state and private Han individuals. Similarly, in the backdrop of the refugee crisis in the EU, Komito (2011) credit social media as an effective and most viable tool among the refugees for communicating with family and friends in the home country and gain social

and emotional support. Oh (2012) study on the second generation Korean American adolescents in U.S suggests how they are using transnational media as cultural resources through which they are constructing new inter-ethnic boundaries to create a unique identity that separates themselves from the controlling gaze of the dominant culture and to build intra-ethnic boundaries to differentiate between authentic and inauthentic Korean Americans. Several studies also posit that minority cultures are using new media to magnify their cultures and create new cultural spaces. Johnson & Callahan (2013) study focuses upon Garifuna people and how they are using a supra territorial cyberspace to counter their feelings of marginalization in the mainstream media by proliferating and strengthening their culture regardless of geographical considerations. Kwok (1999) emphasises the speed of communication and the global reach offered by the internet which in his view allows rapid mobilization of ethnic communities during critical events. Karakusheva's (2016) study titled "Digital Ethnicities and (Re-) Construction of ethnic identities in Social Media" focuses on the efforts of the different members of the Pomak, a Sunni Muslim Slavonic language-speaking community participate in the virtual circulation of information on online platforms. The Pomak's are participating in a 'bottom-up' grassroots public debate about their community thereby decentralizing and challenging the identity discourses of the different national contexts. Carlson (2013) terms social media spaces as a "new frontier" and a viable venue for cultural and social interaction among Aboriginal people.

These several studies locate social media as a tool of enormous possibilities particularly a medium of emancipation and effective in bolstering minority voices that often struggle to find their way in traditional media outlets. The studies also highlight a form of bond and collective consciousness in a deterritorialized online space. This range of studies and their critical findings though in a different context and society, has necessitated the need to critically engage in exploring the strands of

construction of social identity through social media. Through an in-depth engagement into an online group created over Facebook, this study engages in understanding the phenomenon of Khasi identity construction through their subjectivities in social media space.

The Framework of Tribe

As established through an array of studies the conception of the tribe in India has been an ambiguous and a relative one. The notions of the tribe have consistently been conceptualized at the intersections of the larger organized settlement or caste Hindus. In the context of this study, the understanding of the tribe will be rooted in its anthropological framework and will adopt the meta-concept of tribe assimilated by Xaxa (2008) based on the major anthropological literature in India. According to Xaxa, the reference to tribes are based on the three distinct but interrelated elements. They are-

1. Tribes as societies -to be defined based on their boundaries, which set certain limits on the legal, political, economic, and social relations of its members. These boundaries can be defined linguistically, culturally, and politically.

2. tribes as a distinct society- comprising of positive features that are absent from modern society, namely social relations based on kinship bonds, all-pervasive religion, frequency of cooperation for the achievement of common goals, etc. and presence of negative traits such as non-literate, uncivilized, non-industrialized, non-specialized, etc missing from the modern society.

3. tribes as representing a particular stage in socio-political evolution.

These three characteristics shall guide the study to understand the conception

of Khasi tribal identity in the social media space.

Methodology

This study adopts a Netnography method to find answers to the questions raised in the research. Netnography is "a qualitative, interpretive research methodology that adapts the traditional, in-person ethnographic research techniques of anthropology to the study of online cultures and communities formed through computer-mediated communications" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 135). This selection of the Netnography approach is based on the three key premises. Firstly, the conceptual understanding views the internet as an emerging space of cultural and personal expressions or a cultural artefact (Hine, 2000). Secondly, the study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the practices and modalities of social identity construction and what goes on to create the boundaries of tribal identity in the online space. And thirdly compared to the range of internet-oriented ethnographic approaches, Netnography also offers a distinct step by step procedural guideline to take the researcher through the steps necessary to conduct an ethnography of an online community cum culture and to present the work, while maintaining the inherent flexibility and adaptability of ethnography studies.

This Netnography study is based on a closed private Facebook group named "Ka Thymmei U Hyniewtrep" (KTUH henceforth) comprising of over twenty-five thousand members based and operating from Meghalaya. "Ka Thymmei U Hynniewtrep" when translated means *"The Foundation of Seven huts"*. KTUH is a closed private group created on Facebook, wherein only the approved members can view the information shared in the group as well as participate in the activities of the group. The group membership is open only to the dominant ethnic communities in Meghalaya i.e. the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos. The group is run by 8 different admins, two of which are female while six are male. The majority of group members are

from India, and particularly Meghalaya, the group also has a sizeable Khasi population from Bangladesh. The group comprises members primarily between 18- 34 years of age. The group was created in June 2017 with the primary objective to share local news stories from the various news portal sites, television news channels, and digital news platforms operating in Meghalaya.

The researcher integrated the two key aspects of Netnographic inquiry i.e. the participant observation and online interviews to collect relevant data and meet the research objective. In online qualitative methods such as participant observation, Salmons (2017) identifies three typologies viz. extant, elicit and enacted to collect data based on the degree of direct interaction the researcher has with the data and with participants. As enumerated by Salmons, the researcher adopted the extant typology where the researcher lingered unobtrusively on the online group wall watching minute by minute streams of conversations among the group members. The extant data thus gathered comprised of online interactions among the group members on the group discussion wall, where members would express their views and opinions on a range of matters and other members would also react through comments, and emoticons. This study comprises extant data collected for six months. In this period, the researcher closely monitored the activities in the online group each day and prepared a detailed database of the top five posts of the day based on the highest member engagement in terms of comments. The data also comprises online interviews with the group admins. This process ensured that the researcher screenshot all such conversations and saved all the online interactions with admins. Social media studies challenge the traditional concept of informed consent, privacy and confidentiality therefore, elaborate strategies were adopted to anonymise the data and all identifying information were encoded into a unique identification number in an attempt to protect the subject and group privacy and confidentiality. All the individual names and group name

mentioned in the study have been changed.

The 1075 posts thus collected were sorted and coded thematically and analysed based on the guide frame as assimilated by Xaxa, (2008) on tribal identity. The findings of the study are presented below.

KTUH - The Imagined Community

Xaxa (2008) argues that the terms of reference for the study of tribes in India should be the same terms used by the tribal people to identify themselves and by which they are known and addressed by other people and therefore he lays emphasis on "communities". The emergence of internet technology has shifted the understanding of community from a geographic unit to a psychological one and community is viewed as a culture, a set of ideas and interpersonal sentiments rather than as a physical place (Anderson, 1991; Bender, 1978; Calhoun, 1980). The understanding of community in tandem as the tribe has been transient over time and subjective based on different individuals and society. However, the dominating traits in understanding any community, whether offline or online have been on collective action (Jones, 1995), ritualized sharing of information (Carey, 1989; Jones, 1995) attachments to one another and the community more generally (Willson, 2006) close, and intimate (Jensen, 1990) bonds. Besides, Parks (2010) outlines three types of social affordances i.e. membership, expression, and connection as a prerequisite for the formation of communities on social network sites. KTUH in technical parlance is one of the affordances of the Facebook design structure. It is the architect of the model of group communication. KTUH emulates the emerging notions of community, surpassing the idea of a "geographically bounded space". KTUH is a private closed group on Facebook comprising twenty-five thousand members exclusively belonging to the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo communities. Since its inception in 2017, KTUH has incessantly worked on bringing the members

of the Khasi community under one-fold. As a result of this single point focussed agenda, the group grants membership only to Facebook users belonging to the Khasi, Jaintia or Garo ethnic group, irrespective of one's region or place of stay. KTUH has members not only from Meghalaya but also from parts of Bangladesh, which has a sizeable Khasi population and the rest of the Khasis, spread in different parts of the world. KTUH is operated through eight different admins, out of which two are female while the four other members are male. The eight admins are based at the different district headquarters in Meghalaya. The admins running the group do not know each other personally nor have they ever met in person. Their relationship ties are purely built on Facebook. The current team of admins have been in this position for over a year. The admins have sole control in the group, its content, privacy and security aspects. The admins closely monitor the content in the group wall and members can share information on the group wall only after the approval of the admins.

The structures of control in KTUH

Unlike the traditional socio-political institution, the online group chosen in the study is somewhat egalitarian and flexible in its structure wherein there are no rigid hierarchies in terms of the role and functioning nor any gender demarcations or gender-specific roles. In the traditional Khasi society, the power hierarchy of socio-political structure comprises of a four-tier form of governance with the Hima (state) at the top, Raids (communes) at the middle, the Shnong (village) and the Kur (clan) at the base (Lyngdoh, 1996). The Dorbars or councils have no written law of their composition or functioning but operate purely on uncodified customary laws and practices, which are more or less binding on all members of the village. In the present age, changes have been seen wherein some Dorbar Shnongs or village councils have their own written constitutions, rules and regulations (War, 1998). The Dorbar Hima or council is considered a sacred institution of the

Khasis. Strict rules of conduct are imposed. Though the Hima resembles an inclusive space Lyngdoh (1996) points out that women have no share or role in the political and administrative set-up of the Khasi society. In the online group, the admins are not elected but selected based on undefined unwritten preferences, nor the admin structure has a fixed term of office. It is subject to change. Unlike the local Dorbars in the offline setting, it is observed that women are part of the admin team in the online setting and fulfil the admin roles of approving member requests, monitoring the content and other related activities in the group.

The admins have the power to approve or reject members and they do a rigorous background check of the people who apply before granting them membership in KTUH. These checks usually include scanning through the aspiring members' Facebook profile and their timeline of activities before approving their membership requests in the group. Besides this, KTUH also has a three-question membership form to check the authenticity and belongingness of profiles applying for membership. Based on satisfactorily fulfilling the above two criteria, the admins grant membership to the online group. While some admins report that many members who apply do not take the entry questions seriously nor fill with rigour yet, they say having these questions are important as it not just a test of one's language proficiency but also commitment and belonging towards the Khasi community. *Chen[1],* the head admin shares that "one can easily learn a language and there are many non-tribal speaking the Khasi language but not all have feelings of belongingness or commitment towards the community". The admins report that since the online community is big and it is not possible to do a manual check on each member, the members in the community also have a decisive role in doing background checks on co-members and if anyone is found to be a non-tribal, such cases are reported to the admins and their membership is withdrawn immediately and such members are blocked from accessing the group in future. The admins reported instances of such incidents in the

past. The online space is an admin-controlled domain. The boundaries of the online group are strongly drawn around the kinship ties, and deeply rooted in ancestral bonds. This homogenised online space bears a close resemblance to the characteristics of tribal societies deeply rooted in the sameness of culture, language, religion etc.

KTUH- Everyday practices

KTUH is an active and vibrant discursive space built on social media. According to the admins, the group was conceptualised and designed primarily with the agenda of sharing news and information mainly about the Khasi Jaintia hills of Meghalaya. The admins also emphasized the role of the group in steering debate, deliberation and discussion. *Shan[2],* another admin reports- "we wanted to create a platform where people can express themselves and how they feel about the different issues around them". For the Khasis spread the world over, KTUH is a convenient and most accessible way to keep in touch with news and activities back home. Among the vast majority of its members, the group is symbolically perceived as a "*Dongmusa*" which when translated to English means a torchlight. As a symbolic visual analogy, like a torchlight, the Facebook group is aimed at enlightening the way for the Khasi community through information sharing and active engagement in everyday affairs and the politics of the state. News is the most shared and highly posted content in the group. The daily wage labourers and poor section feel privileged to be members of the group as they get access to news and other important information on their phones round the clock without having to invest in newspapers or any other media. The members resort to the group wall to share their opinions on a range of issues such as criticising the govt for poor management of the mid-day meal scheme, or the corruption at the local Dorbar (administration), or the plight of teachers enrolled in Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) or merely alerting the group members to abstain drinking alcohol in public places. The online

group wall at several occasions replicates the community information centre (CIC) exhibiting information on various employment and skill training opportunities at a different location at regular intervals. The members in the group also share their work from home part-time job experiences encouraging and requesting other members to take up such ventures with the least investment liabilities. Farmers belonging to different villages also post their queries on the group wall particularly on their produce and on rare edibles such as mushroom or turmeric or the availability of affordable fish breeds.

One of the intrinsic characteristics of a community is its members' engagement in the socio-cultural activities of the community. Social gatherings or mass celebrations or other socio-religious or cultural events are often the common ground for the members to meet, share and participate. KTUH has its own set of norms for such gatherings. The group wall regularly features different kinds of games, challenges, polls and predictions to engage the members. Jenkins (2007) terms the era of new media technologies as 'participatory culture'. The group wall constantly exhibits various performative videos of its members made usually on other cross-platform apps such as Likee or Tiktok. These short under a minute videos showcase performances (often dance and singing skills) to a mixed match of Bollywood, Western or Khasi music. Such videos often feature housewives, mothers or teenagers who become an instant rage in the online group as depicted through the members' likes, comments and shares. The members also frequently share their experiences of being cheated or duped by people mostly on the pretext of job in major urban centres of India alerting other members to take necessary precautions on the group wall. The members resort to the KTUH wall to complain about the regular power cuts in their respective localities or the poor mobile and internet service providers of the various telecom companies. The online group also emerges as a potent venue to reach out, connect and support each other. The group wall

regularly shares posts from members seeking help on various issues ranging from blood donations to assistance for applying birth and death certificates. The group wall regularly displays posts appealing either for blood donation or any kind of financial assistance. These posts laden with images of the patient from hospital beds is seen to trigger higher responses among the group members as projected through the numbers of likes, comments and shares in such posts. These posts reflect the interdependence of the group members. These posts often accompany thanksgiving or appreciation posts in the week. These strings of posts indicate that the members in the group are not just connected in the online space but their social ties also expand to the offline settings and reach out to help and support each other. According to *Kongri³,* a female admin in the online group, "the group has brought us closer and it has strengthened the bonds and belongingness among us through different acts of kindness and cooperation".

The multitudes of members in the online group do not know each other personally, yet the close kinship structure among the Khasis and their belief system that's rooted in knowing the matriclan and patriclan (*Tip Kur, Tip Kha)* unifies the online group in a cohesion. The feelings of solidarity and belongingness to the community is primarily rested on the nostalgias and the ancestral ties.

The discursive of belongingness

The social relations in the online group is discursive and interactional. One of the most recurring terms in the group wall post is "Jaidbynriew". Jaidbynriew is a Khasi word which when translated means "Race". It is a collective term or a uniform entity used to denote Khasis across region and religion. Jaidbynriew is used as an umbrella term encompassing the Khasi superstructure that comprises of several clans at the base, followed by the Shnongs (Village level), Riad (Commune) and the Hima (state) at

the top. Jaidbynriew as a term comprehensively glues the ruptures within the Khasi social structure arising due to religious conversion, migration and modern living. The term is used symbolically in the online group to bond the Khasis into a uniform stream tracing its root to the mythical divine origin of the children of the seven huts (*Hynniewtrep, Hynniewskum).* The term "*Jaidbynriew"* is also used conjunctively with the word "*Ri*" or "*RiKhasi*". The word Ri when translated to English means land (Nongkynrih, 2001) and Ri Khasi means the Khasi land or the land inhabited by the Khasis. However, it will be unfair to derive any inferences based on the literal meaning of these terms. Ri Khasi is not so much the geographical space demarcated through history and the politics of the times (Ghosh, 2018). The word Ri or Ri Khasi though denoted a tangible demarcated geographical boundary in the past, but in the contemporary times, it isn't just a piece of land that one can spot in a map. Before the arrivals of the Britishers, the Khasi hills were divided into different *Himas* (Kingdoms) and the conglomeration of different *Himas* formed the Ri or Ri Khasi, thereby signifying a Nation where Khasis lived. The word Ri and Ri Khasi were convenient category labels in the past. However, post-independence and especially after the signing of the Instrument of Accession the term metamorphosed from literal (territorial) to symbolic significance. The recurrence of the terms "*Ri or Ri Khasi"* in the online group discourses is a social construct and used symbolically. In KTUH, these terms are used to unite the members into a single fold and invoke a sense of unity and belongingness based on a 'shared historic territory', 'common myths' and 'historical memories' (Smith, 1991, p.14). The term further garners 'substantial distinctiveness and the feeling of exclusivity as well as beliefs in a common ancestry and continuous genealogy' (Tamir, 1995, p. 425). In the online group discourses, the term also signifies a "homeland, that members in the group believe is theirs" (Barington, 1997, p. 713). The other catchphrase commonly used in the online group that connotes community bonding and solidarity

is the term "*Para Khasi*" which when translated to English means "our own Khasis". The phrase is yet another collective attempt at drawing boundaries and binding the members within such boundaries. This term gained a renewed significance in recent times after the former legislator of Nongkrem Constituency in East Khasi Hills, Ardent Miller Basaiawmoit while addressing a public meeting at *Students Field* in *Jaiaw* on February 6, 2020, gave it a revolutionary twist. He raged a "*Para Khasi"* slogan while making a clarion call to oppose CAA and demand for ILP in the state. The fourth recurring phrase is the expression of *"Para doh Para snam"* which when translated to English means "our flesh our blood". This term regularly appears in the discourses in the online community and is used to invoke a feeling of oneness and unity. The term is rooted in the concept of race which takes into account the core biological aspect of sameness of blood and genealogy. It's an affiliation that one develops tracing through the same bloodline. These terms and phrases dominate the discourse patterns in the online space. The technical affordances of the online community develop the ties of kinship and ancestral bonds developed in the on-ground community.

Distinctive boundaries of 'problematic other'

The boundary can be understood as an important marker of any community. Fredrick Barth introduced the concept of boundary to social group formation in 1969, which until then was deeply rooted in cultural factors of assimilation. Boundary encapsulates the identity of the group or community. Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be, distinguished (Barth, 1969, 1998). How boundaries are marked depends entirely upon the social actors. The boundaries of the online community, KTUH are stringently maintained through the strict membership procedures and active vigilance and awareness of the co- members. Besides, the online group draws language boundaries. Khasi emerges as the most dominant language of communication among

online members. 97% of the posts collected as part of the study from the group wall are in the Khasi language. The members in the online group also make a concentrated effort to draw boundaries through the process of dichotomisation of us against them rooted into the everyday activity of trade, commerce, language, values beliefs, attitudes and conflicts. The most commonly agreed-upon understanding that emerges through the interaction in the online group is that the outsiders mainly non-tribal are a threat and the Khasis need to protect themselves and be united to fight the outsider. There is an inherent building up of fear, insecurity and uncertainty that arises from the non-tribal outsider as constantly projected in the online group discourse. The dominant narrative in the group constructs the non-tribal as 'problematic other'. The discourse in the online community locates Khasi men in particular and the pressure groups in general as the custodians and protector of the tribe, whereas Khasi women through whom the lineage and kinship pass, as a weak node providing access and weakening the boundaries of the community.

In the process of boundary-making, the online group produces a wealth of interactions that are representative of a portion of community life and values, beliefs and norms. It undoubtedly mirrors every day of the community life in its several conversations. Borrowing the concept from Taylor (2004), the everyday interaction in KTUH produces a range of social imaginary. Taylor defines social imaginaries as 'the ensemble of imaginings that enable our social acts and practices by making sense of them' (p. 165). The social imaginary is thus that which enables individuals to know what is acceptable, expected and unacceptable in social life. It acts as a map by which individuals navigate and negotiate the intricacies of life with others (Taylor, 2004, p. 23–30). The 'problematic other' is one such co-constructed social imaginary the other one being their subjective views of the community that emerges through the dominant online discourses based on a different context. During the study period, some of the recurring values,

beliefs that dominated the group wall were *(i.) Khasi's can be easily misled and tricked by the other, (ii) Khasi's are ill-treated and weak, (iii) Khasis are vulnerable, victims and in need of protection, (iv) Khasis are lazy and lack enterprising skills, (v) Khasis need awakening, (vi) Khasis are going to be extinct.* These are the self-construct impression of the group members towards their community in contestation to the dominant 'other' i.e. the non-tribal group. Are these dominant thought patterns as derived through the wall posts in the online group reflective of the Khasi community at large? Who is constructing such social representation? What are the implications of such construction? What role does an online group play in facilitating these expressions/ constructions? These are some of the queries that need further in-depth exploration. However, it also needs to be argued that the private guarded homogenized online space in Facebook not just ignites but amplifies these expressions. *Chen,* the head admin in the online group highlights, "the boundaries in the online group are much easy to guard and maintained compared to the elaborate logistics and infrastructure involved in guarding on ground territories". The boundaries in the online space are distinctly and recurrently drawn in contestation with the invisible other, reinforcing the dominant epistemic of the tribes that have been consistently pitted against the caste Hindu or the civilized other (Xaxa, 2008).

KTUH is a closed private group on Facebook that emerges as a socially constructed mediated space representing the much-anticipated aspirations and hopes of the Khasi community for a guarded and well-protected exclusive space away from the non-tribal immigrant settlers. KTUH is a Facebook group that symbolises the aspired model of the community that the various student bodies and pressure groups have envisioned as the demand for the implementation of Inner Line Permit grows stronger after the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act in December 2019.

The mere presence of a 'virtual supra territorial bounded space' of this

size to be active and functional on social media is undoubtedly a potent venue to understand the tribal communities that for long have remained distanced from the map and mind of the dominant forces. KTUH is not the only one or the last one, online space is booming with many such bonds and articulations both at the group and individual level, thereby locating the information communication technology at the centre of tribal discourse. As a discursive space, KTUH emerges as a huge collective canvas where members collaboratively paint their Khasi identity in context to socio-cultural factors and in a contest to a distinct other. At a time when rapid expansion of technology has shrunk the world propelling higher movement and migrations of people across the globe, where information technology is bridging the global-local distinctions, KTUH on the contrary emerges as a homogenised, bounded space in the interconnected "network society" (Dijk, 2006). KTUH is an ideal "imagined community" built on parochial ethnic affinities in the online space. The discursive wall of KTUH links the private sphere of one's thought and imagination to the public sphere of the community wall, thus it facilitates the negotiation of the private self and the social self. Thus, KTUH as a Facebook group emerges as one such online community, whose roots are in the offline world but aspirations, collectiveness and bonding in the online space.

Conclusion:

The socially constructed mediated space KTUH can be perceived as an extension of the on-ground community, a constructed online space of hopes and aspirations, exclusivity, protected and enclosed by strong boundaries. As the study maps the swift transcendence of a major section of the Khasi community in the online space, it also explores the nuances of the online communities shaping through online discourses. The online community is not just accumulating the social imaginaries but it is also transforming the Khasi community through the facilitated space for easy expressions on the

various facets of their everyday life. The online space as a performative platform emerges as a potent venue to test and experiment with one's identity and belongingness. KTUH should not be seen as a mere assemblage of people because as they unite and transcend their ties to the online space, they also take with them a slice of one's everyday life, values, beliefs, attitudes, aspects of one's culture in the online space and therefore digital immersion can become one of the ways to map transformations in tribal societies as well as decolonise the epistemology of tribe.

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Personal and Online Interviews: Ordered by date-

Personal interview with admin Shan on the 21st May 2019

Personal interview with admin Kongri on the 22nd May 2019

Online interview with head admin Chen on 14th June 2019 on Facebook Messenger

Endnotes

[1] Based on Online interview with head admin Chen on 14th June 2019 on Facebook Messenger

[2] Based on personal interview with admin Shan on the 21st May 2019

[3] Based on personal interview with admin Kongri on the 22nd May 2019

Connectivity Crossroads: Exploring India's Northeast in Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)

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Abstract: India's Northeast is gradually being promoted as a gateway to South and South East Asia with huge possibilities of physical infrastructure connectivity in Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). However, improved physical and digital connectivity including highways, Multimodal Transit Transport Projects etc. may not solely ignite transformation and integrate the development process in Northeast India, which needs a serious look on a number of challenges in the sub-region. Under this backdrop, this paper focuses on historicity and contests of trans-boundary connectivity, the role of sub-regional groupings and regroupings, India's Look East and Act East Policy and connectivity engagement with ASEAN putting India's Northeast at the core, which is at the crossroads. It is argued that a sustainable and equitable development process with active local participation possesses the capacity of transforming Northeast India in tune with the promises of BIMSTEC.

Keywords: Development, Northeast India, regional connectivity, transformation, BIMSTEC.

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Introduction

India's association with Southeast Asia can be traced back to ancient times as it has influenced the region by way of religion, language, culture and civilization. Historical evidence also suggests that there was flourishing economic and cultural relations between India and the countries of Southeast Asia in the pre-colonial era (Kalita, 2018; Bhattacharya, 2014). The British used India as the main strategic base for its colonial presence in the rest of Asia, making India highly integrated with the region's economy (Muni, 2011).

Newly independent India made a promising start to its foreign policy. It has been noted that given India's sheer size, cultural influence over Asia due to the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism, and the fact that India was the first Asian nation to attain independence, "Nehru viewed Asia as a region in which India's new status should endow it with leadership" (Malone, 2011, p. 201). Several Indian leaders then believed that the nation must emerge as a leader in the region's anti-colonial struggles and pave the way for greater Asian solidarity, and hence, India emerged as one of the leading nations of the Non-Alignment Movement.[1] However, Asia soon divided on cold war lines as staying aloof from one of the two super-power blocs was not feasible, and India then leaned considerably towards the Soviet Union. Given New Delhi's domestic commitment to a mixed economy under Nehru's welfare state[2], India's economy became inward focused and isolated. It was thus marginalized from the boom in trade and investments between South-East Asia's NICs[3] (Lee, 2015).

The collapse of the Soviet Union, India's balance of payment crisis in 1991, and the subsequent loan taken from the IMF to prevent India from defaulting meant that India's centrally planned economy was deemed a failure and India was in serious economic crisis (Haokip, 2015). This crisis

created conditions that allowed economic engagement with Asia. India then brought about 'liberalization, privatization and globalization' to make India's economy open to trade and investment and thus competitive. It is in this broad context that the initiation of the Look East Policy in the 1990s must be viewed, also amidst expansion of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and failure of India to steer the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), etc. which forced India to look eastwards for protecting, consolidating, and expanding its economic interest.

India's Northeast in Look (Act) East Policy

Northeast India is connected to the rest of the country through a short land corridor flanked by Nepal and Bangladesh. Weak infrastructure and poor connectivity have hampered these states' socio-economic growth for decades. A gateway to Southeast Asia, these states are known as 'Ashtalaksmi of India'. Japanese help for Northeast India's infrastructure development is a significant step forward in bilateral ties between these countries. Due to their close proximity, Bangladesh and Myanmar too are vital to the region's economic development and the success of India's Look/Act East Policy.

As stated in the Northeast 'Vision 2020' document, the Ministry of Development for North Eastern Region makes certain logical assumptions in its attempt to achieve economic integration of India's Northeast with Southeast Asian markets: - The Northeast's historical, ethnic and cultural ties with Southeast Asia could be leveraged for greater trade and tourism; - This will help alleviate the "economic imprisonment" and isolation caused by the Indian partition of 1947. The document's acknowledgement that present-day Northeast India was a unified geographic and economic entity under British colonial rule is The Brahmaputra and Barak-Surma rivers used to transport goods between the Northeast and Kolkata port. The Barak-

Surma-Meghna navigation channel linked Silchar and Kolkata. After the 1947 Indian partition, inland water transport was severely hampered, and the region became isolated. This isolation has harmed the region. The Indian government believes Northeast India can become the nation's 'Growth Engine'. The government acknowledges that the Northeast cannot be left behind if India is to reach a $5 trillion economy by 2024-25. The region has abundant natural resources and a huge potential for tourism growth. The region requires good physical connectivity to support economic production and trade. Sub-regional forums like BIMSTEC help to improve physical connectivity in the Bay of Bengal.

Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi introduced the Act East policy at the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and East Asia Summit in Myanmar characterizing it as a reflection of the emphasis that India attaches to this region. Replacing 'Look' with 'Act' meant that India would be adopting a more pro-active and action-oriented strategy towards the region with a "priority on security, connection and regional integration" (Ministry of External Affairs [MEA] Annual Report, 2014-15). This was also reflected in the establishment of a distinct Indian Mission to ASEAN and the EAS in April 2015 with a dedicated ambassador to manage relations based at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta (MEA Annual Report, 2015-16). (MEA Annual Report, 2015-16).

India's development-driven goal in this phase has placed specific emphasis on increasing connectivity, including infrastructure, people-to-people relationships and trade. The focus on connectivity has been reflected in measures to enable linkages between existing regional forums such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi- Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) that has been proposed as a bridge between South and Southeast Asia.

Connectivity: The Cornerstone of BIMSTEC

BIMSTEC initially came into being as the Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, and Thailand-Economic Cooperation (BIST-EC). Proposed by Thailand and formalised in Bangkok in 1997, the combination was the first attempt to "build a bridge linking South and Southeast Asia" (Palit, Choudhury and Tieri, 2018). It is an encouraging sign that BIMSTEC has been enjoying a great deal of visibility and is more active than it has been in the recent past. The designated chair or lead countries of 14 priority sectors and different sub-sectors have been cooperating with each other for the sake of greater regional integration. India leads the Transport and Communication sector which encourages physical connectivity in the region. A renewed momentum can be traced back to the BIMSTEC leaders' retreat, convened by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Goa in l6th October, 2016. In the outcome document, the seven member states pledged "to work collectively towards making BIMSTEC stronger, more effective, and result oriented." The major physical infrastructure connectivity projects undertaken by BIMSTEC, aiming to boost connectivity of the Northeast of India with the Bay of Bengal region include the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, linkage of the Chittagong port with Agartala and the Inland waterways network linking the Northeast with Bangladesh. These projects will complete the loop of connectivity and increase trade and capital circulation under the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area Framework.

Corridors have been created and road connectivity is being built to strengthen Northeast India's connectivity with the rest of India. The East-West Corridor, which connects Srirampur to the west, is one of the important pathways. It runs along the Bengal–Assam border and reaches all the way to Silchar in Assam. The 670-kilometer stretch of the East-West Corridor between Srirampur and Silchar is now being constructed and now reconfigured as a four-lane highway

The 1360-kilometre-long trilateral highway connects Mae Sot in Thailand with Moreh in India through Yangon and Mandalay in Myanmar. India–Myanmar Friendship Road, linking Moreh-Tamu-Kalemyo-Kalewa is now a part of the trilateral highway. The extension of the trilateral highway to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam are being planned and are at different stages of implementation. This highway could allow seamless movement of both passengers and cargo vehicles which could be a strong alternative to the commercial trade with South-East Asia which till now only takes place via the sea route through Kolkata. This project is significant to the Northeast India as it will enable a physical link with Southeast Asia by road.

Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project proposal could make Mizoram another gateway to Southeast Asia. For Mizoram, this is also an opportunity to join a sub-regional trading bloc and benefit from cheaper exports of high-demand consumer items. Derived from the Kaladan River, the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project will connect Aizwal in Mizoram to Sittwe port in Myanmar. The project also includes developing a pipeline from Myanmar to Northeast India. The project is particularly significant since it will provide an alternative route for products from Kolkata to Mizoram.

The visit of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2019 was remarkable for Northeast India because Tripura became the recipient of the seven Indo-Bangladesh Agreements. It will become the first Northeastern state to have direct access to international sea trade routes via the Chittagong Port, which will enormously improve the state's trade and commerce potential. An agreement on implementing Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) on the utilization of Chittagong port of Bangladesh, was reached between the two countries. The present route between Agartala and Chittagong port involves: 130 km from Agartala and Sabroom by road (Sabroom is a town and a sub-division of South Tripura district) and 178 km from Sabroom to

Chittagong port in Bangladesh via road. According to the Indo-Bangladesh treaty routes, a fairway from Sirajganj (Bangladesh) to Daikhowa (India) and from Ashuganj to Zakiganj (Bangladesh) allowed year round navigation. This aided bilateral and transit trade, much of it moving NW-2 in India. The movement of goods between the Northeast India and the neighboring country of Bhutan via Chittagong port via National Waterways-2 has been tested. According to a PTI report, the Indian side of the Indo-Bangladesh protocol route will utilise both NW-1 and NW-2[4]. At present, Pandu is the only port with multimodal connectivity in NW-2; The Indo Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) route was developed jointly by India and Bangladesh at a cost of Rs 305.84 crores to provide alternate connectivity for the North-eastern states from Guwahati and Jogighopa to the ports of Kolkata and Haldia. The IBP routes Sirajganj-Diakhowa (175 km) on the Jamuna and Ashuganj-Zakiganj (295 km) on the Kushiyara are being built to connect with the River Brahmaputra and River Barak (NW-16) in Assam[5].

Speaking on new components of the connectivity Master Plan, M.Shahidul Islam stated that the new plan also has provisions for emphasis on inland waterways connectivity. "A lot of countries like Nepal and Bhutan will have easy access to the Bay of Bengal by this plan. It not only deals with building roads but also to find out economic viability of those roads," the BIMSTEC chief said, adding that Northeast India will come to play a key role in the whole process. The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is in the process of setting up a jetty at Sonamura for inland waterways connectivity with Bangladesh, connecting Meghna River (Bangladesh) with Gomti River (Tripura). Small ships can travel these waterways, each capable of picking up fifty truckloads of cargo, thereby reducing transportation costs (Singh, 2019). The development of inland waterways, especially in Bangladesh, is crucial for two reasons. It is a riverine region. Transport by water links more towns than roadways. Each village is a consumption hub, and may become an export hub for produce, milk, meat, leather, etc. This

region will benefit more from river routes than roads and rail. Second, river transit is always cheaper than road or rail transport. The construction of waterways will make riverside villages and towns more competitive trading partners with Agartala and Chittagong.

Problems with Physical connectivity

The Northeast must be more than just an economic corridor that links with ASEAN. If the local population of the Northeast cannot participate and gain directly in the economic diplomacy with ASEAN, the development will not be sustainable (Nath & Nath, 2004).

Physical connectivity alone cannot assure economic development, despite the fact that it is a necessary requirement. While adequate connection enables the rapid and cost-effective supply of products and services, it does not generate demand for those goods and services. The Northeast of India can only become a significant market for goods and services if the development process is both sustainable and equitable; that is, if the material advantages of development reach the indigenous population. Furthermore, commerce and business that are unrelated to the lives and needs of the people may prove counterproductive, as they may foster attitudes of exploitation and neglect toward the Centre, further sullying the insurgency problem. The Northeast of India also faces an illegal drug, guns, and human trafficking crisis. As a result, it is necessary to keep in mind that improved physical connectivity can stimulate not only legitimate trade, but also illicit traffic in the region. The Northeast India and the broader BIMSTEC region are also confronted with concerns such as illegal migration and drug and human trafficking (Srikanth, 2016). The Golden Triangle region is rife with drug manufacture and trafficking. Northeast India is also on the heroin trade route, with multiple labs along the Indo-Myanmar border. In 2020, about $5 million in methamphetamine and Yaba tablets were confiscated from the Northeast[6]. The Golden Triangle region is reported to have earned over

US$70 billion in profits in 2019, with much of this income frequently used as seed money to acquire weapons for ethnic armed groups in Myanmar and Thailand's border areas, stoking violence and insecurity in the region[7].

The Northeast of India has faced violent secessionist movements right from the independence of India. A majority of development scholars argue that in Northeast India, insurgency is rooted in economic factors such as inequality caused by persistent deprivation, negligence and exploitation of the region by outsiders, along with the notion that the Northeast was illegally unified with the rest of India (Nath and Nath 2004). It is also believed that the insurgency has intensified the problem to such an extent that development workers of the Government and NGOs, as well as business interests are deterred from going to region. Consequently, insurgency is dragging the backward sections of the region to the darkness of deeper under-development and is serving as a retarding factor delivering disservice to the indigenous people, whose cause they are supposed to represent (Bhattacharjee & Nayak, 2013).

There is some hope that the situation is improving, as the governments are actively working to settle the insurgency problem in Northeast India. However, important peace discussions like Naga, ULFA, etc. take a long time to resolve. Although the Government of India just reached an agreement with many NDFB factions and the All-Bodo Students Union, it was hastily inked. Prime Minister says Bodo Peace Accord created way for Northeastern Peace. But it is time to rethink and reconstruct Northeast India in a new paradigm and manner. Insurgents and their ideologies can never bring peace to the region, and hence a new method is required to improve Northeast India's integration.

Another sector where further improvement is left desired is in establishing people to people connection amongst the BIMSTEC member countries which can help bring about a sense of common belonging in the

region. Former BIMSTEC Secretary General Sumith Nakandala has stated that the organisation's main mission is to "re-enable the environment of cooperation and community in the Bay of Bengal"[8]. This feeling of a shared community is currently found to be lacking in the Bay of Bengal region, and to achieve such an end, BIMSTEC must aim to popularize its brand. This can be achieved via dedicated funding for promotional activities and campaigns from member countries which can enhance the visibility of "Brand BIMSTEC" (Xavier, 2018, p. 30). While government funding would represent a top-down approach, the resultant people to people ties could create a passage for the bottom-up approach to building the Bay of Bengal community.

Citizenship Amendment Act in December 2019-January 2020 were strongly anti-immigrant (Dutta 2019), which does not reflect well for a strong Bay of Bengal community in the near future. The Bangladeshi migrant community is resented in Northeast India because it is perceived that mass migration has transformed the region's demography, endangering the region's indigenous people. Unless the immigration issue is resolved, the people of Northeast India may not desire people to people connectivity with Bangladesh. Bangladesh Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen acknowledged that the CAA and the NRC are India's "internal issues", but at the same time voiced concern that any "uncertainty" in the country is likely to affect its neighbours.

This event reflects how even the perceived internal affairs of a nation can affect bilateral ties. Thus, on certain sensitive issues such as the one mentioned above, member states must only arrive at domestic decisions after successful consensus building amongst the BIMSTEC member nations to prevent any threat to the creation of a Bay of Bengal community. It could also be argued that BIMSTEC being a forum for solely economic integration lacks the political capacity to ensure that its economic goals are realised.

Physical infrastructure connectivity projects initiated by BIMSTEC member countries would too pass-through sensitive areas of the region. It is highly imperative that the local population view these developments as tools which provide them with means improve their own lives here (Srikanth, 2016). The demand for good physical connectivity within the Northeast for seamless travel and tourism is already found to be necessary. However, there is no inherent demand within the Northeast to integrate the region with the Bay of Bengal region, and thus such integration may be viewed with suspicion by the people. A possible way to generate goodwill towards these cross-boundary infrastructures is to create a demand for such integration. If large scale production of traditional arts and craft and other products from the North East is encouraged, then the local population could view the Bay of Bengal region and ASEAN as a potential market for its products. Human trafficking has increased in the area as a result of the pandemic-induced weak economies, pervasive poverty, and ongoing ethnic strife[9]

Problematic assumption of geographical proximity aiding integration

The Northeast is betting on its geographical proximity to the ASEAN region for its regional integration, but the underlying assumption is somewhat naive. Looking to the east through the Northeast is only one of the several options that the Indian state exercises. The Northeast of India is unlikely to be a transit corridor for the Indian industry because there is no point in taking the costly and circuitous land route to trade with ASEAN when sea freight is cheaper. Hence, the manufacturing sector of the Northeast needs a major boost if the prospect of the region to become a blossoming transit hub between India-ASEAN is to come to fruition. It is only if the Northeast India produces substantial products for export that the land route would make sense logistically. The emergence of the Northeast India as a potential manufacturing region shall also help to offset the flooding of the region's market with cheaper goods from Southeast Asia. The employment

of physical labour to transload cargo from one country's trucks to those of another is a significant cause of inefficiency at border checkpoints and ports. This process could be made more efficient, particularly for large shippers, by utilising pallets and robotic transfer methods such as forklift trucks. Private sector investment in handling facilities and warehouses could be enticed. Otherwise, there is a considerable chance that what little manufacturing currently takes place in the region too would vanish.

Contradiction between integration and isolation in Indian Policy

BIMSTEC and the Government of India have actively attempted the regional integration of the Northeast India with the Bay of Bengal region in recent times. However, to steer this process in the right direction, a study of the historical perspective of Northeast India is necessary. The British Colonial Government focused on economic exploitation of Assam's oil and tea resources. It followed a policy of complete separation of hills tribal communities from the plains people in the Northeast and a separate system of administration for the tribal communities through the Inner Line Permit[10] (since 1873) and District Councils (Singh, 2006).

During the Constituent Assembly debates on the administration of Northeast India, two opposing views emerged: one urged rapid assimilation of the tribal population with neighbouring societies, while the other favoured safeguarded and regulated growth. So the Bordoloi Committee was appointed to report on the Northeast Indian policy, and its suggestions were adopted into the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. To preserve the democratic tradition, cultural variety, and deal with the unique difficulties of the tribes of Northeast India, this clause mandates a distinctive sort of autonomous governance system. These autonomous structures of governance are entrusted with the twin task of protecting tribal tradition, culture and customs and at the same time to undertake development plans (Sarmah, 2012, p. 79).

Apart from the provision of the Sixth Schedule and the ILP, Protected Area Permit (PAP)[11], Restricted Area Permit (RAP)[12] etc. are in force in different states of Northeast India. The main objective of the ILP, PAP and RAP system is to prevent settlement of other Indian nationals in the protected states in order to safeguard the indigenous population. Thus, the Indian state recognized the distinctness of the Northeast Indian population and granted regional autonomy to keep its indigenous tribal culture and traditions intact. Essentially, independent India continued the same policies adopted by the colonial British Government (Singh 2006). This developmental path with a British legacy needs introspection today, standing in connectivity crossroads.

In offering the Northeast Indian states the constitutional concessions and autonomy, the Indian state has succeeded to retain the Northeast in some degree of 'isolation' from the rest of India. At this stage, however, the Indian government expects to achieve the regional integration of the Northeast India with BIMSTEC and ASEAN member states, presumably while protecting the tribal people's culture and autonomy, which is also the state's constitutional requirement. This decision raises a few significant issues and worries. How is the regional integration of the Northeast with the Bay of Bengal region to take place while the ILP, PAP and RAP prohibit integration within the Northeast itself? Will the Indian state strive to accelerate the regional integration process by diminishing the autonomy constitutionally granted to the Northeast Indian states, or conversely, will the Indian state let the regional integration move be impeded by these legally imposed 'barriers' in the Northeast? This is a question that the policy bearers in New Delhi must have an answer to, if they are actually genuinely concerned about the developmental destiny of the region.

What does the Northeast of India want going forward? Does the region desire isolation or integration? This may be a very hard-hitting question for

the Northeast India to decide. Meaningful connectivity engagement with BIMSTEC is not possible without dealing with this subject. The nation-wide popular uproar and protests over the Indian Government's Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019, saw the rising clamour for the extension of the ILP in Assam by various student and cultural organisations which enjoy mass popular support. The state of Manipur implemented the ILP in December 2019[13] and in doing so it became the fourth state in the Northeast after Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh to implement the ILP.

Thus, it may seem that the people of the region demand either a continuation or the extension of the isolationist framework. However, the root cause of such demands by the people of the Northeast, is driven by a fear of being turned into minorities in their respective states due to decades of undocumented illegal immigration into the region, and not necessarily borne out of the desire to remain in isolation. This fear is not merely a figment of one's imagination, highlighted by the massive demographic change in the state of Tripura has shown where the indigenous tribal population of the state turned into a minority after the immigration of Hindu Bengalis after the Partition of India and the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971[14]. In a region where pluralism has not yet seeped in and is marked by distinct ethnicity, democracy can turn out to be dominance of small groups by a larger group where the worst form of deprivation is the inherent threat to the existence of an ethnic group as a distinct socio-cultural community (Kikhi, 2009).

The state of Assam already possessed special provisions enshrined in Section 6A[15] of the Citizenship Act of India, 1955, which were the product of the Assam Accord, 1985[16], to safeguard the state from illegal immigration. There is a general consensus in the state that the Centre has failed to keep its promises as mentioned in the Accord, and hence, implementing the ILP is seen as the most effective way to check illegal immigration. Thus, the

popular demand to implement the ILP in the state is the result of failure or lack of viable alternate solutions. This serves to highlight the notion that the people of the Northeast may not be opposed to the integrative framework of the Bay of Bengal region as initiated by BIMSTEC, provided such an event does not lead to their political, economic and social subordination in the hands of other groups.

Another pertinent question that emerges here is whether the Northeast India is merely supposed to serve as an economic corridor for the transit of goods between India and Southeast Asia, or is the regional integration aimed at the development of it? If the regional integration is indeed aimed at the development of the Northeast, the option of integration could be the only alternative. Integration in this regard also carries two dimensions: internal and external integration. Internal integration implies economic, social and political integration within Northeast India whereas external integration denotes economic integration with the BIMSTEC and ASEAN.

Conclusion

The Northeast of India, which is geographically located between 'mainland' India and Southeast Asia, is expected to reap enormous developmental gains as a result of BIMSTEC's initiative, and hence have synergistic impacts on poverty reduction, insurgency, and armed conflict. However, there is growing concern about the influence of increased market imperatives on the region's traditional society, which has a permanent impact on the people's culture and life and would also lead to more settlement of mainland people.

As a result, Northeast India's regional integration with Southeast Asia must be such that indigenous people's values and customs are not lost in the whirlwind of development. However, many of its age-old restrictive regulations must be revised so that the Northeastern states can play a key role in paving the way for economic permeability as a result of their

geographical proximity to these countries stand to gain (Suman 2018). The administration must have a plan outlining how it intends to achieve such growth in India's Northeast. As a result, it is critical that the announced regional integration take place within a regulated framework and in collaboration with the region's local people, which will help to reduce tensions, improve cooperation between the people and states of the region, and most likely expedite the process of regional integration.

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Endnotes:

[1] The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) supported and played a key role in the independence struggles of the peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America under the yoke of colonialism. It also struggled to maintain their self-determinism from the two power blocs during the Cold War.

[2] India's economy under the welfare state possessed capitalist elements but relied heavily on state-owned enterprises in important sectors such as banking and manufacturing, extensive subsidization of important goods and services and a focus on developing self-sufficiency in production.

[3] Newly Industrialising Countries of the mid-20th century such as South Korea, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore.

[4] Devanjana Nag | February 05, 2021 5:06 PM "Indo-Bangladesh Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade to improve trading between two nations; details" https://www.financialexpress.com/infrastructure/indo-bangladesh-protocol-on-inland-water-transit-and-trade-to-improve-trading-between-two-nations-details/2188731/

[5] " Assam To Have Tourist Jetties Including One in Pandu, Probable Locations Identified" https://www.sentinelassam.com/north-east-india-news/assam-news/assam-to-have-tourist-jetties-including-one-in-pandu-probable-locations-identified-552282

[6] Dinakar Peri, "Meth, gold and arms — How Assam Rifles is trying to stop them from entering Mizoram", The Hindu, April 17, 2021.

[7] "India-ASEAN Relations", ASEAN India Progress and Prosperity, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, August 2018.

[8] SumithNakandala, Former Secretary General, BIMSTEC, in an interview conducted by Constantino Xavier, New Delhi, March 30, 2017. (https://carnegieindia.org/2018/03/01/reactivating-legacy-of-integration-through-bimstec-pub-75753).

[9] Leo Lin, "Southeast Asia Human Trafficking Risks are Increasing in the Time of COVID-19", Titan, July 29, 2020.

[10] Inner Line Permit (ILP) is an official travel document issued by the concerned state government to allow inward travel of an Indian citizen into a protected area for a limited period. It is obligatory for Indian citizens from outside those states to obtain a permit for entering into the protected state.

[11] Under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958, all areas falling between the 'Inner line', as defined in the said order, and the International Border of the State have been declared as Protected Area. In Northeast India The whole state of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and partly Sikkim falls under this category with certain conditions and modalities.

[12] Every foreigner, except a citizen of Bhutan, who desires to enter and stay in a Protected or Restricted Area, is required to obtain a special permit from a competent authority delegated with powers to issue such a special permit to a foreigner, on application. In cases where the powers have not been delegated to any subordinate authority by the Government of India, the application for special permit should be referred to the Ministry of Home Affairs for prior approval, at least eight weeks before the date of the expected visit.

[13] Manipur implemented the ILP on 31st January, 2019 after the Centre said that states and areas, protected by the ILP and the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution would be exempted from the purview of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2020. (https://www.news18.com/news/india/ilp-comes-into-effect-in-manipur-from-january-1-temporary-permit-to-be-issued-for-15-days-2441705.html)

[14] As per the 2011 Census, tribal people constitute about 30% of the population while non-tribal Hindu Bengalis constitute about 66% of the population in Tripura. (https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/what-prompted-bengali-majority-tripura-to-forgive-bjp/articleshow/63155511.cms)

[15] According to Section 6A of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1955, 24th March 1971 was decided as the cut-off date for Indian citizenship exclusively for the state of Assam.

[16] The Assam Movement composed of a broad ethnic coalition, which managed to win a constitutional concession in the form of the Assam Accord in 1985. It promised several safeguards to the Assamese people to protect their linguistic, cultural and social identity and heritage and ensure their holistic economic development.

Media Representation of Gender Power Relations in Matrilineal Meghalaya

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Abstract: The media portrayal of the *all-powerful* woman and the *helpless and insecure* man has been the epicentre of all the Khasi matrilineal debates. The paper aims to find out whether this media propagation is supported by the educated urban Khasi people. The paper seeks to find out the gender constructs and the interplay of gender power relations of the two sexes in the private and the public spheres, as well as how they are portrayed in Khasi films.

Findings from the study revealed that 92.6 per cent of the respondents do not support the 'all-powerful woman' notion, and 71 per cent of males do not agree that Khasi men feel insecure in matrilineal Meghalaya. While gender roles are clearly defined, a clash in the interplay of gender power relations is most apparent in the family decision-making process. The media presentation of gender roles favours the male sex, both off-screen and on-screen.

Keywords: matrilineal, Meghalaya, gender, power relations, media representation

Media Representation of Gender Power Relations in Matrilineal Meghalaya

If one is to web search 'Meghalaya', 'Matriliny', 'Khasi', 'women in Meghalaya', one would not be surprised to see statements such as a society of men who feel useless[1]; outcasts and desperate'[2]; 'while the mother-in-law

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commands, you are helpless."[3] Women in Meghalaya have been portrayed time and again as powerful and superior to men, and they enjoy a much higher level of equality. The power, roles, and functions of women in Meghalaya have been the focus of research. The uniqueness of the matrilineal culture of the state has been the subject of interest for scholars who want to find out the exclusivity of a Khasi female – known as the custodian of culture and race, the successor of ancestral property and on whom the lineage or family name is carried out.

The interplay of power relations has, in most cases, been the epicentre of the Khasi matrilineal debates. Subir Bhowmik (2013) notes that *Matriliny breeds a culture of men who feel useless*[4]. Menon (1998) writes that as more women struggle for their rights across the country, the process is being reversed in the state. The age-old matrilineal system followed by the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribals (who make up about 79 per cent of the state's population) is under threat here, and men are expressing their rights.[5] On the other hand, Ghosh (2015) notes, *'family wealth is entrusted to women, but they do not possess it. The uncle is the one who makes the final decision.'*[6]

Although media discourse and debates on the gender power relations between the two sexes often take the extreme ends, literature about the Khasi people and their matrilineal culture exists in abundance, and none satisfactorily probes this media projection. Media assertions, such as these, may not only lead to the wrong construction and perception of gender but, worse, impede the realisation of gender equality in the Khasi matrilineal society. A probe, using gender analysis, into the claim is desirable.

Understanding the gender role distribution in Khasi society through a gender lens is critical and can shed significant light on the societal construction of gender in society. By adopting the *socio-economic activity profile* of the Harvard Gender Analysis Framework to answer the question,

which sex does what? This paper tries to find out how gender roles are distributed in Khasi society. Further, the paper uses the *access and control profile* of the Framework to delve into the interplay of power relations through the concepts of '*power-over, power-to, power-with, and power-within'* to find out which of the two sexes exercise more power and to what extent. Clashes of gender power relations are analysed by finding out which of the two sexes has *access to what* kind of resources. Which sex has *control of what* kind of resources*?* and which sex enjoys what privileges derived from the use of such resources?

Further, quantitative data collected are analysed to see whether the educated urban Khasi people support the media projections. The purpose of the study can be succinctly put through the following objectives and research questions:

Aims and Objectives

Unravelling the question of the 'all-powerful' woman and the 'insecure' man in Khasi society, the paper attempts to find out the social construction of gender and the gender role distribution in the socio-economic activities within the Khasi matrilineal society. More specifically, the paper attempts to find out if the educated Khasi people residing in urban areas support the media claim.

Objectives of the Study

- To find out how gender is constructed among the urban, educated Khasi people,

- To identify which of the sexes has what type of power (*power-over, power-to, power-with, and power-within*) and who exercises what powers and to what extent?

- Identifying which sex has *access to* what resources and *control over* which resources

- To find out which of the sexes enjoys what privileges in the use of resources in the private and public spheres,

- To find out whether the educated Khasi people in urban areas support the claim of the all-powerful woman and the helpless and insecure man in the Khasi matrilineal society,

- To find out whether gender equity and gender equality truly exist in the matrilineal Khasi society,

- To identify how Khasi films distribute gender roles and portray the interplay of gender power relations through their texts.

Research Questions

Gender

How is gender constructed by both men and women in the Khasi matrilineal society?

How are gender roles understood and interpreted by both men and women?

How are gender power relations distributed in society?

What kinds of power do men and women exercise in society?

What types of gender power relations clashes do the sexes face in their daily activities?

To what extent does the clash of power relations pose a barrier to gender sensitivity, gender equity, and gender equality in the Khasi matrilineal society?

Which sex has access to what kind of resources?

Which sex has control over what kind of resources?

Which sex has access to the benefits derived from the use of family and personal resources?

Khasi movies' representation of gender

How do Khasi films construct gender roles in a Khasi matrilineal society?

How do Khasi films design, produce, and depict the interplay of gender power relations through their texts and images?

What is the representation of Khasi movies of both sexes on-screen and off-screen?

Research Methods and Methodology

Methods of collecting data

Primary and secondary procedures are used to obtain data. Secondary data is gathered from published articles, books, and journals. Primary data is collected using the following methods:

Survey method: A set of 48 questions is randomly sent to 200 urban Khasi-educated people using stratified random sampling. Over eight months (January - August 2018), 81 responses were obtained (38 males, 42 females, and 1 Other). Data was stratified based on the following demography (*See Table 1: Respondents' profile*)

Table 1: Respondents' profile

Respondents' Profile		Male (*f)	Female (f)	Other (f)
Qualifications	Graduate	15	7	1
	Post-Graduate	16	22	
	Doctorate	3	11	
Total = 81		**38**	**42**	**1**
Age	<35	10	14	1
	35-40	14	10	
	40-45	4	5	
	>45	10	13	
Total =81		**38**	**42**	**1**
Profession	Academia	8	20	
	Government Service	8	9	
	NGO	3	2	
	Other	10	8	1
Total		**38**	**42**	**1**

f=frequency

Khasi Films: Four Khasi films (**Onaatah**[7], **Papa**[8], **Hep**[9], **Dei Maphi**[10]) were selected based on their popularity among the local Khasi people.

Data Analysis: data is analysed using the following methodologies.

Primary Data

Gender Analysis: Using the Harvard Gender Analysis Framework, Content analysis is used on the following parameters.

➢ Socio-Economic Activity Profile: The profile particularly helps us to understand which sex does what in the daily socio-economic activity.

➢ Access and Control Profile: The profile helps us to understand the dynamics of power (*power-over, power-to, power-with, and power-within*), *access to* and *control over* resources, as well as the enjoy the benefits of power.

Survey: Content analysis is adopted to analyse quantitative data derived from the Survey method as well as Gender Analysis. Gender disaggregated data is tabulated in terms of frequency and percentages using SPSS and presented through the use of tables and figures.

Films: critical contextual analysis is adopted to analyse how gender roles are distributed and represented in the four movies.

➢ Content analysis is used to analyse the gender roles assigned to the characters, the top three speaking characters, and the number of times that male and female characters appear on the screen and talk or do not talk.

➢ Use of Bechdel's Test to analyse if the films pass the gender equality test

Secondary data: Use of qualitative contextual analysis of published articles, books, and journals on the subject matter.

Limitations of the study

The present study is limited to the urban Khasi population whose education is Bachelors' Degree and above, and serving as professionals in different capacities in governmental and non-governmental organisations. The findings of the study cannot be generalised to the Khasi population residing in rural areas, irrespective of literacy levels of education. Studies on the same can be undertaken on the population residing in rural areas.

Review of Literature

Gender and Gender roles

Moser (1993) classified gender roles, the socially expected behaviour of

women and men in a society, as *productive, reproductive, and community roles* (triple roles of gender).

Productive Roles: Activities performed by men and women to generate income or meet the needs of the family.

Reproductive Roles: Activities required to ensure that society's labour force is reproduced. This involves childbearing, raising children, and caring for aged and working family members.

Community Management Roles: Activities carried out at the community level to assure the provision and upkeep of scarce resources for collective use, such as water, health care, education, politics, and so on. This is unpaid labour done in one's spare time that may or may not result in enhanced power and status.

Gender relations

Candida March, Ines Smyth, Maitrayee Mukhopadhya (2005) define gender relations as the social relationships between men and women as a sex. This relationship is concerned with how power is distributed between them. [11] According to them, gender relations create and reproduce different positions for men and women, define how gender roles and responsibilities are allocated and internalised, and add or assign value to those roles. This relationship also defines the opportunity available to the two sexes in terms of the use of (access to) and the power to decide (control) how a resource is used[12] as well as the enjoyment of the privileges that come with that use. Gender relations do not remain constant but vary according to other factors, viz., time, place, and between different groups of people.[13] Gender roles and relationships are influenced by age, class, colour, ethnicity, religion, and geographical, economic, and political circumstances (Moser, 1993).

Gender Analysis

Gender analysis highlights and investigates the relationships between men and women in society (Candida March, Ines Smyth, Maitrayee Mukhopadhya, 2005). According to them, gender analysis examines how domestic power relations interact with power relations at the international, governmental, market, and community levels.[14] Gender analysis probes the visible and invisible inequalities between the sexes in the public and the private spheres in a given society by asking: Which sex does what? Which sex has access to which types of resources? Which sex decides what? Which sex gains or losses from the use of resources?

Gender analysis is a tool to understand that men and women, boys and girls, have different sets of needs. While meeting those needs, gender analysis helps to identify, address, and narrow the gender inequalities that emerge from the performance of gender roles and the division between the sexes in society.

Power

Vene Klasen and Miller (2006) define power as the degree of control over the material, human, intellectual, and financial resources that are exercised by particular people, institutions, and organizations. Controlling these resources becomes a source of power.[15] While power is dynamic and often exercised between individuals and groups, it is distributed unequally. Batliwala (2019) defines social power as an individual's or a group's ability to select who receives what, do what, choose what, and who sets the agenda.[16] Batliwala further notes that power has three faces: direct, indirect, and invisible.[17] Williams, Seed, & Mwau (1994) characterised the forms of power as

Power-over: a dominance/subordination relationship that can be either/or.

Power-to: This refers to the authority over the decision-making process, the ability to resolve difficulties, and possessing skills that are innovative and enabling.

Power-with: entails people organising around a common aim to achieve a common goal.

Power-within: includes self-assurance, self-awareness, and aggressiveness. It has to do with how individuals may recognise how power operates in their lives by analysing their own experiences, and how they can get the confidence to act to influence and change it (Williams, Seed, & Mwau, 1994).

The Khasi Matrilineal Society

Meghalaya, in north-east India, is home to three tribes: the Khasi, the Garo, and the Jaintia. Meghalaya has a population of 29,66,889 and its sex ratio stands at 997 (Census 2011). Christians form the majority of the population at 74.59 per cent. The Khasi constitute 47.05 per cent of the total population in Meghalaya, while the Garos constitute 31.41 per cent.

History and origin

Until the advent of the English East India Company to the Khasi hills, not much is known about the history of the Khasi. One of the reasons, Bareh (1964) mentions is the lack of a written script.[18] Till the middle of the last century, the Khasi Syiems (Kings) used their neighbours' scripts viz., Devanagari, Assamese, Bengali and even Persian[19] for maintaining relations with their subjects in the plains. Until the introduction of the Khasi Roman script in 1841 major cultural transmission of knowledge about the history of the Khasi people was handed down for generations from the oral traditions

called *Ki Parom* (folk tales).

Theories on the origin of the Khasi invariably agree that the Khasi came from a common paternal heritage with the other Austroasiatic populations of Southeast Asia and bear a great resemblance to the Khmer people in Cambodia (Fuchs (1993), Choudhury (1998), Gurdon (1975) (Hutton), Bareh, (1964). The Khasi, who prefer to call themselves '*Ki Hynñiew Trep*' (Seven Huts), however, have their oral history. They believe, of the sixteen tribes who live in heaven, they are the seven tribes who came down to earth via a hill called '*U Sohpet Bneng*' (Heaven's navel) (Lyngdoh, 1998).

Socio-cultural Dynamics

Historically, it is impossible to pinpoint the exact phase or time as to when the Khasi adopted a matrilineal form of descent or to know what the system was before they adopted it. Lyngdoh (1998) is of the view that the Khasi adopted the matrilineal system on their way in the hoary past to these hills to tide over some unexpected vicissitudes that threatened their very existence and survival. The esteem and love for this matrilineal system have sunk deep into their marrow, and the Khasis, in general, have come to believe that this matrilineal system is the unique characteristic that distinguishes them from the rest of the human race.[20]

The Khasi Matriliny is often used synonymously with matriarchy. Gurdon (1975) mentions the prevalence of matriarchy, or mother kinship, among the Khasis.[21] Cantlie (1984) refers to the Khasi descent as a matriarchate.[22] However, this may be applicable at a time when Khasi matrilineal society retained much of its original character. Cantlie (1984) calls the matrilineal ideology '*a folk-cultural theory of politics and economics*.'[23] The Khasi matrilineal society consists systematically of three interrelated and inseparable principles: (a) descent (b) kinship (c) associated norms and values.

Descent: In the Khasi matrilineal society, descent and clan identity are traced through the mother. Ancestral property is generally passed down from mother to daughter/s. Among the daughters, *Ka Khadduh* (the youngest) gets the lion's share because she is responsible for *ka bat ia ka niam* (holding the religion and religious ceremonies), and taking care of the family members, who are struck by misfortunes and dire need, or the deceased sisters' underage children. However, *Ka Khadduh* succeeds not in the property but in the office as a mere custodian, and she cannot dispose of, transfer, or alienate the ancestral property.[24] Nongkynrih & Angelica (2015) clearly stated that nowhere in the teachings of the Khasis is it designated that the *Khadduh* is the absolute owner of ancestral property.

A man holds a unique position in the Khasi matrilineal system. In the house of his mother, the oldest son takes the position of *U Kñi Rangbah*[25] (chief uncle to his sister's children) who is "*uba ha ka iap ka im*" (he who is present in matters of life and death). In the house of his wife and children, he has the honoured position of a father, "*uba lah uba iai*" (he who bears the burden and heat of the day) (Cantlie, 1984). Traditionally, *U Kñi Rangbah* is not only respected as the central authority in his sisters' family, but he is also the priest, the teacher, and the intercessor between God and his sisters and their children (Lyngdoh, 1998).

Kinship: Khasi system of kinship is exogamous. *Ka Ïing* (a family) forms the sub-clan *Ka Kpoh* (ancestress) of *Ka Kur Ka Jait* (Clan). Bareh (1964) made clear distinctions between families originating from the mother's side are called *Ka Kur Ka Jait* (cognates) and families having a direct lineage to the father's side are called *Ki Kha Ki Man* or cousins (agnates).[26] Nongbri (2013) further elucidates that *Ki Kur* (one's clan members) together with *Ki Khun Kha* (son's children) and *Ki Nongkha/Ñiakha* (father's maternal kin) form the core of an individual's kinship world[27] in the Khasi society.

Marriage within the same clan is considered *Ka Shong Sang* (sacrilege). Couples who marry within the same clan are usually ostracised and secure no inheritance. Such couples may be driven away from their home and, worse, their bones are excluded from the common cairn of the house. This custom is still observed even among the Christian Khasis.[28] However, Kharkrang (1990) states that in rare cases, such unions are not condemned as *ka sang* if (a) there is no direct link between the two families to which the parties belong, (b) If the two parties are at least three generations apart, and (c) if the respective families of the two parties concerned arrive at marriage arrangements honourably and are duly blessed by pastors or priests if they are Christians.[29]

Norms and Values: *Kamai ia ka hok* (to earn righteously), *Ka Tip Kur Tip Kha* (to know and respect kinship-cognates and agnates) and *Ka Tip Briew Tip Blei* (to know and respect humanity and God) are the three tenets of societal norms, values and conducts of the Khasi for a peaceful and providential life now and in the after-life (Berry, 1902).

Khasi Matrilineal in transition

More often than not, one of the changes in the Khasi matrilineal society is the reduced position of the *Kñi Rangbah* in modern times. By the time the British arrived in the hills, the original system of matriliny had already undergone changes. The foreigners interpreted the altered Khasi matrilineal system only to make it worse. Lyngdoh (1998) is of the view that the foreign rulers did not understand the original Khasi matrilineal notion of 'custodian' of property. In 1918, the British Government introduced the Law of Inheritance that required land and other properties to be registered in the owner's name, and hence land was registered in the name of the *Khadduh* (Kynjing). The law brought significant change to the position of *Ka Khadduh*.[30] The new law legalised her as the heiress and not the

custodian of all the family wealth and property. Consequently, the *Khadduh* gained more power and the *Kñi Rangbah* authority diminished (Rapthap, 2005). From then on, the concept of private property came into practice gradually. [31] Perhaps one of the adverse effects on Khasi society brought by British rule was on the land ownership system. Kharkrang (1990) states that the law separates and delinks inheritance from religion and religious duties.[32]

Another reason for the decline of the authority of the *Kñi Rangbah* among the Khasis is the arrival of Christianity. The role of the chief uncle as the priest became redundant. The Bible extoll and holds a father in high reverence[33] (Lyngdoh, 1998). Further, migration and urbanisation have become impossible for the *Kñi* to make frequent visits to the members of their *Kur/Kpoh/Ïng* to counsel them (Rapthap, 2005).[34] Lyngdoh (1998) maintain that migration disturbed the golden balance that helped the functioning of the original matrilineal system as per the teachings of the Third Divine Assembly or Durbar held at *Sohpetbneng* which pointed out that '*whenever you start a new village or town, see to it that there are enough groups of cognates (Kur) and agnates (Kha)*'[35]. As more and more males married outside their villages it became difficult for them to manage the affairs at their sisters' house. In the absence of the *Kñi,* the father gained more dominance and the uncle's role diminished consequently (Lyngdoh, 1998)[36]. The age of the *Kñi* as the centre of authority in the original matrilineal system gave way to the age of the father. In this newly evolved matrilineal system, the position and status of the woman and her relationship with her children remain constant. It is the man who shifts. Her relationship with the man in the family, however, changed from that of a sister to a wife (Lyngdoh, 1998). Under the authority of the uncle, socialisation is maximum towards the *Kur* (cognates) and in the presence of the father, socialisation goes also towards the *Kha* (agnates) (Kharkrang, 1990).[37]

In a matrilineal society in transition, Lyngdoh (1998) pointed out that, in contemporary times, three views and debates emerged. One group wants to preserve the lineage system through the mother, though unclear whether the *Kñi Rangbah* or the father is the sole authority. The second finds it reasonable for opting for a patrilineal system as he is '*u kpa ba lah ba ïai*' (the father who bears the heat) and that children are from his seed. The third group opts for a parallel descent where boys would take their fathers' lineage and girls their mothers'. The third group believe that after marriage, the couple should choose a new surname combining that of both the husband and the wife. [38]

Discussion

The debates and discourses on the gender roles of the two sexes in the Khasi matrilineal society, which frequently take the extreme ends of the '*all-powerful woman'* and the '*helpless man*', need a systemic study from a gender lens. A gender role analysis of a Khasi male and a Khasi female and their social relations (how their normative roles, duties, and responsibilities are defined and internalised), their different socio-economic activities (divisions of labour in productive and reproductive works), and their community management roles and responsibilities can provide insight into how gender is understood and constructed by the matrilineal Khasi society.

A study of their gender roles can identify the differences and inequalities that might otherwise be taken as given or natural. Their gender relations, especially in terms of their access to and control over resources can reveal the underlying power relations of the two sexes, as well as find out which of the two sexes is comparatively more powerful in the Khasi matrilineal society.

The research focuses on the ideas, positions, and perceptions of urban-educated Khasi indigenous people about media propaganda.

Gender roles distribution in the Khasi matrilineal society

In terms of socio-economic profile, findings reveal that 80 per cent of males and 17.3 per cent of females agree that generating the main income is a male's responsibility whereas, 75.3 per cent of females and 23.4 per cent of males feel that providing additional income is the female's responsibility. However, 30.86 per cent of males do not agree that men are breadwinners and women are homemakers, yet very few of them are involved in child care (3.7 per cent) and household chores (2.5 per cent). The study reveals that gender reproductive roles are not only socially assigned but internalised by women. It is found that 57.8 per cent of males and 54.7 per cent of females agree that Meghalaya is matrilineal in descent but patriarchal in nature.

The interplay of gender power relations

The study reveals that 67 per cent of the respondents say that both the mother and the father have a major role to play in the decision-making process in the family. Family issues relating to the children's well-being (85.2 per cent), transaction of major assets (74.1 per cent), number of children to have (86.4 per cent), divorce and separation (63 per cent), disposal of ancestral property (51.9 per cent) are jointly decided by both of them. Though the woman wields considerable power in decision-making, it is restricted to the private sphere. The decision-making process at the community or traditional institutions is reserved for men (91.4 per cent). Though she is considered to practise traditional religion, males perform 91% of religious customs and rituals among the living and the dead. The study finds that 81.5 per cent of females and 11.1 per cent of males feel that a woman is more likely to be excluded from the decision-making process in the private as well as the public sphere in the Khasi matrilineal society.

As far as gender power relations are concerned, 73.6 per cent of males and 71.4 per cent of females feel that the clash of power relations is highest

within the family (37 per cent). Other clashes include male domination in the public sphere (28.4 per cent) and formal decision-making within the community (27.2 per cent). Almost 50 per cent of the respondents feel that the coexistence of a patriarchal society and a matrilineal lineage is the main cause of the clash of gender power relations.

Gender equality

It is to be noted here that, 45.7 per cent of the respondents feel that women and men are treated equally in Khasi society. Another, 76.5 per cent of the respondents agree that the Khasi customary laws are not prejudiced against women. However, 77.8 per cent of the respondents do not agree that Khasi customary rules are prejudiced against men.

Findings reveal that 73.6 per cent of males and 73.8 per cent of females reported having never faced domestic violence. However, for those who do, more females face verbal abuse, more males face threats and intimidation, more females face mental and psychological torture, and more males face physical torture and harassment. More respondents would rather notify family members than file a report with the appropriate authorities. 3.7 per cent of males prefer to suffer silently, and 2.5 per cent of females would wait for a change in their spouse's behaviour. Alcoholism (66.7 per cent), desertion and abandonment by a spouse (43.2 per cent), divorce (32.1 per cent) and single parenting (43.2 per cent) are the prevailing problems in the Khasi matrilineal society.

Of the factors that inhibit gender equality, 90 per cent of respondents feel that females are more likely to face gender discrimination than males at 6.2 per cent. 66.6 per cent of females and 52.63 per cent of males feel that alcoholism is the main reason for the sharp increase in abused women in Meghalaya as per the NHFS 4 (2015-16). 38.09 per cent of females and 36.84 per cent of males feel that desertion and spouse's abandonment is a

major problem, followed by alcoholic abuse by a spouse (23.8 per cent of females and 15.75 per cent of males).

Gender portrayal in the Khasi films

Behind the scenes, gender representation in Khasi movies is unequal. In total, 87.33 per cent of males and 12.67 per cent of females make up the crew in the production of the four films. There are more male characters than females in each film. The main casts in the four movies are 75 per cent males and 25 per cent females. 58.13 per cent of males and 41.87 per cent of females are cast in supporting roles. More male characters are named (62.85 per cent) than females (37.14 per cent). The top three speaking characters are males (58.33 per cent) than females (41.67 per cent).

Findings

Gender roles distribution in the Khasi society

As far as the understanding of gender is concerned, 44.4 per cent of the respondents (42.1 per cent of males and 38 per cent of females) could not differentiate between gender and sex. Though matrilineal in lineage, findings of the study reveal that 79 per cent of the respondents (78.9 per cent of males and 78.5 per cent of females) say that the father is the head of the family, while 16 per cent of them consider a mother as the head of the family. A mere, 3.7 per cent of the respondents say it is the uncle. The study reveals that the role of the uncle is phenomenally reduced as the centre of authority in Khasi matrilineal society as 35.8 per cent of the respondents feel that the youngest daughter can demand the greatest share of the ancestral property as her customary right.

Socio-Economic Activity Profile

The study reveals that stereotypical gender roles exist even amongst the

educated Khasi population. Generating the main income for the family is largely believed to be a male's responsibility while generating additional income is a female's responsibility. (*see Figure 1: Gender roles distribution*).

Figure 1: Gender roles distribution

	Generate main income	Generate additional income	Care of the elderly and sick family members	Daily cooking	Child care	Cleaning washing etc	Marketing	Assisting in household chores
Male's Role (%)	81.4	23.4	9.8	6.2	3.7	2.5	16	23.5
Female's Roles (%)	17.3	75.3	87.6	92.6	93.8	95	82.7	72.9
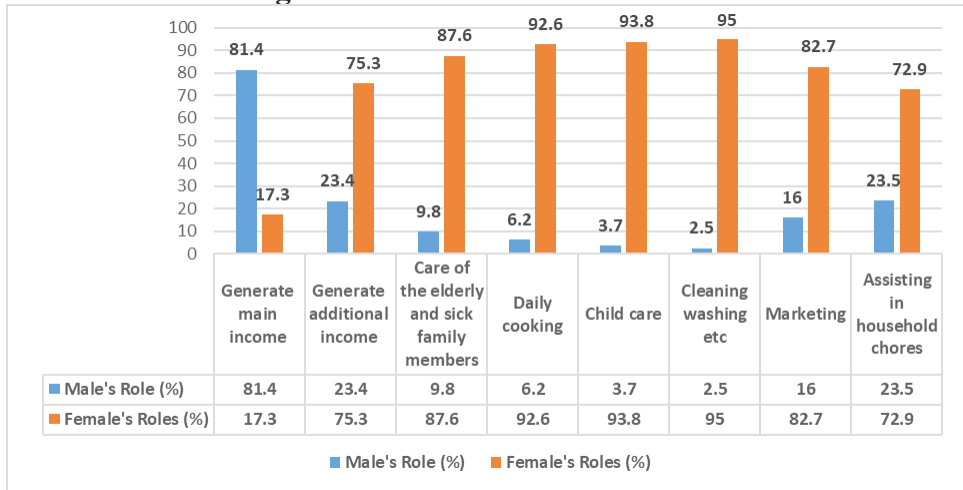
In the matrilineal Khasi society, gender roles are marked, identified and internalised by both sexes in their socio-economic activities. Gender productive roles activity is largely taken on as a male's duty, whereas gender reproductive roles are largely accepted and internalised by females as a woman's role.

Access and Control Profile

Women are denied or limited in their access to social and cultural resources, such as the performance of customary religious rites and ceremonies, justice and legal aid, membership in trade associations, and participation in medium- and large-scale economic enterprises. As far as the enjoyment of resources, men enjoy more opportunities to rise to leadership positions, have more access to information and networking, and enjoy more time for leisure. The following table gives a clear picture.
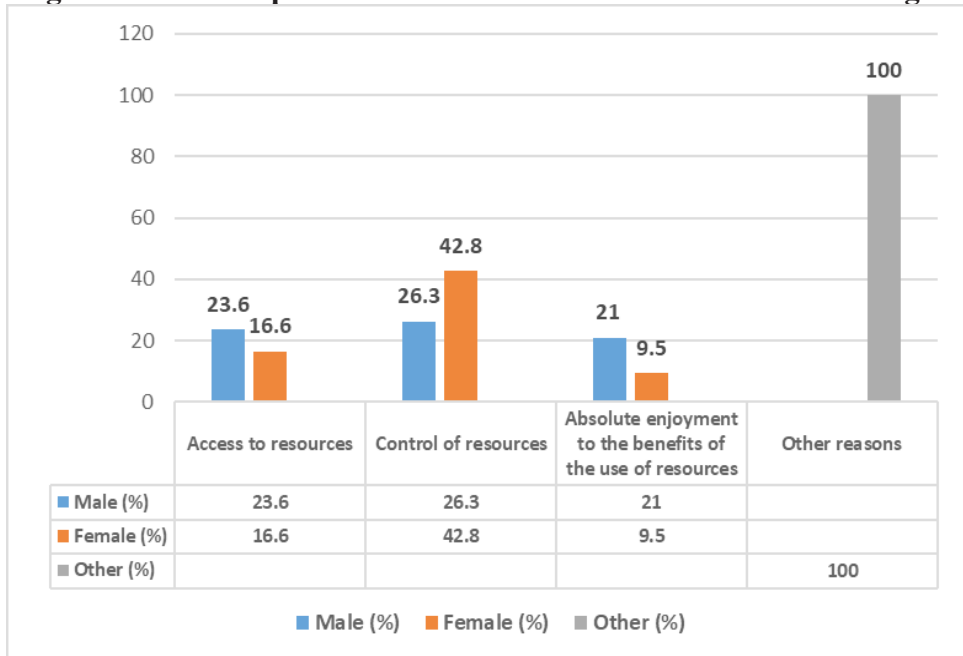
Table 2: Access to and control over resources

Type of Resources	Access		Control	
	Male	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**
Socio-cultural				
Performing customary religious rites and ceremonies (living and the dead)	√		√	
Health care services	√	√	√	√
Justice and legal aid	√		√	
Economic				
Employment and livelihood opportunities	√	√	√	
Membership in trade and associations	√		√	
Medium and big economic enterprises	√		√	
Small and Micro business enterprises	√	√	√	√
Equal pay for the same type of work	√		√	
Farming activities	√	√	√	
Crafts and embroidery	√	√	√	
Political				
Influence the voting behaviour	√		√	
Participation in the state political institutions	√		√	
Participation in the community's traditional institutions	√	√	√	
Decision-Making Processes				
Decision-making at home	√	√	√	√
Decision-making at the community	√	√	√	
Decision-making at the traditional institutions	√		√	
Enjoyment of resources				
Control over one's earning			√	
Opportunities to rise to leadership positions at different levels/strata of work	√		√	
Freedom of movement in the public domain	√		√	
Information and networking	√		√	
More time for leisure	√		√	

The study reveals that though women have access to socio-economic and political resources, they do not control them. In gaining access to resources,

16.6 per cent of females believe there is a clash of gender power relations and 42.85% of females believe the power relations clash is more pronounced in their ability to control those resources (*See Figure 2: Clash power relations is more visible in issues relating to*)

Figure 2: Clash of power relations is more visible in issues relating to

	Access to resources	Control of resources	Absolute enjoyment to the benefits of the use of resources	Other reasons
Male (%)	23.6	26.3	21	
Female (%)	16.6	42.8	9.5	
Other (%)				100

Gender equality in Khasi society

More females (52.3 per cent) than males (39.4 per cent) agree that men and women are treated equally in the Khasi matrilineal society. However, 31 per cent of males do not agree with the statement. (*See Figure 3: Men and women are treated equally in the Khasi matrilineal society*). Overall, 75.3 per cent of the respondents agree that the Khasi customary laws are not prejudiced against women (*see Figure 4: Most of the Khasi customary laws are prejudiced against women*). More females (26 per cent) than males (21 per cent) however, disagree with the statement.

Figure 3: Men and women are treated equally in the Khasi matrilineal society

Figure 4: Most of the Khasi customary laws are prejudiced against women

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Other (%)
Agree	21	26.1	
Disagree	78.9	71.4	100
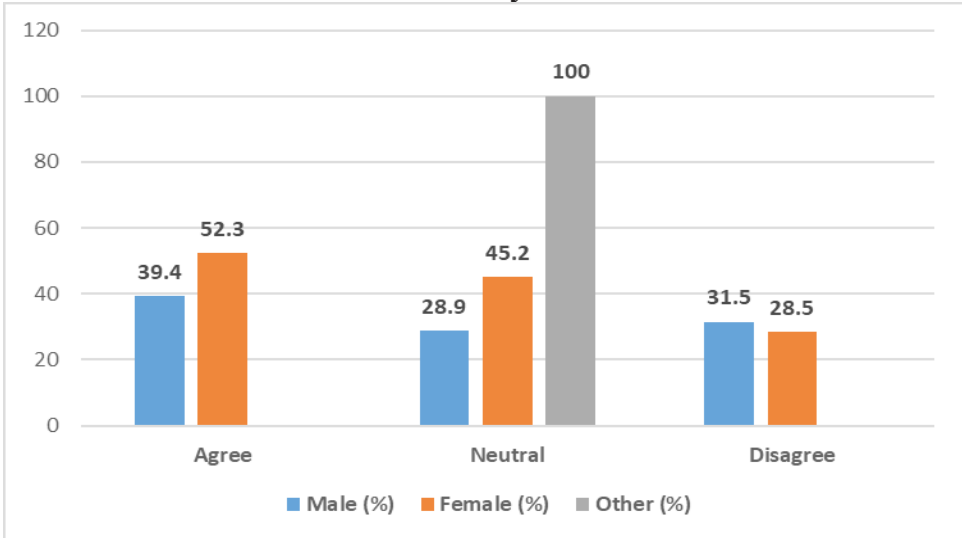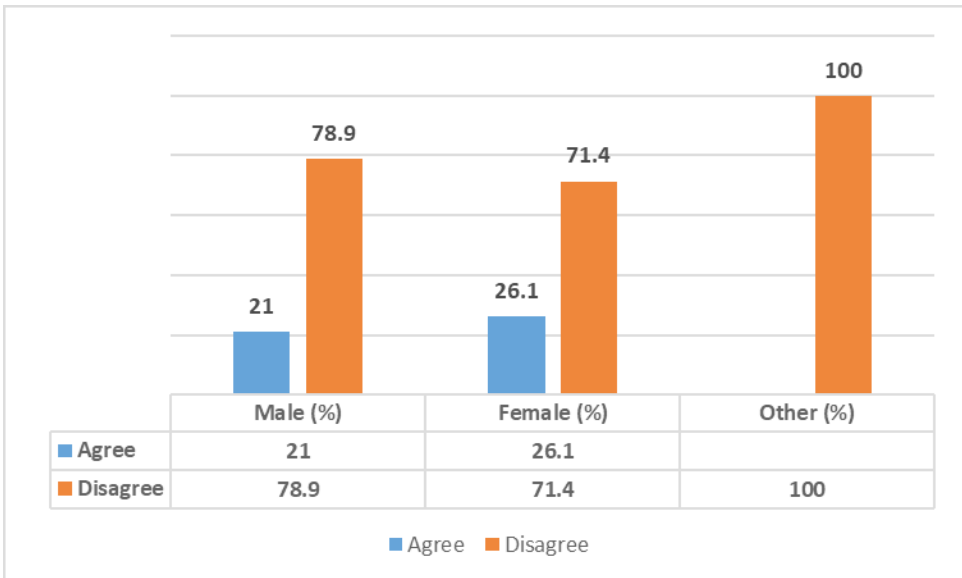
About 77.8 per cent of the respondents do not agree that Khasi customary rules are prejudiced against men. Findings of the study reveal that though a majority of males do not feel insecure in matrilineal Meghalaya, 26 per cent

of males feel that the Khasi customary laws and practises are prejudiced against men (*See Figure 5: Most of the Khasi customary practices are prejudiced against men*). Close to 30 per cent of males and 38 per cent of females feel that males do feel insecure in Meghalaya. (*See Figure 6: Khasi males feel insecure in Matrilineal Meghalaya*).

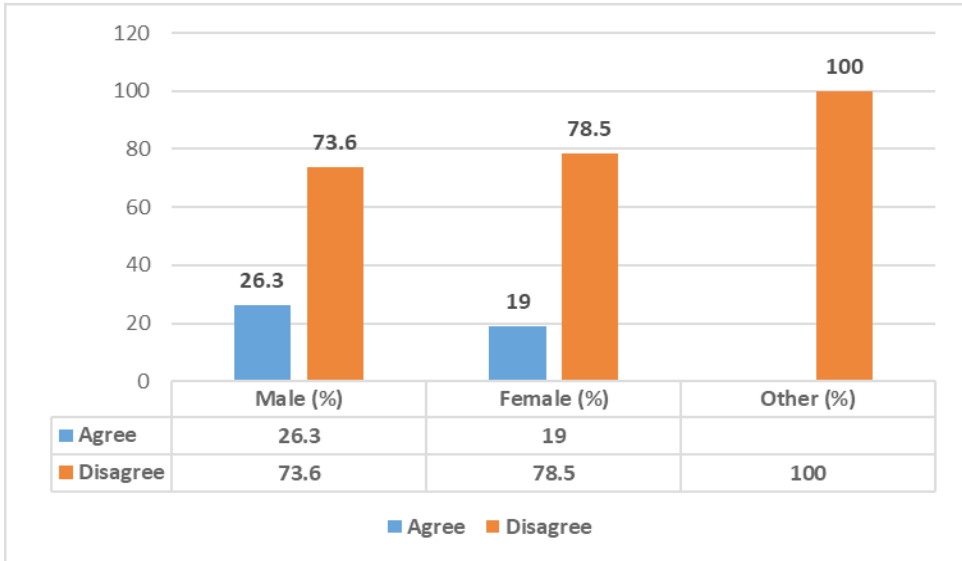**Figure 5: Most of the Khasi customary practices are prejudiced against men**

Figure 6: Khasi males feel insecure in Matrilineal Meghalaya
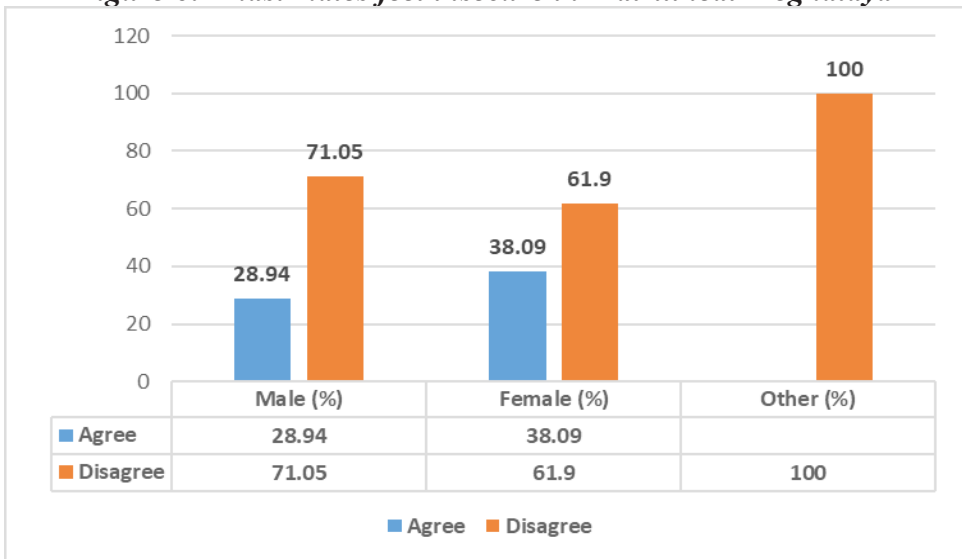
Women as powerful sex in matrilineal Meghalaya

Again, 58 per cent of the respondents do not agree that women have more power than men in Meghalaya. More females than males disagree that women in Meghalaya have more power than men whereby, 71.6 per cent of the respondents do not agree that women in Meghalaya are all-powerful and need no empowerment. The findings debunk the notion of the 'all-powerful woman' as portrayed in the media. (*See Figure 7: Women have more power than men & Figure 8: Khasi Women are all-powerful, they need no empowerment*)

Alcoholism (66.7 per cent), desertion and abandonment by a spouse (43.2 per cent), divorce (32.1 per cent) and single parent (43.2 per cent) are the prevailing social problems leading to gender discrimination in the Khasi matrilineal society (see *Figure 9: Problems in the Khasi matrilineal society*).

Figure 7: Women have more power than men
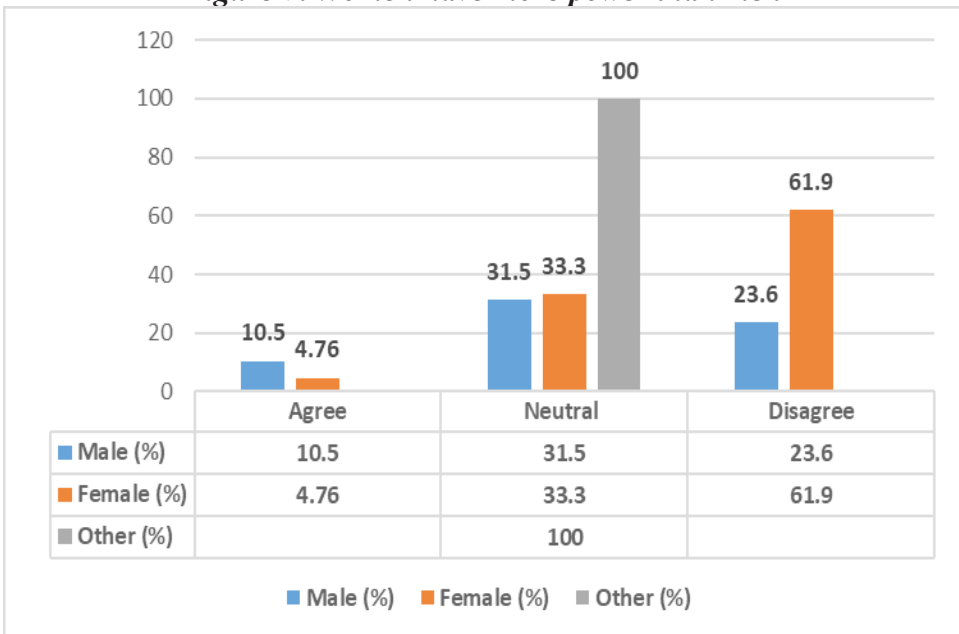
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Male (%)	10.5	31.5	23.6
Female (%)	4.76	33.3	61.9
Other (%)		100	

Figure 8: Khasi women are all-powerful, they need no empowerment

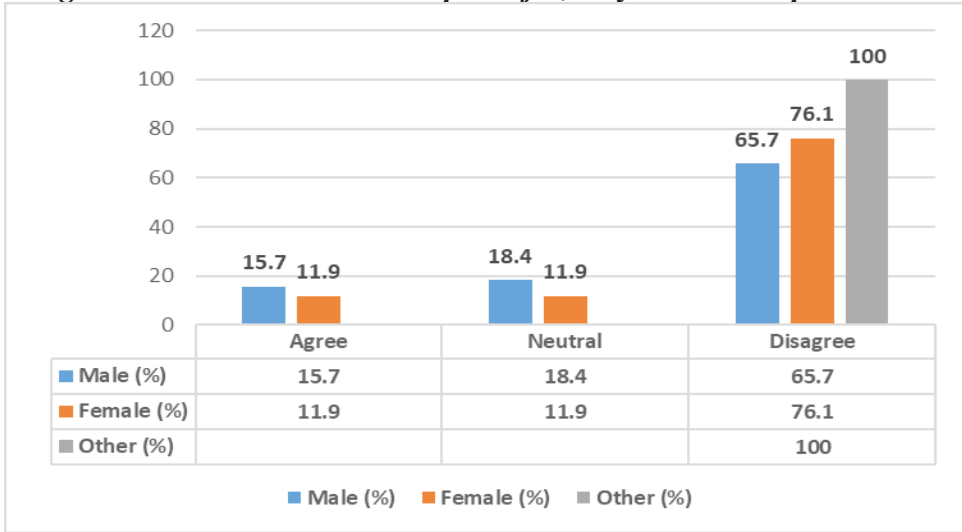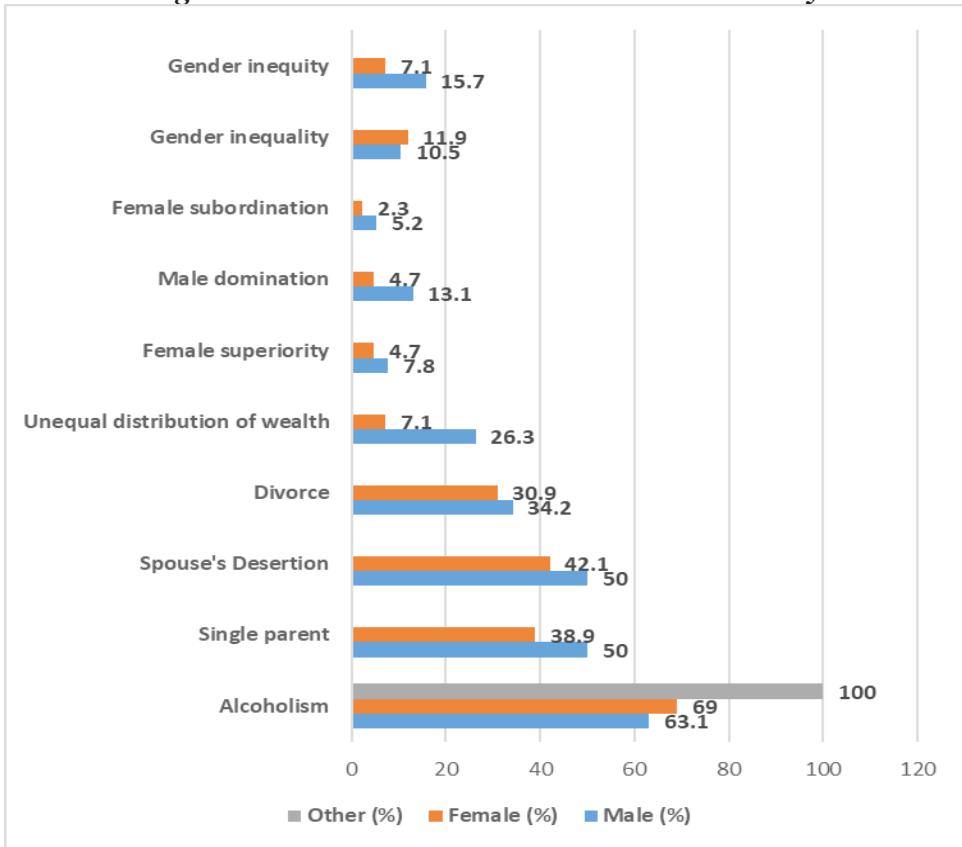|	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Male (%)	15.7	18.4	65.7
Female (%)	11.9	11.9	76.1
Other (%)			100

Figure 9: Problems in the Khasi matrilineal society

Media representation of gender roles through Khasi films

The history of the Khasi films in Meghalaya is scanty. The first Khasi black and white film '*Ka Synjuk Ri Ki Laiphew Syiem*' was made by Hamlet B. Ngapkynta in 1981. '*Manik Raitong*' the first colour Khasi film, was made by Ardhendu Bhattacharya four years later.[39] (Lyngdoh A. W., 2013).

From then till the early part of the twenty-first century, Khasi regional cinema witnessed a halt due to the social and political instability in the region. In the last decade of the twentieth century, directed by Pradip Kurbah, '*Ka Mon Bajwat*' was released in 1998. Pradip Kurbah changed the art of filmmaking in terms of styles of storytelling, cinematography, and editing. '*Ri*' (2013), '*Onaatah*' (2016), and '*Ïewduh*'(2019) received national and international acclaim. In its infant stage, the Khasi film industry has a long way to go. The following are the details of the films taken for study (*See Table 3: Films' profile*)

Table 3: Films' profile

Film	Directed & Produced	Duration	Characters		Number of scenes
			Male (13	Female (9)	
ONAATAH	Pradeep Kurbah & Jova Kurbah	1.46 hrs	*Lead Role*		81
			1	1	
			Supporting Role		
			4	4	
			Extras		
			8	4	
PAPA	Kitbok Kharmalki & Banteilang Nongsteng	1.30 hrs	Males (24)	Female (18)	65
			Lead Role		
			2	1	
			Supporting Role		
			11	4	
			Extras		
			11	13	
HEP	Pradip Kurbah & Jova Kurbah & Sweety Pala	2.3 hrs	Male (26)	Female (6)	93
			Lead Role		
			4	0	
			Supporting role		
			7	6	
			Extras		
			15	0	

DEI MAPHI	Pradip Kurbah & Sweety Pala	2.53hrs	Male (10)	Female (19)	72
			Lead Role		
			2	1	
			Supporting Role		
			3	4	
			Extras		
			5	14	
Total number of characters			**73 (58.4%)**	**52(41%)**	

Movie Analysis through a gender lens

Onaataah, the protagonist, after a gang-raped, seeks to heal in another village after facing ridicule in her town. Through friendship with a man and other villagers, mostly men, she finds new reasons to be hopeful about life once again. Returning to her town, she discovered a new purpose in life. From a gender perspective, the movie is about a gradual and painstaking ordeal of a woman who successfully fights social gender discrimination in society. However, it takes a man to rescue her from her problems.

The movie, Papa revolves around the gender power clash of relations in a matrilineal Khasi society. Kitdor, the protagonist of the movie, struggles for the custody of his only daughter after he was forcefully made to separate from his wife, Clara, by his mother-in-law and brother-in-law, as he has very limited economic means to support his family. Following his rescue of his daughter's kidnapping, Clara left her boyfriend and reunited with her husband. The movie portrays the stereotypical roles of men as providers, problem solvers, and protectors of the family without whom women are helpless. Clara is portrayed as emotional, irrational, and lacking the intellect to foresee what is good and desirable for her.

In Hep too, his sister and his mother are portrayed as the emotional support for Hep, the protagonist, who is trying to regain his life after a prolonged association with a bad company. Women in the movie are portrayed as helpers who are both weak and emotional when making decisions. Their lives revolve around the house and the household chores

that are not appreciated. Their roles in the movie are to win the audience's sympathetic emotions for Hep, who was killed in the end, and for the film as a whole.

Dei Maphi is a drama that revolves around three characters - Naisha, the main protagonist, her mother and her aunty. The story revolves around the teenage pregnant Naisha, who was sent off far away to stay with her aunty to hide the pregnancy and a child to be born out of wedlock. The film portrays two different women. One, a strong woman (mother) who carries out the decision (to hide her daughter) as desired by her husband, and obtains the support of another woman to carry out the plan; two, a voiceless daughter who undergoes the afflictions and is victimised by societal gender discrimination. The film depicts a woman (mother) as a flag bearer of patriarchy, subjugating other women to fall in line within the social patriarchal order through varied forms of gender discrimination. Naisha's problem is finally solved by Cliff, her secret admirer who truly loves her.

These four movies failed to meet Bechdel's criteria of having two named female characters that talk to each other without having to discuss a male. These four movies did not pass Bechdel's gender equality test.

On-screen and off-screen, women's representation in the four Khasi movies is underrepresented. Women account for only 25 per cent of lead roles in films, compared to 75 per cent for men, and 41.8 per cent of supporting roles, compared to 58.13 per cent for men. The crew for the four films is made up of 87.33 per cent men and 12.67 per cent women.
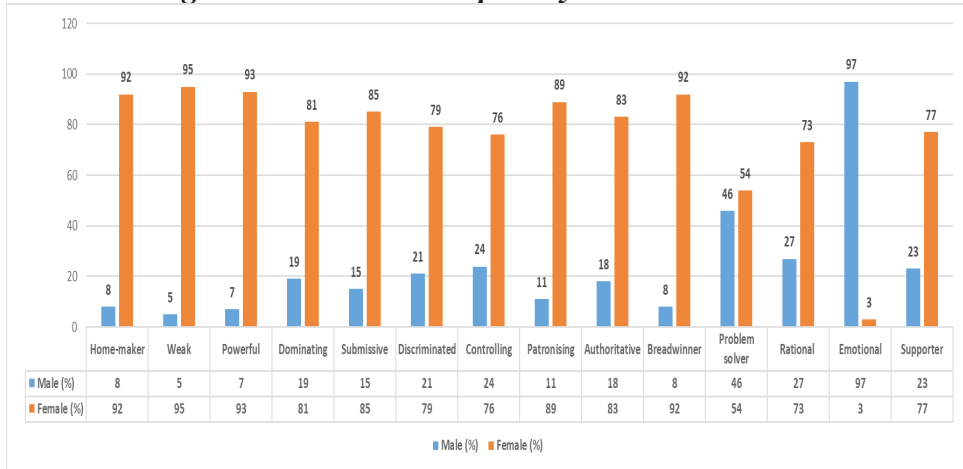
Representation of gender roles in Khasi films

Around 69.1 per cent of the respondents say that from reel to life, Khasi films provide a closer representation of Khasi society. In the four movies selected, women are generally portrayed as emotional, submissive, discriminated

against, weak, homemakers, and as well as beacons or watchtowers of patriarchy. In the Khasi movies, men are portrayed as rational, authoritative, powerful, and dominating (*See Figure 10: Gender roles portrayal in the Khasi movies*). 54.1 per cent of the respondents are unsure if Khasi media are gender sensitised.

About 45.7 per cent of the respondents feel that the movies' portrayal of the clashes of power relations between men and women is seen more in decision-making at home (45.7 per cent), women's fight for equal status (12.3 per cent), and men's fight for equality (1.2 per cent).

Figure 10: Gender roles portrayal in Khasi movies

	Home-maker	Weak	Powerful	Dominating	Submissive	Discriminated	Controlling	Patronising	Authoritative	Breadwinner	Problem solver	Rational	Emotional	Supporter
Male (%)	8	5	7	19	15	21	24	11	18	8	46	27	97	23
Female (%)	92	95	93	81	85	79	76	89	83	92	54	73	3	77

Conclusion

The findings of the paper reveal that the media claim of the 'all-powerful woman' is not supported by the urban-educated Khasi people. Though Khasi women enjoy considerable power in decision-making in the private sphere, their decisions are likely to be sidelined in the process. The clash of gender power relations between the sexes is also seen to be highest in decision-making within the family. Khasi women have little or no access to decision-making in political, cultural, and traditional institutions. Though they have

access to economic resources, they do not have the power to control them. More limited by their triple burden, Khasi women have less or no time for leisure. They are more restricted in movement in the public domain, more prone to gender-based discrimination, and have fewer opportunities to access information and network. They lack the enabling power to rise to leadership positions.

In matrilineal Meghalaya, men have more power *over* political, economic, socio-cultural, and traditional resources. They enjoy more power to make decisions in both the public and the private spheres. Men have more power as compared to women. They enjoy more access to information sharing and networking, are more likely to become members of trades and associations and have higher chances of rising to leadership positions. They enjoy more time for leisure and other entertainment or cultural activities, and their movement in the public domain is not restricted. The findings revealed that, largely, the urban educated Khasi people do not support the media's notion of a 'helpless' man.

A Khasi woman needs more equality in the public sphere and more access to and control of strategic resources. Khasi men need more equity in the private sphere, especially in the equal distribution of family wealth. Feelings of insecurity could have been due to the traditional culture of inequitable distribution of family property where, generally, Khasi men do not inherit ancestral property. The current gender-sensitive legislative proposal of the equitable distribution of family wealth could go a long way towards addressing social insecurities.

Findings reveal that the matrilineal Khasi society is patriarchal in character. Even among educated people and the local media, the awareness of gender sensitivity is unsatisfactory. Further research on the same can be carried out on the Khasi people living in rural areas.

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Interface of Autonomy and Forest Policy: Application and implication of Land Rights in Mizoram

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Abstract: The implications of forest policy after the Godavarman case deeply affect the whole notion of land rights and use of forest in the North East states including Mizoram. The reverse impact has been witnessed in the case of villages falling within the boundary of the largest state reserved forest 'Tut-Langkaih Protected Council Reserved Forest' (TLPCRF) created by the then Mizo District Council in 1970. From the District Council to the present state government, these villages instead of being de-reserved were overlapped with various land laws, adding more confusion with regard to land rights. With the above case, the state government complied by the national forest policy and tried to reinforce its authority on the reserve forest. This state government reinforcement received strong protest from the people which inhibited the rights on land and use of forest which is not only sanctioned by tradition and customary law but also by the Constitutional law under the the Sixth Schedule. To understand the applicability of land rights, the paper analyses the land policies in Mizoram since the inception of the District Council to the present state government but witnessed the limitation of the autonomy of the state in the interface of national forest policy.

Keywords: autonomy, land rights, village council, jhum, forest policy.

In compliance with the Supreme Court order on the famous Godavarman case, the whole notion of autonomy under the special provision of Sixth Schedule and Article 371G in Mizoram has been revisited. The autonomy enjoyed by the state since the days of the Mizo District needs to redefine

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the rights and ownership of land and use of forest. Contrary to common belief, land, including forest, was neither owned by the community nor the individual in early Mizo society: it belonged to the chief. After chiefdom was 'abolished' by the post-colonial state, land theoretically became the state 'property' though this was not uncontested. The state re-embedded its authority over forests at the behest of the court order but it resulted in unrest among the people who realised that state intervention had been too expensive: the existence of the villages and the people living within the boundary of the reserved forest had been threatened. Besides, the whole notion of autonomy under the Sixth Schedule and then Article 371G has been called into question as the state's power has become limited with the apex court order on the National Forest Policy. In this context, the interface between autonomy and the forest policy in Mizoram is emphasised by taking the case of one reserved forest. This paper revisits the institutional structure of the then Mizo District Council (1952-72) to understand how autonomy has created a legitimacy over land and forest. Second, it inquires the intrusion of State agencies to subsume the rights over land and forest. The latter section of the paper articulates the impact of the court order on the state government and the counter response of the people with the implication of forest policy.

The implication of Sixth Schedule in the land system in Mizo District

The implementation of the Sixth Schedule led to the formation of the Mizo District Council (MDC) in 1952 in which the anti-chief party Mizo Union won the election with overwhelming majority. The party, since its formation in 1946, encouraged the anti-chief policy. It also won the trust of the Bordoloi's Sub-Committee whose assignment was to plan an institutional arrangement to integrate the old 'excluded areas' of Assam (Rao 1968: 723). This sub-committee recommended, for the provision of district autonomy enshrined in the Sixth Schedule empowered with legislative, executive and

judicial functions, to make and implement its own laws. As provided by the Sixth Schedule under paragraph 3 (sub paragraph 1), the District Council has the power to make laws on ten subjects of which the first four subjects are directly related to land and forest. It reads-

(a) the allotment, occupation or use, or the setting apart, of land, other than any land which is a reserved forest for the purposes of agriculture or grazing or for residential or other non-agricultural purposes or for any other purpose likely to promote the interests of the inhabitants of any village or town:

Provided that nothing in such laws shall prevent the compulsory acquisition of any land, whether occupied or unoccupied, for public purposes [by the Government of the State concerned] in accordance with the law for the time being in force authorising such acquisition;

(b) the management of any forest not being a reserved forest;

(c) the use of any canal or water-course for the purpose of agriculture;

(d) the regulation of the practice of jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation;

Though the District Council might be given the power to make laws on the above subjects, limitation was inevitable in the midst of the existence of the institution of chiefdom. In Mizo tradition, land was neither private property nor communally owned, but 'belongs' to the chief though certain limitations were imposed after the coming of the Colonial government (McCall 1980 [2008]: 33-48; Aitchison 1931 [1983]: 94). The best example of this type of ownership rights on land can be witnessed where the system exists till today. Since, the Sixth Schedule had not empowered the District Council for the 'abolition' of the traditional institutions two different procedures were engaged to cripple the chief; first, the Lushai Hills District (Village Councils)

Act, 1953 was passed and second, in 1954 the village council was formed through universal adult suffrage in most of the villages. After the village council was formed under the Sixth Schedule, the Mizo District Council issued notification for the transfer of village administration from the chief to the village council[1]. But to completely subdue the chiefs, at the behest of the MDC, the controversial Assam Lushai Hills District (Acquisition of Chiefs' Rights) Act, 1954 was passed by the Assam Legislative Assembly (Burman 1997: 34). The Act was made effective from April 1, 1955 in which the chief relinquished all their rights particularly on their authority on land and forest. On the same date the Deputy Commissioner passed an order to all the Chiefs to hand over all the village records to the village councils concerned.[2] Thus the traditional institution of chiefdom was abolished and replaced by the village council.

Now the 'ownership' rights of the land became problematic because none of the above two acts created to restructure the village administration came with land reform. Particularly, the acquisition of chiefs' rights act, unlike its predecessor, the Assam State Acquisition of Zamindari Act, 1951 where settlement was made by the state for the tenant as landholder, did not automatically confer land ownership to the villagers or community (Das 1990: 30; Singh et.al. 2012: 37-38). The former act called for the transfer of 'ram' (territorial land) from the chiefs to the state government with certain terms and conditions of compensation to the chiefs. Section 6 of 1955 Act specified that the chiefs' ram vested in the state again shall be transferred to the District Council or Regional Council as the case may be. Though there is no official hand over of land from the Assam government to the District Council, the Mizo District Council by virtue of paragraph 3 (sub paragraph 1) of the Sixth Schedule became the de jure authority over land within the Mizo district. But the reality was that except for town areas, the village council became the de facto owner of land and forest. Though certain laws passed by the Mizo District Council had been limiting the village council,

particularly on forest to the distribution of jhum land under the village council act 1953 and also by the Mizo District (Forest) Act, 1955, amended from time to time.

Apart from jhum land the MDC fully deployed the power under Paragraph 3 of the Sixth Schedule in the management and control of land and forest. While in the village settlement areas the village council was empowered to distribute homestead land. To regulate land revenue, the Mizo District (Land and Revenue) Act, 1956 was passed in October 1956 and became effective from January 1957. This act led to cadastral survey in the urban areas and bigger villages and was categorized as 'revenue village' where the revenue law was made applicable. It resulted in categorisation of two types of villages - one revenue village where cadastral surveyed was done through the issuing of land certificate by the Revenue Department and; 'non-revenue villages' through the system of house pass that was issued by the village council. Still in both types, it was common perception that the forest remained common for jhum cultivation, gathering, hunting, etc. But contrary to the common belief, it is interesting to learn that the rights over forest and its resources had been gradually subsumed by the radical intervention of the District Council through the amendments of forest laws.

District Council intervention on land and forest

The MDC enacted the forest act in 1953 which was soon repealed and replaced by the Mizo District (Forest) Act, 1955. The new act empowered the District Council to create reserved forest under sections 11, 12, 13 and 14. Section 11 relates to the constitution of Town Forest Reserve which so far had been applicable only to the then Aizawl town but its existence has been largely invisible due to rapid urbanisation and privatization of land. Sections 12 and 13 deal with the demarcation of village forest reserve within the village territory, while Section 14 is the 'power to constitute Council Reserve Forest' except in the autonomous region of the then Pawi-

Lakher Regional Council (PLRC). Within 'village reserve forest', three classes have been specified: (1) village safety reserve, for protection against fire and also in the interest of the health and supply of water resources to the village; (2) village supply reserve, to supply the need of the village and villager including jhum cultivation; (3) Protected Forest Reserve, restricting village communities in terms of destruction of 'valuable forest' resources. But the most controversial leading to the present conflict on the case study was Section 15 where Council Reserve Forest can be constituted for the sole property of the District Council.

As per the latest forest report of Mizoram, under the village reserve forest two notifications were made declaring the composition of such forests in forty-two villages under the then Lushai Hills District (Forest) 1953 (Government of Mizoram 2019: 48-51). With the implementation of the new act in 1955, another 113 notifications were made affecting 123 villages between 1955 and 1971 (Government of Mizoram 2019: 51-56). Apart from the village reserve forests another notification was made in 1965 for the creations of the Riverine Reserved Forests and Roadside Reserved Forests, in the first instance by subsuming half a mile from either side of the sixteen major rivers, and in the second by declaring half a mile on either side of the road between Aizawl to Silchar as Roadside Reserved Forest (National Highway No. 54).[3] The creation of these areas meant the reintroduction of the policy of the Colonial Government but with more comprehensive and consolidated form (Road order No. 6 of 1948-49, MSA[4]). While 'Protected' and 'Council' Reserve Forest were late introductions to secure the forest land as the sole property of the District Council.

This continuous creation of reserved forests legitimized state control over forest and its resources and, subsequently forest came to be the major source of revenue for the state. MDC direct intervention on the forest had restricted the village communities on the forest which led to reverse

impact, and privatisation of land. Accordingly, the people realised that land privatization was necessary not only to secure their ownership rights but also to protect their rights against the unscrupulous forest restrictions. As a result, land settlement certificate (in revenue village) and land pass (in non-revenue village issue by Village Council) of homestead and garden pass were introduced leading to privatization of land and securing of the best lands within the road side reserve, riverine reserve and forest lands. Later, the Mizo District (Agricultural Land) Land Act, 1963, was made applicable irrespective of the village categorisation, transforming forest land into private agricultural land. Under this act the certified land pass (later patta) holder has both transfer and inheritable rights.

The contrasting nature of privatization of land and the continuous notifications for reserved forests exposed the District Council contradiction on its policy on land and forest. This contradiction was materialised with the creation of Tut-Langkaih Protected Council Reserve Forest (TLPCRF) in 1970 which combines the two radical terms 'protected' and 'council reserve forest'.[5] Here, the whole notion of recognition of rights on land and forest has been put into question with the inclusion of the term 'protected'. Incontestably, one can recall chapter four of the Indian Forest Act, 1878 classifying 'Open Forest' as 'Protected Forest' in exposing the aggressive 'conservation agenda' by the Colonial government against the 'agrarian rights' which had continued in Assam till the 1930s (Saikia 2011: 85, 90; Handique 2004: 64). The problem of creation of the Tut-Langkaih Protected Council Reserve Forest (TLPCRF) lies not only in the aggressive nature of the state agency but the condition in which it was notified makes it imperative that the subject of reserved forest will be briefly studied with the village grouping.

The impact of village grouping in the creation of reserved forest

The Indian State through its defence force retaliated against the Mizo National Front (MNF) movement which sought for a separate sovereign nation state starting March 1, 1966, putting the whole Mizo district under 'rambuai'. Borrowing from the example of the British military operation against the communist in Malaya between 1948 and 1960 (Thompson 1966: 50-62), the Indian State entered into a system of grouping of villages, to separate the people and the village from MNF activities. Villages situated beyond the easy accessibility of the Indian forces were put under the operation of both military and civil administration. The administration had to be gradually transferred to the civil administration who had also prepared the administration plan[6]. Village grouping was practised from 1967 to 1969, negatively affecting the life of more than 85 per cent of the population in the Mizo District (The Mizo District Council, 1969[7]). The State tried to endorse village grouping under the guise of development but this tactic failed as the operation is only remembered as 'annihilation of reason and sensibility,' the atrocities of the State (Jafa 1999:100; Sundar 2011).

By 1970 several military operations had been relaxed and the people in the grouping centres were not prevented from moving back to their original villages for re-settlement. In the midst of this re-settlement process, a notification for the creation of TLPCRF under Section 14 of the Mizo District (Forest) Act, 1955 was declared in the Assam Gazette on June 24, 1970. The notification permitted only the eight existing grouping centres for settlement[8]. These villages are those grouping centres- Kanhmun, Zawlnuam (Lokicherra), Zamuang, Rengdil, Kawrthah, Mamit, Phaileng and Tuipuibari. As regards to the creation of TLPCRF, former member of the Mizo District Council C. Pahlira developed two theories[9]. First, to restrict the illegal extraction of timber through the nexus of non-tribal trader and local official and; second, to check illegal immigration and settlement of the Chakma who had been escaping against the atrocities in the erstwhile East Pakistan. But in an interview with one of the then forest official (name

undisclosed) who happened to be among the officials in charge of the creation of TLPCRF claimed that these objectives had failed. He further admitted that exploitation of forest resource was beyond the control and management of the District Council due to shortage of manpower to handle law and order situation. As for the second objective, the then Pawi-Lakher Autonomous Region, in any case had been trifurcated into three autonomous districts, reserving one autonomous district for the Chakmas.[10]

Whatever the theories are behind the creation of the reserved forest, the District Council as agent of the Post-Colonial State not only re-enforced the colonial policy but   re-introduced the whole idea of land and forest as the property of the state. It was nothing but a channelizing of the pan-Indian forest policy existing since the time of the colonial period wherein 'the forests of rural communities were continuously being reserved and nationalized, while the rights of the villagers were constantly being eroded through a series of legal actions' (Poffenberger & Singh 1998: 60). Though the notification contained certain rights and concession to the people living within the villages it also acknowledged that (apart from the authorized villages) the existence of other villages were not recognized unless approved by the Executive Committee of the District Council. For the rights and concession, section 9 of the notification outlines -

> Villagers residing in the Grouping Centre inside the area will be entitled to their customary Jhumming in the open area only at the rate of 5 acres per household per year of five years cycle under specific order from the Executive Committee or the Officer empowered in this behalf. They will further granted rights to collect minor forest produce as may be necessary for their domestic purpose but not for sale, trade or barter. Timbers of un-reserved species will also be granted for the similar purpose.

The rights and concessions of the villagers did not go beyond jhum

cultivation and use of minor forest produce for non-commercial purposes. It can be argued that the forest policy adopted by the District Council had made the land and forest acquired resonate with what Saikia (2010: 22) calls 'wider political and economic meaning'. The provision of the Sixth Schedule provided legitimacy to the District Council to control and manage land and forest. One of the reasons behind the aggressive forest policy of the District Council was to maximize revenue. Record has shown that land revenue and forest royalty were the two major sources of revenue of the Mizo District Council (See, Thanhranga 2007: 249-252). In the course of transfer of power from the District Council to Union Territory in 1972 and then the birth of Statehood in 1987, all laws including the forest policy have been adapted by the subsequent regimes to make the reserve forest the property of the state.

Court intervention and the state response

The whole question of the forest policy adopted by the state of Mizoram since independence has been revisited as a result of the Supreme Court intervention after the famous Godavarman case (T. N. Godavarman Thirumalpad Vs. Union of India, 1996) and has extended to other North Eastern states including all the District Councils (For the judicial implication, see Divan and Rosencranz 2010: 288-308). The quasi-judicial intervention and constantly-evolving definition of the term 'forest' have adversely affected the day-to-day lives of people dependent on forest, banning and restricting the movement of cut tre s and timber from all the states of North East (Nongbri 2001). The apex court also directed the state governments to cease the felling of trees in all forest areas except those that were in accordance with the state working plan, which was subjected to further approval of the Central Government.

In pursuance of the interim directive, the Government of Mizoram took prompt action by ceasing all ongoing activities of non-forest purposes within the forests, under the provision of the Forest Conservation Act, 1980. The state government came out with a notification on January 24, 1997 constituting two Expert Committees.[11] The first committee consisted of all the state departments related to the use of forests and, the second committee consisted of state forest divisions related to conservation including the Working Plan Officers. The first committee acting under the Apex Court order delineated three core areas:

(a) identify areas which are 'forest', irrespective of whether they are so notified, recognized or classified under any law, and irrespective of the ownership of land of such forest;

(b) identify areas which were earlier forests but stand degraded, denuded or cleared; and

(c) identify areas covered by plantation trees belonging to the Government and those belonging to private persons.

The Committee held three consecutive meetings on February 7, 10 and 11 in 1997 and discussed the above issues. With the first, the committee examined the list of the notified forest areas (as recorded by the state forest department) and the non-notified but tree-covered forest areas which were still in existence outside the recorded forest areas. In the second case, it was concluded that the permanently 'denuded and cleared areas' were to be confined to those cleared for jhumming; the non-notified areas were regenerated predominantly by bamboos in the subsequent years but trees remained largely absent. The third case relied on the record maintained by the Forest Department since 1958 where the government plantation covered 1759.80 Sq.km. and the private plantation covered 81.26 Sq.kms (GoM 1997).[12] Besides, in compliance with the Supreme Court order the second

expert committee assessed the sustainable capacity of the state forests on the matters related to State qua saw mills and timber-based industries.

Creation of Working Plan and ownership question on land

Finally, the two Expert Committees submitted their reports under the supervision and guidance of the third committee constituted under the same notification. According to the report prepared, the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests had submitted an affidavit to the Supreme Court on behalf of the Government of Mizoram (1997). The report clearly mentioned the practical difficulties in complying with the directives of the court order. It stated that 'the effort of private growers in the state has to some extent reduced the pressure on natural forest for fuel and small timber. Such tree growing activities is needed to be encouraged for conserving the ecology and improving the environment'. The state government's stand was to lift the ban on the movement of timber to encourage the private growers. Second, the question of jhum cultivation was raised wherein the state government initiated various programmes for their settlement but this required forest land. The report also claimed that the 'ownership' right of the entire land lay with the state government and that it would be looked after by the village council. The report further supported the regularization of "the allotment and settlement within forest reserves which have already taken place for the purpose of agriculture" and "the Reserved Forest areas be demarcated accordingly" (Government of Mizoram 1997: 12).

In response to the appeal made by the State Government, initially the Ministry of Environment & Forests, North Eastern Regional Office, Shillong conveyed their approval for a Working Scheme for a period of one year on the condition that half yearly reports be made on the details of harvesting and regeneration and the purpose of this would be to revise the Working Schemes.[13] However, this process could not be done due to limited time, therefore an extension was given for a period of one year to be completed

by October 31, 2003. Despite this, the implementation of working schemes could not be completed. In the meantime, the North Eastern Regional office of MoEF conveyed their approval for working schemes for the un-classed forests of the village councils under four Forest Divisions, for a period of one year from June 4, 2004 to June 3, 2005.[14]

In the case of Kawrthah Forest Divison where the present TLPCRF is located, the Working Plan for the procedure of cutting trees belonging to private planters was announced by the state forest department on November 19, 2007 and it was officially published on November 26, 2007 (http:/www. dipr.mizoram.gov.in, accessed on 12.11.2012). There were two contested areas on the notification – first, the process in which the private planter would get access to their trees under the Working Plan and second, that nature in which land under the reserved forest would be given recognition through the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

The Working Plan fueled apprehensions over the state's indifference to ownership rights. Paragraph 221 of the Working Plan stated that, 'However, the ownership of the land continues to vest with the government whereas such forest produces are with the jhummias'. Paragraph 223 further stressed, 'however, in case of plantations by the Forest Dwellers, the ownership of the land will remain with the government, if and unless notified in writing by the State Government as per the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forest'. In addition to this, as per the Apex Court order, the department concerned had to carry out all the operations on timber, including marking, felling, logging and transportation. For administrative charge the department and the planter had to deposit five to ten per cent of the market value of the timber. Primarily, the land holder has to submit their land passes to the forest department after all the timber operation was concluded.

People's claims and objectives on the rights on land

The Working Plan was strongly contested by the Mizoram Private Tree Planter Union (MPTPU) and Hachhek Constituency Development Council (HCDC) forcing themselves to revisit entire policies related to land and forests since the creation of the Mizo District Council. They also studied the apex court order to revalidate the claim made by people on the ownership rights of land. To put a strong contestation against the Working Plan, the two groups, separately and in unison, pursued the implication of the forest policy by sending a letter to the Chief Minister of Mizoram and also, making press releases to aid their cause. The two main concerns include, permission for processing their private timber, and the ownership rights on land. MPTPU (2008)[15] contested the overlapping of functions of different departments over land and forest and, pleaded the government to amend the Mizoram (Forest) Act, 1955.[16] They also begged that the affidavit sent to the Supreme Court by the state government recognize private plantation and land ownership inside the reserved forest viz., inner line, riverine and roadside reserved forests. Similarly, HCDC (2008) claimed that the land ownership had been validated through Land Settlement Certificate (LSC) issued by the Land Revenue and Settlement Department (LRSD).[17] This claim has proven what has been discussed earlier on increase of privatization of land. Now, people strongly opposed the Working Plan which intentionally ignored the recognition of land rights even when the court order entailed, 'the plantation on private and community holdings shall be excluded from this requirement but shall be regulated under respective State Rules and Regulation'.

The strongest contestation came with the picketing of all the forest offices under Kawrthah Forest Division by the HCDC and MPTPU from September 19 to 23, 2008 (Vanglaini, September 24, 2008). It ended only after the forest authority headed by the PCCF on September 23, 2007 promised to rework the Working Plan. Since no concrete plan was made to

suffice the interest of the people, a joint statement was made on September 30, 2008 personally attacking the PCCF for trivializing their cause and a statement was released to the state government requesting for prompt resolution of the issue by doing away with forest reserve altogether [18].

The interface of council reserve forest with other laws of the state

Again on October 18, 2008, the HCDC made a press statement that the whole idea behind the creation of the council reserved forest (TLPCRF) was not only against the people living within but also against the Mizo District (Forest) Act, 1955. It was argued that Section 15 to 22 of the Act deals with the whole nature of inviting claims and objections of the affected areas through a procedural manner but that it was intentionally ignored as there had been no effort at raising awareness among the people, and the insensitive manner of the concerned authority, that put them under the reserved forest overriding their existence and rights, led to a lot of anguish. The second argument was the lack of cognizance of villages existing prior to the notification (1970) within the reserved forest. In fact, land holding rights have never been ceased to be an issue under the Lushai Hills District (House Site) Act, 1953 in ten of the revenue villages by the LRSD (2012) and in the non-revenue villages by the village council for homestead land under the same act. This duality of functioning under the same government exposed the inconsistency of the state agencies. Since, prior to the notification of the reserved forest (1970), the Mizo District (Agriculture Land) Act, 1963 had been empowered to issue patta for agricultural land which is inheritable and transferrable. Nowhere in the 1970 notification does it state to supersede agricultural land act, instead section 22 of the Mizoram (Forest) Act, 1955 empowers the state government to give land rights within the reserved forest to individuals.

Confusion also existed on the notification over the nature in which revenue villages were categorized. Section 8 of the 1970 notification legitimised the existing eight grouping centres within the reserved forest– Kanghmun, Zawlnuam (Lokicherra), Zamuang, Rengdil, Kawrthah, Mamit, Phaileng and Tuipuibari. But revenue record has revealed that when the land revenue administration was extended in these reserve areas, two grouping centres – Rengdil and Zamuang were excluded, while villages like Marpara and Tuipuibari were included. Now, it is difficult to comprehend on what basis revenue villages have been categorized by the state government because chapter 3 of the then Mizo District (Land and Revenue) Act, 1956 clearly indicates that the act is not applicable to the reserved forest. The negligence on the part of amending laws which overlapped and this conflict has often been pointed out by the resisting groups. In this context, Law Research Institute under Gauhati Hight Court in their study of land system of Mizoram encountered the same difficulties, 'when laws on the same subject are scattered in so many enactments and rules, they become confusing both to those who are affected thereby and those administer them' (Das 1990: 25). Thus in the midst of all restrict under the reserve forest, the land revenue record has shown that LSC has been continually issued in the areas covered by 'reserved forest' even after the implementation of the court order by the state government [19].

Limitation and contradiction in the autonomy of the state

With renewed emergence of the court order and the radical steps taken by the concerned central ministry and the state department, the implication of forest policy is beyond comprehension, psychologically if not practically. The base of the state autonomy has been introspected through the provision of Article 371G inoculating the state assembly against intervention of the central law on - Mizo's 'religious or social practices', 'customary law and procedure', 'administration of civil and criminal justice according to

customary law' and 'ownership and transfer of land'. But, the article again limits the autonomy of the state assembly against the Central laws which existed before February 20, 1987, the date on which Mizoram attained statehood. As the clause reads

> "Provided that nothing in this clause shall apply to any Central Act in force in the Union territory of Mizoram immediately before the commencement of the Constitution (Fifty-third) Act, 1986".

The imperative of the special provision under Article 371G was therefore called into question as the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 came into force from October 25, 1980. The latter poses a threat to the overall autonomy of the state as it is effective prior to the insertion of Article 371G. In the interview, Zoramthanga in 2010[20], argued that the Indian State took a precautionary route when Article 371G was designed unlike its predecessor of Nagaland, Article 371A. In the case of Article 371A it gives power to the Nagaland Assembly both on 'land and resources' and without limitation on its effective dates. The limitations on the part of Article 371G were; omission of the word 'resources' from the sentence 'ownership and transfer of land', and limiting the effective period as mentioned in the above clause. In such a situation, the Government of Mizoram can only concede helplessness with the implication of the forest law. Thus, state autonomy has been limited by the provision which gives special provision and has to comply with the Court order.

What has become more devastating is that the state authority instead of looking into the crucial issue of protection of the people's rights over forest, is more concerned with the realization of theoretical recognition of legal right of state ownership on land and forest. As a result subsequent laws were being made to be overlapped by the departments of revenue, forest and agriculture. In the course of the field study it can be presumed that the court order had been conveniently used by the state forest department to reassert

itself as the authority on forest, not only against village communities but also the other departments, revenue in particular. This intention becomes clear by looking at the Working plan wherein people are made to submit their land pass to the forest department after the use of forest land. The only escape plan offered by the state forest department was through the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.

Conclusion: The escape plan

Apprehensions concerning government initiation of the forest dweller act have emerged and endured owing to the fact that since the creation of villages within the reserved forests –recognized by both colonial and post-colonial states- the people have ceased to consider themselves as forest-dwellers. Besides, the FRA 2006 has been contentious for the Mizo since such legal recognition of right over land and forest has been uncontested. The rights over land and forest have not only been sanctioned by the customary laws and practices but also by special provisions such as the Sixth Schedule and later by Article 371G. To support the people's claims the latest report on FRA by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2018) in which most of the North Eastern States (except Assam and Tripura) made a clarification that the rights enjoyed by the tribal over land and forest have been deeply rooted in their customs and tradition, making FRA 2006 inapplicable if not irrelevant. In these states the traditional land holding system and rights over the forest is either recognised or legalised by the state.

Regarding the limitations over the forest subject in the interface of state law and central law, in the eyes of the state authority the only viable option was the implementation of the FRA, 2006. Empowered by Article 371G, the Sixth Legislative Assembly of Mizoram in the fourth session tabled the FRA 2006 on October 29, 2009 (for detail see Mizoram Legislative Assembly 2009: 687-704). With the hope of recognizing rights and accommodating

the people's claims the FRA was unanimously passed by the state assembly on the same day. Then, it was made effective from December 31, 2009 and then notified by the state government on March 3, 2010.

Contrary to the belief of the law makers, the passage of the FRA has not been met with enthusiasm by the people. Instead, people's apprehensions over the act have made the government halt the implementation till today. It is common thinking of the people effected by the reserve forest that the approval of FRA by the state government was a strategic plan to hijack, if not divert, the whole process of the present case. The situation has become increasingly complicated because the state cannot afford to deny the existence of the inhabitants within the reserved forests. Implementation of the forest policy in toto in future will only aggravate the problem putting the whole concept of land ownership right into jeopardy. The larger problem is not with the failure to create a concrete plan regarding the implementation of the FRA but, the limitation of state autonomy vis-à-vis national forest policy.

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Note: The article is a continuation of research of one of the chapter in my PhD thesis awarded in 2014 CPS/SSS, JNU.

Endnotes:

[1] No. DC. 6/54/64 dated Aizawl, August 11, 1954, Deputy Commissioner Office, Mizoram State Archive (MSA).

[2] Order No. DC. 6/55/13 dated April 1, 1955. Deputy Commissioner Office, MSA.

[3] Notification No. ADC supplement to the Assam Gazette dated 19th May, 1965. MSA

[4] In the 1948 order, thirty feet on either side of the PWD road on nine stations had been reserved. Road Order No. 6 of 1948-49. Memo No. 1094-110 Pol/VI-22, dated Aijal, the 8th July, 1948. Sl. No.125, CB-8, Forest Department, MSA.

[5] Notification No. 1 of 1970 of 24.6.1970 by CEM, Mizo District Council. The forest covers the whole areas between two major rivers - Tut on the eastern side and Langkaih on the western side of the present Mamit district with an area of around 500 sq.miles (959 sq.km.)

[6] For details see, *Instruction for Administration of Protected and Progressive Villages in*

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[7] The Mizo District Council (1969):*Brochure on the Mizo District Council*,Aijal: Publicity Department. Lib/R056/S2/24, ASA.

[8] Mizo District (Forest) Act, 1955, Section 14. Notification No.1 of 1970, The 24th June, 1970 published in Assam Gazette dated: Shillong, Wednesday, March 24, 1971, 3rd Chaitra.

[9] Personal interview with C. Pahlira. Ex- Deputy Chairman of the Mizo District Council (1957-62), April 19, 2010, Aizawl.

[10] The Mizoram District Councils (Miscellenous Provisions) Order, 1972, published in the Mizoram Gazette, 1972, dated the 5th May, 1972, Vol. I, Pt. II, p. 17 (w.e.f. 29-4-1972).

[11] The Government of Mizoram, Letter No. C. 18014/21/96-FST, dated: 24.1.1997.

[12] Report on the Expert Committee on identification of Forest Areas, Degraded, Denuded Forests and Plantation Areas in Mizoram (year not mention). Dept. of Environment and Forest, Government of Mizoram.

[13] "Kawrthah, Mamit and Kolasib Working Schemes" vide their letter dated 22.10.2001 and for Tlabung and Thenzawl Working Scheme on 1.3.2002. Department of Environment and Forest, Government of Mizoram

[14]   vide letter dated 4.6.2004.

[15] Mizoram Private Tree Planters Union. *Letter* to the Chief Minister of Mizoram, Dated Aizawl, January 26, 2008.

[16] The Mizo District (Forest) Act, 1955 had been renamed the Mizoram (Forest) Act, 1955 *vide* the Mizoram Forest (Amendment) ordinance, 1989 and later enacted by the Mizoram (Forest) Amendment Act, 1990.

[17] Hachhek Constituency Development Council (HCDC), *Letter* to the Chief Minister of Mizoram, Dated: Aizawl, September 4, 2008.

[18] *Joint Press Release*, Mizoram Private Tree Planters Union and Hachhek Constituency Development Committee, dated Aizawl, September 30, 2008.

[19] Between 1998 and 2012, 79, 86 and 138 number of LSC had been issued in the revenue village of Marpara, Tuipuibari I and Tuipuibari II respectively. These vllages were covered under the council reserved forest by they were not the grouping centre under 1970 notification. Extracted from, "*Record of the LSC issued as on October 2012",* Directorate of Land Revenue and Settlement, GoM, Aizawl.

[20] Personal interviewed Zoramthanga, President MNF Party. He was the Vice President of MNF at the time of signing of Memorandum of Settlement (Peace Accord) in June 30, 1986.

National Education Policy 2020 and Collegiate Education in North-east India

Batskhem Myrboh[*]

Abstract: The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020) envisages sweeping structural changes in higher education in India. It proposes to make Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) large and autonomous multi-disciplinary institutions under the light but tight regulatory regime to ensure quality. This is a much-needed change in the HEIs in the country. Though this policy may be practical in other parts of the country, in North East India (NEI) certain challenges may make its implementation rather difficult. This paper, therefore tries to unravel the challenges that stand on the implementation of NEP- 2020 in NEI states.

Keywords: National Education Policy, Higher Education, India, North-east.

Introduction:

It has been more than three decades since the last national education policy was adopted in 1986 and keeping in mind the necessity to keep pace with the tremendously changing realities in diverse fields nationally and internationally, the Government of India, in 2020 adopted the new National Education Policy (hereafter NEP-2020). The Policy was framed on the basic premises of 'access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability' (Ministry of Education, 2020: p.5). It is also proclaimed to be a policy framed in line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 (Press Information Bureau, 2020). Though the policy has attracted admonition and protests, especially from the left-wing student bodies indicating that the policy will increasingly lead not only to privatisation but

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also the saffronisation of Indian education, yet by and large the NEP-20 is being hailed revolutionary in the Indian educational system. In North East India (hereafter NEI), the policy has been welcomed by state governments controlled by North-east Democratic Alliance (NEDA)[1]and they have been eager for its early implementation. For example, the Meghalaya government immediately after the adoption of the NEP-2020 proclaimed to be the first state in the country to implement the NEP-2020 (The Sentinel, 2020).

In the frenzy of political proclamations and excitement on the NEP-2020, this article attempts to analyse the pros and cons of the policy as far as its implementation is concerned limiting to those provisions of the policy on collegiate education with a focus on the states of NEI. It may be mentioned here that the region has its own prevailing structural and institutional challenges that are unique in many aspects from the rest of the country which may have unique implications for the implementation of the NEP-2020.

Major Thrusts of the NEP in Higher Education

The NEP-2020 has spelt out that the main thrust on higher education is 'to end the fragmentation of higher education' which can be achieved through the transformation of the existing higher educational institutions (HEIs) into large multi-disciplinary HEIs analogous to the great universities of ancient India and also through clustering of educational institutions. It is also envisioned that all HEIs shall have a minimum of 3000 students and by 2030 each district in the country shall have at least one such HEI. Further, the NEP-2020 seeks to free the HEIs from the strangulating bottlenecks and unnecessary heavy loads of the existing affiliating system by transforming the colleges into autonomous degree-granting colleges. Accordingly, HEIs offering single stream are obliged to either become multi-disciplinary or face closure and it is envisaged that by 2035, the system of affiliation of colleges to universities will be phased out in favour of either 'autonomous degree-

granting college' or 'constituent college of a university' if the institution is unable to adopt the former.

Feasibility of Implementation of NEP-2020 in North East India

Looking at the major thrust areas of the NEP-2020, a few questions arise on the practicality of the policy in NEI. Will colleges all be able to function autonomously? Will it be feasible to bring colleges as constituent colleges of universities? Will colleges be able to become multi-disciplinary with a minimum of 3000 students? Will clustering of colleges be possible in the region? What will be the implications when colleges have to be closed down for failure to meet the aspirations and objectives set by the NEP? Perhaps, these are the questions that need to be addressed as far as the implementation of NEP-2020 in NEI is concerned.

Before furthering a discussion revolving around the above-stated concerns, it is imperative to have a basic understanding of NEI. NEI is a region consisting of eight states- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura having a total of 262185 square kilometres or 8 percent of India's geographical area with a population of 389.84 lakhs or 3.79 percent of India's total population according to 2011census. The region is sparsely populated with an average density population of 176 persons per square kilometre compared with an all-India average of 382.The states in the NEI region have been categorized as the special category states with weak financial resources and are heavily dependent on the Union Government for their financial requirements. Given their weak financial position, the Union Government generally follows a pattern of funding the centrally sponsored schemes for NEI states different from the rest of India. The share of financial capital between the centre and the states in NEI for such schemes is on the ratio of 90 to 10 percent whereas in the rest of the country the share of the state government is more than 10 per cent.

The precarious financial position of the NEI states was observed by the National Committee on the Development of Backward Areas (1981). It was stated that the small states of NEI were not in a position to ably and sustainably finance higher education. This observation was not only true then but even truer today. There is a high dependency of NEI states on the centre in the field of higher education owing to their inability to establish HEIs. Presently, all states, barring Assam which has a robust state university system,[2] are totally dependent on the central government for university level education and for affiliating their respective colleges. Besides, many states in the region lack professional and technical education. The outcome of such a scenario, as concluded by a survey of the North-east India Support Centre and Helpline, is the increase of number of students from the region migrating to other parts of India pursuing higher education because of poor infrastructures in higher education in the region particularly in the post liberalisation period (The Hindu Business Line, 2011).

In the absence of state universities in most of the NEI states, implementation of phasing out of the system of affiliation is challenging. The states which are dependent on the central universities for affiliation will face a daunting task in handling their collegiate level HEIs as the option of converting the affiliated colleges into constituent colleges of state universities is not available. The only option available for NEI states is to convert the existing colleges into autonomous degree granting colleges or establish new state universities under which colleges can be transformed into constituent colleges of such universities. But the question remains whether the states have the will power and capacity to establish state universities. Moreover, state run colleges cannot be integrated with the central universities unless the state governments are willing to transfer the management and ownership of such colleges to the central government; the possibility of such a transfer is unlikely. However, the situation is even more complex in the state of Meghalaya. Even with the establishment of a state university, Meghalaya would still encounter strong challenges in view of the fact that most of the

colleges in the state are owned and managed by private entities,[3] many of which are religious based groups. The only option available for Meghalaya is to encourage such private colleges to be transformed into autonomous colleges.

In the context of the requirement for existing colleges to be upgraded into autonomous HEIs thereby enabling the proposed discontinuation of the system of affiliation, it is important to look into the conditions and quality of colleges in the region. An assessment and accreditation by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), recognition by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the status of affiliation of such colleges to an affiliating university can be employed to gauge the capacity of colleges to become autonomous HEIs.

As evident in table 1, the percentage of colleges that have been assessed and accredited by NAAC in different NEI states barring Mizoram is much below the 50 per cent mark.[4] Among those colleges that have been assessed and accredited as presented in table 2, the largest portion is classed as B grade colleges. In Manipur and Sikkim none of the colleges managed to attain 'A' grade and above. Moreover, as evident in table 3, a large proportion of the colleges in the region are not even recognised by the UGC under Section 2 (f) and 12 (b) of the UGC Act, 1956.

Table 1: Number of colleges in NEI assessed and accredited by NAAC as on 16.12.2021 (state wise)[5]

States	Arunachal Pradesh	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Sikkim	Tripura	Total
Total number of colleges	37 (100)	623 (100)	108 (100)	73 (100)	36 (100)	63 (100)	18 (100)	51 (100)	1009 (100)
Number of colleges assessed and accredited	06 (16)	152 (24)	16 (15)	17 (23)	19 (53)	29 (46)	07 (39)	17 (33)	263 (26)

Source: Affiliating Universities in NEI and University Grants Commission
N.B. Figures in brackets are in percentage.

Table 2: Number of colleges NAAC assessed and accredited by grades as on 16.12. 2021 (state wise)

States	Arunachal Pradesh	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Sikkim	Tripura	Total
Number of colleges assessed and accredited	06	152	16	17	19	29	07	17	263
Number of colleges graded A++	00	01	00	00	00	00	00	00	01
Number of colleges graded A+	00	00	00	00	01	00	00	00	01
Number of colleges graded A	01	12	00	04	00	03	00	01	21
Number of colleges graded B++	02	12	01	01	03	01	00	00	35
Number of colleges graded B+	00	22	00	00	03	05	01	02	33
Number of colleges graded B	01	90	12	09	06	16	03	08	133
Number of colleges graded C	02	15	01	03	06	04	03	06	39

Source: University Grants Commission

Table 3: Number of colleges in NEI included under Section 2 (f) and 12 (b) of the UGC Act, 1956 as on 28.02.2021 (state wise)

States	Total number of colleges	No. of colleges included in		
		2 (f) and 12 (b)	2 (f) only	Both 2 (f) and 12 (b)
Arunachal Pradesh	37 (100)	12 (32)	02 (05)	14 (38)
Assam	628 (100)	309 (49)	23 (04)	332 (53)
Manipur	108 (100)	61 (56)	01 (0.9)	62 (57)
Meghalaya	73 (100)	30 (41)	10 (14)	40 (55)
Mizoram	36 (100)	27 (75)	02 (06)	29 (81)
Nagaland	63 (100)	36 (57)	12 (19)	48 (76)
Sikkim	18 (100)	04 (22)	07 (39)	11 (61)
Tripura	51 (100)	31 (61)	00	31 (61)
Total	1009 (100)	510 (50)	57 (06)	567 (56)

Source: University Grants Commission
N.B. Figures in brackets are in percentage

The problematic quality of college level HEIs in the region can further be gauged by looking into their status of affiliation to the universities. A look at the websites of universities across NEI reveals a weak position of a large number of the affiliated colleges many of which are still under temporary affiliation even after decades of establishment. Taking the case of North Eastern Hill University (hereafter NEHU) which is one of the leading universities in the region, 26 from 73 colleges which accounted for about 35 per cent of the total number of colleges are still temporarily affiliated to the university. These colleges were established in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Many of these colleges, including state government colleges, are

administered by principals who do not possess even basic qualifications prescribed by the University Grants Commission (hereafter UGC) (North Eastern Hill University, 2021a) and a number of staff appointed in many colleges affiliated to the university do not possess requisite qualifications(North Eastern Hill University, 2021b). This situation strikes similarity in the case of colleges affiliated to other universities in the region as well. Therefore, given such quality of most of the colleges in the region, it would be a herculean task to promote them into autonomous colleges and any attempt at forceful conversion for the sake of implementing the vision of the NEP 2020 will run the risk of spirally downgrading the quality of education and therefore, will prove detrimental to higher educational system in the long run.

In the light of the above scenario, many colleges in NEI runs the risk of being unable to meet the aspiration of the NEP-2020, i.e., to either become constituent colleges of a university or to become autonomous. Therefore, such colleges run the risk of an imminent closure if the NEP-2020 is to be strictly followed or implemented. It may be noted that the Government of India proposed the establishment of the National Higher Education Commission of India in the Draft Higher Education Commission (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act 1956) Bill, 2019. According to this draft bill, the proposed Higher Education Commission of India has the power to order a closure of institutions that fail to adhere to minimum standards and get accredited within the specified time. While such proposal is much welcomed to weed out the sub-standard HEIs, it will on the other hand lead to the disappearance of many HEIs especially those located in rural areas with weak financial, infrastructural and human resources. This will adversely impact the gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education which will be counter-productive to the vision of the NEP-2020.

Establishment of large multi-disciplinary HEIs in every district

The vision of the NEP to establish large multi-disciplinary HEIs in every district may not become a reality in NEI except in Assam because of small population with low density. For a comparison, according to the 2011 census, the entire population of Sikkim with 6.1 lakhs is less than the population of the least populous Mahoba District of Uttar Pradesh having a population of 8.75 lakhs. The Population of the seven NEI states excluding that of Assam in 2011 was only 12,588,110which was less than the female population of Chhattisgarh with 12,712,303 persons. Assam is the only big state in the region with a population comparable to the population of other big states.[6]With small and low density of population coupled with the hilly terrains and the under-developed infrastructure in transport and connectivity, the vision of upgrading the HEIs into large multi-disciplinary HEIs with at least 3000 students in every district seems to be impracticable unless such HEIs are designed to be residential institutions. Instead of having large multi-disciplinary HEIs designed to suit the general Indian condition, a different approach of setting up small HEIs may be suitable for the region.

One way of resolving the problem of establishing large multi-disciplinary HEIs as proposed by the NEP-20 is the clustering of small institutions. However, while clustering of institutions may not be problematic in states of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura where colleges are mostly public funded,[7] the state of Meghalaya which, as stated earlier almost totally depends on the private sector for education, may face difficulty in so far as clustering of institutions is concerned. Privately run institutions especially those belonging to the religious groups may take aversion to the idea of clustering institutions. This will ultimately hamper the effective implementation of the policy.

Conclusion:

The NEP-20 is ambitious and revolutionary, setting the vision of taking the higher education system in India to international standard. It aims at correcting the shortcomings of the existing education system which is long overdue. In NEI, the policy will expose the regular improper and non-adherence to minimum standard set by regulations frequently notified by authorities such as the UGC. However, given the distinctiveness of problems and challenges that higher education in the region is facing, the all India policy will make it difficult to be successfully implemented unless flexibility and tweaking of the policy implementation is accepted by the Union Government. In a country as diverse as India, it would be more practical to appropriately adopt policies that suits peculiarities of the region for achieving desired results in place of one jacket fits all approach adopted in the NEP-2020.

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Endnotes:

[1]North East Democratic Alliance is a political alliance in North East India headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and it includes other regional parties.

[2]Assam at present, according to UGC, has 17 state universities. It is only recently that Sikkim government established the Sikkim State University which is yet to be fully functional. Manipur University and Tripura University were the state universities of Manipur and Tripura but were subsequently converted into central universities in 2005 and 2006 respectively. Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura have no state university of their own at present.

[3]According to the All India Survey on Higher Education 2018-19 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2019: T5) in Meghalaya, there were 23 government colleges and 28 private colleges which was a misrepresentation of facts. However, the data are strikingly different from those shown by the state government in the official website. According to the website of the Directorate of Higher and Technical Education, Meghalaya, the state has five general degree government colleges and 49 private colleges.

[4]The number of colleges that have been assessed and accredited is calculated from the information that is available in UGC website as on 16.12.2021.

[5]The number is calculated by adding the number of colleges affiliated to different universities in NEI but the exact number cannot be ascertained due to the inaccessibility/unavailability of the list of colleges affiliated to the Bodoland University in Assam.

[6]The population of Assam in 2011 was 31,205,576.

[7]According to All India Survey on Higher Education Final Report 2018, in Assam 443 out of 526 colleges, in Mizoram 30 out of 32 colleges and in Tripura 44 out of 52 colleges were government colleges. These figures unlike in the case of Meghalaya are realistic after checking from government websites of respective states and affiliating universities.

Locating Women's Movement in Assam

Bhanuprabha Brahma[*]

Abstract: The state of Assam has been the stage for the single biggest students' movement in the post emergency India that came to be known as 'the Assam Movement'. On the other hand Assam also has a long and vibrant legacy of women's activism. With the histories of both being entangled, how do we locate an appropriate framework for studying a women's movement amidst the backdrop of cultural enactment of a powerful student movement in contexts like Assam? Various strands of discussion on women's movement provide ample number of alternative approaches to study the women's movement in Assam. However, the focus of this paper is on specificities seen over a period of time in the women's movement in Assam. This study on women in Assam, instead of positioning women as victims in the conflict area of Assam, is an attempt to recreate the story of women's movement in Assam. Women were not only present in those men-led political movements in Assam but also underwent lot of changes from the post Assam Movement era negotiating for their own space as they felt their standpoints were vindicated. Therefore, this study both acknowledges as well as narrates the fact that a women's movement did exist in Assam. Keen attention is paid to the issue of intersectionality among the women as they carry other ethnic and cultural identities.

Keywords: Women's Movement, Assam Movement, Intersectionality, Identity, Autonomy.

1. Introduction

Titled with its aim itself, this paper is an attempt at understanding women's movement in Assam from the backdrop of student-led strong political

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movement in Assam. It could be seen that the history of women's movements in Northeast India, in spite of being well-documented, has largely been interpreted within the context of movements for self-determination, as manifestations of struggles for assertion of community rights and claim of territorial autonomy within the apparatus of the state for separate statehood. It has not been recognised as movements with agendas of their own significance in their own right. The literature here, also hints at the question of different women at first coming over the same platform, but later leading to the formation of different women organisations owing to the differences in their situated experiences. This question of intersectionality is then taken on my study more directly, in order to better contextualise the contemporary trends of women expression and the women's movement in Assam. The emergence of sub-nationalism and the tribal discontent after the Assam Movement of 1979, due to the dominant Assamese hegemonic class indicate the presence of intersecting factors in terms of mobilisation too. The increasing fragmentation and dissonance between different ethnic groups living in Assam, which has led to troubling trends of ethnic unrest, led to the advent of new movements of autonomy in various parts of the Northeast. Therefore, this paper significantly highlights that intersectionality is not just a way to understand identarian complexity of an individual but that it also impacts the way movement groups emerge and develop.

This paper is divided into three parts. The first section presents a brief background to the study. The second section 'Women's Movement in Assam', deals with the need of space and full autonomy that women have been trying to convey post Assam Movement as they felt their standpoints were excluded. It refers to the birth of Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity (APMS) that shaped a new era, transforming women of Assam to being effective agents of societal changes. The third section of this paper, presents the discussion, debates around the term 'intersectionality' in terms

of women's movement in Assam, as this study reflects on the issue of intersectionality among the women in Assam as well, as they carry other ethnic and cultural identities.

2. A Brief Background to the Study

Assam, as positioned in the Northeast of India is an insurgency-ridden state (Sengupta, 2006). Although Assam is not the only state facing insurgency, nevertheless, the geographical location of Assam being encircled by transnational borders on all the three sides makes it unusual and at the same time vulnerable too (Sengupta ,2006). The unified identity of the people of Assam is as, if not more, difficult to define as the unified identity of the Indian nation. Assam's ethno-diversity has time and again been the source of conflict among various groups in the state. The six-year long Assam Movement (1979-1985) stands out as one of the biggest civil disobedience movements in post-independence Indian history (Baruah, 2002). This was further followed by tribal discontentment in Assam that led to the rise of another prominent student movement known as the Bodoland Movement in the year 1987. These are the two most dominant student movements led by the All Assam Student Union (AASU) and All Bodo Student Union (ABSU) respectively. The former one has been led by Assamese speaking people while the latter one by the Bodos. All Assam Student Union (AASU) and All Bodo Student Union (ABSU) played a critical role in changing the social political scenario of Assam and laid a huge influence on its youth politics.

The linguistically chauvinist ethno-nationalism pursued by the All Assam Student Union (AASU) has served as the instrument of division among the people of Assam. The lack of representation in the echelons of decision making made numerous tribes of Assam such as Bodos, Karbi etc to fuel movements for self-rule. This was a process of substantial change

not only for AASU but in general for the subsequent course of student movements in Assam. This study began with a discussion on Assam Movement that has been the first student led political movement in Assam that brought forward many women, to participate in the movement but later did the women realise that they were merely contributing in numbers and lacked a space of their own. The Bodoland Movement historically repeated the same to the tribal women in Assam. These are not simply allegations but an indication of shortcomings of the youth politics, as there is a lack of proper representation within the organisation, thus, a lack of heterogeneous insight in their demands and policies to date.

This work, therefore studies the women's movement with the cultural enactment of youth politics spearheaded by AASU and ABSU as its backdrop. When AASU turned hegemonic and chauvinist in the midst of the Assam movement, the other tribal people of Assam specified feeling deceived that led to the rise of another prominent student-led movement, the Bodoland Movement in the year 1987. The Bodoland Movement further brought the tribal women in another platform. Thus, while studying the women's movement in Assam, this work also takes into consideration an essential concern of feminism—that of dissimilarities and difference among women—depicting that it is not gender alone that marginalises. This paper paid attention to the most crucial fact that all women do not face the same problems. In doing so, it also highlighted the intricate and multidimensional dynamics of gender in the everyday arbitration of power, which is stringently interleaved with other power dynamics as played out in the intersecting spaces of women's associations.

3. **Recounting the Women's Movement in Assam**

The question of subjugation of women has been predominant in the history of social welfare. The substance for self-determination of women, as well as

equality was laid down through reforms in education, removal of practices like child-marriage, sati, purdah or seclusion and resistance to widow remarriage (Kumar, 1993). Women were seen as passive beneficiaries of meagre charitable aid in forms of benevolent treatment by the western sophisticated male bourgeois. Indian women were easily identified as objects of social reform, because they were the most discriminated against. The roots of the women's movement in India are more often than not traced to these organised women's struggles around social justice problems in the nineteenth century. The nature and content of the debates around *stree-swadhinata* were largely decided by the colonial situation, especially at a time when the colonial government was experiencing an increasing crisis of legitimacy in the face of a struggle for national self-determination (Roy, 2011). Therefore, the various threads in the debate framing the women's issues, reflected the multiple relationships of dominance and subordination. These threads further include the essence of colonial power, the diverse socio-political powers and theoretical frameworks that constituted the narratives of womanhood.

While in the context of Northeast India, there has always been a pride in the self-asserted egalitarian societal set-up vis-à-vis the harsh atrocities committed in the name of caste and gender in other parts of India. However, this claim can be disputed on the basis of tribal and caste disparities (Kumar, 2013). In spite of its self-asserted equality, Northeast India, notably Assam, has unearthed itself in the concurrence of tribal and caste Hindu social structures (Hazarika, 2008). Gender and its different corollaries have been thoroughly disregarded and occasionally adored as the only place in Indian society where women possess equal status. Here the myth of a casteless culture is deciphered by instances of propagandizing of tribal communities. Citing the Nellie massacre in Assam in 1983 (the most brutal mass murder the Northeast has seen so far) and also the killing of Manorama Devi 21

years later in Manipur, along with subsequent demonstrations by women who had stripped themselves in front of the Assam Rifles garrison, Sanjoy Hazarika argues that women were the most innocent victims of the war. Hazarika believes that these forms of abuse demonstrate how the state and the fighting groups have refused to guarantee the safety of women (2013). He observes that the state has failed to provide economic and social assistance regarding vulnerability to women's security needs in conflict-ridden regions. Take any dispute or potential conflict from either side, women are the most marginalised and vulnerable (ibid.2013).In reality, adopting the 73rd Amendment in Assam, where the first such elections took place in 2001, took nearly 10 years. Since the 73rd amendment does not extend to the states of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram as well as the hill areas of Manipur and Assam, the provision to reserve women's seats in regional assemblies is therefore not applicable in these states as well. These states are left out of the panchayat system and also among the most severely affected by conflict (Kolas, 2012). Nevertheless, in every case, a historical and contemporary study of distinctive political mobilisations in Assam would unravel limited women's representation. This is not to say women were not trying to create places for their own. The movement have only added women in numbers but neglected and oppressed them as they asserted their own itinerary (Kumar, 2013). Therefore, the feminist discourse in Assam needs to be given greater attention and emphasis.

The women in this region have played an active but largely unrecognised role in the political negotiations with the Indian government since independence. Therefore, the women's peace initiative is neither new nor alien to culture. Women being socially vulnerable as well, forced women to mobilise among themselves, which in turn directly or otherwise unified the efforts of these women. The massacres that accompanied the Northeast uprising helped women rally around their own tribal affiliations

in the Northeast. Most women's organisations formed as a direct reaction to these atrocities. There have certainly been several canopies and descriptions of what we call the 'women's movement' very broadly. These organisations are made up of both groups that either work to preserve the position of women or aspire to change the position of women. This study on Northeast Indian women brings to the forefront questions of methodology, issues of the premises on which theories of inclusion and empowerment of women in conflict areas are based. Hence the discourse on women's autonomy and identity in Assam needs attention.

3. 1. **Demarcating Masculinity in Political Movement of Assam: From Assam Movement to Bodoland Movement**

Women in Assam have never overcome the institutionalised hegemony of any nationalist movement or group. They have hardly ever surpassed institutionalised patriarchy be it the movement for autonomy or legal authorisation for political participation. While the infuriating aspect seems to be that voices of change most often come from the male leaders. The politics beyond the orthodox definition of the 'political' is never questioned in such situations. Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding of women as political subjects and representatives would build upon a more nuanced conceptualisation of the sphere of power that is systematically found today (Hazarika, 2008). Women are powerful voices of conflict resolution but rarely find inclusion in the political spaces (Mazumdar& Agnihotri1,1995).

Therefore, this section particularly aims at tracing the trajectory of masculinity from the Assam Movement to the Bodoland Movement and look beyond the participation of women taking into account the style of functioning of the male leaders of the movement. With the change in the nature of the movement the scale of women's participation changed but at the same time the reinforcement of binaries remains in the terms of

essentialised gendered roles. While recognising the unpleasant evidences about the movement, it could be seen that in spite of the heavy presence of women in these political movements, there was no signature in the Assam accord from a woman representative. Neither did women hold office in the central committees formed during Assam Movement. The male leadership of the movements in Assam could at many times depend on women to come forward but the demands of women have never been treated with respect nor have there been any efforts to redraft the institutional dismissal of voices. Realising such lapses and voids of the movement, these women began raising their own voices to form an independent platform. They felt that their subjectivities need to be recovered in order to breed an alternative history. From the view point of self-realisation of their existence and the multiple atrocities happening around, they started bringing out the gender issues in the movement.

The different dominant hegemonies, over time have degenerated into exclusivist notions of individual identity in Assam. This has garnered a sense of collective mistrust instead of solidarity giving way to mutual suspicion between different beleaguered groups. This research therefore, takes identity as the starting point for marking the evolution of women as protagonists and their self-autonomous organisations. Women's political presence and self-sacrifices have been underrepresented in these movements. This often leaves women leaders experiences misrepresented, as well as refuse to emphasise the interweaving between life and death (Deka, 2018). Even in Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) led government, women's leadership could not garner political representation. Even when there is no formal exclusion to participation, the conditions required to be able to equally participate are in favour of the dominant group (Fraser, 1996). They were kept outside the alleys of real power. These women, many of whom left their jobs and completely devoted their time for the cause of the movement

later did not even speak out against their male compatriots who became political leaders. These women felt let down and betrayed by the corrupt AGP government, by the failure of IMDT Act and their angst was reduced to drawing room discussions amongst mainly middle-class women about how women participated in the Assam Movement and got nothing out of it (Behal, 2012).

The Assam Movement that commenced in 1979 initially witnessed women's participation in large numbers. The women in Assam holding public accountabilities were gradually getting involved with these events of the students' organisations. But after the agitation ended, these women were often at the receiving end of character assassination and other kind of pejorative attitudes. This has been exacerbated by the all-pervading feeling of disillusionment that the campaign failed to live up to its goals. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, the major nationwide uprisings of 1921, 1930 and 1942, witnessed quite a few women that participated through various actions such as protesting in front of wine stores, putting blockades in front of government institutions. But as pointed out by Ranjana Mishra, history being a gendered discourse, these women are rarely cared for and left to the back alleys of mainstream national history (Sultana, 2013).

The youth organisation being the harbinger of social change was not sensitive to their own voids. Although they find themselves promoting political democracy, in many instances they propagate cultural conservatism instead. There is little or no awareness among these student organisations of what constitutes gender issues. They actually never knew what constitutes these problems (Brahma, 2019). The concerns they raised were regarding identity and ethnicity that converted them into a position of moral police. The issues of women concerning the indistinctness of women in the legal and political spheres of life have never been interrogated. Barring women's entry to religious places such as 'Sattra' (an Assamese word for religious

place) such issues have never been deliberated upon till date. Even those members have never acknowledged the unfair disparity of male and female elected representatives in the student union. There always remains a deep void in youth politics of Assam.

Thus, the women's movement was on the rise in the mid-seventies, trying to find space for itself. Women were seen assembling underneath different forms of solidarity. An 'include women' campaign was organised just before the April 2016 election in which at least 3,000 people from the district of Chirang participated. The workshop was attended by many women and they even raised a number of questions. They demanded tickets from political parties for women candidates, ration shops exclusively for women, an end to violence against them, and inclusion in decision making as well as in the governance processes (Roy Talukdar , 2017). Unlike most other Indian states where regionalism is articulated in terms of one dominant community, in Assam a number of smaller ethnic communities are carved out in the areas through their respective parties. Along with ethnicity and identities, issues of space as well as morality too come up.

3. 2. Rise of Women as a 'Category'

Discourses on self-sufficiency of women have constantly remained subsumed within other dialogues, conversations such as that on rights and representations. This is due to the bogus mindset of Indian society that until the recent past did not treat women as an independent subject. Women efficaciously leading protests and movements in different parts of India from the 1980s till the contemporary times aroused a growing awareness of women as independent subjects even when they embody their communities (Banerjee, 2005). The role of women and their nature changes with the kind of protest that they are identified with, owing to the underlying patriarchal set-up and hegemonic masculinity (Low, 2008). History provides us

sufficient evidence that depicts the scenario on how women were barred from the formal education system too. This avoidance of capturing the voice of women and their contribution to political situations in pre-independent India to many extent can be blamed as a deliberate attempt due to the patriarchal nature of our documented history (Bhasin, 1998).It is not surprising therefore, that their opinions were not expressed in the written texts which serve as witnesses of our heritage. This historical evidence therefore makes us consider the gender-biased nature of our history to be taken as granted. Women's movement is no longer a movement that drips in ascending order. The long history of women's struggle in India has laid down its off shoot in the form of women's movement and now gender studies. These facets manifested themselves in certain crucial quests such as analyzing women's problems as well as, discovering the real sources of their oppression and exploitation.

A feminist movement emanates because the contemporary society does not give its women a fair deal (Streijffert, 1974). In case of Assam, it was the dynamic contribution of women like Chandraprova Saikiani, Girija Devi, Puspalata Das that made the participation of Assamese women noticeable in the freedom struggle. These women's organisations that were formed primarily were not politically oriented. The budding political realisations of the women was an artifact of their milieu. Indian feminist scholars have contributed significantly towards the new focus in the study of women and conflict away from victimhood, as well as paid greater attention towards women's agency. Nevertheless, the Indian security studies is still reluctant to apply a gender lens to armed conflict and the importance of India's women's movements still lacks its due recognition (Manchanda, 2001). The resilient charisma of women's resistances or the challenges they exhibited on and after Assam Movement makes us rethink those struggles, as well as the need of a space to be explored. In the conventional political arena, the roles

played by different groups of women such as the role of women leaders and also the political activity of women outside the conventional arena should both be studied in order to see the impact of women's movement in Assam. Therefore, the lack of space for women during the Assam Movement made women feel their position to be mistreated and overlooked.

The historical processes since the birth of Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity (APMS) led to the rise of women as a 'category' in political arena consequently transforming women of Assam to being effective go-betweens of societal change. Assam Mahila Samity, the first organised structure later known as Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity was created by the new spirit of socio-political activity among Assamese women (Mahanta, 2008). They felt the need for a platform to express their thoughts and began to assemble in 1915.It was in 1919 that the Tezpur Mahila Samity, adopted a resolution against the purdah system. During that time, the women while going out, were compelled to move in a horse carriage with its doors and windows tightly closed (Miri, 1975).Until then, schools were miserable in Northeastern India. Women were not allowed either because of bad economic circumstances or because of early marriage to go to school. The lack of women participation in any decision-making processes has resulted in marginalizing women's needs and aspirations in a conflict zone (Goswami , 1999). As usual the dropout rate seems to be higher in terms of women in conflict situations as schools are converted to army camps. The boys get admitted to another school at a far distance while parents fear to send their daughters. A thorough study of the nature of political transition taking place in many countries of the Third World is needed while at the same time having a feminist perspective on democratisation needs to be garnered as well. Such a study must include an understanding of political marginalisation, democratisation along with the connections between class, gender and ethnicity.

Women in Assam have coordinated themselves independent of the formal political configurations to defy fascism of the non-state legal actors too. Their goals, as well as their tactics of agitation and opposition, were different from those of more traditional male-dominated forces. In some cases, they continued to fight with certain forms of political protest, in spite of being drastically silenced. The role these women play is of importance as they battle for their own rights while resisting patriarchal authoritarianism, which is strengthened to varying degrees by state authoritarianism. Thus, their struggle forms an essential component of democracy (Hensman, 2005).

The Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity had organised and funded many Mahila Samities which had a common impact on Assamese culture since 1926. Therefore, people gradually entered from the confines of their households into the outside world. Assam's women became actively involved in the Indian freedom movement. Gandhi's 1921 visit to Assam had inspired them to come out for the sake of the country and that led to a new uprising of women. The active members of women's organisations argued that personal interest, choice or desire was the result of having few women involved in party politics. The allocation of women's seats in the council was described as an important element to ensure the participation of women in local politics and also in the recruitment of government jobs. This was important, since it would give women their own voice. It was Assam's first unified non-political, independent women's organisation movement for women's rights and welfare. The Samity also placed requests before the Railway Advisory Committee for separate seating arrangements and improved waiting room facilities for women travellers at the Goalpara session of AMS, which was held in 1927.Sucheta Kripalini a woman leader in 1949 applauded the status of Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity as the country's largest political women's organisation while attending the Samity's 5th session in Dibrugarh (Saikiani, 1975). The Samity has been

doing its best to protect, safeguard and support women's rights since its establishment in 1926 (Choudhury, 2004). The growth of women's education, banning social evils, providing relief during natural disasters is some of the initial activities in which Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity (hereafter APMS) has been involved. With the experience of the Assam Movement, where the declining paradigm of the women's movement had no significant impact on the growing awareness of women, these new organisations were better established in the sense of organisational structure as well as in the theoretical direction (Karna, 1998). The legacies of this organisation too, continued to contribute to the continued existence of women. Present-day mutual activities taken by women are entrenched in networks of prospect and opportunities that are themselves the yields of women's past struggles as well as of present social relations. Nevertheless, women are apparently organising as women to contest or support other social relations as well.

Talking about the rise of women as a 'category', the author has specifically tried to lay emphasis on the particular fact that how the participation of women before the formation of Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samity (APMS), a formal organisational structure was restricted to fulfilling particular kinds of roles and how the emancipation for women in all cases has been short-lived as their assertion was missing. In the early nineteenth century, the attempt at uplifting the condition of women was largely conducted by the male liberal thinkers. It almost resembles the way Radha Kumar in her book *History of Doing* mentions how women's own organisations were formed by the early 20th century and how the unique category of 'women's activism' was shaped within a couple of decades (Kumar, 1993). The consequence of the anti-rape and anti-dowry movements was the recognition that violence in different forms had existed long before we knew its presence (Gandhi & Shah 1992). The mid-seventies were post-emergency years in which many women activists started addressing new types of women's issues.

Any movement, culture, tradition that maintains a sharp division between sexes, generates female groupings which accentuated in Assam too. Time and again women in Assam were 'allowed' to lead many demonstrations but the very nature of issues being limited to mainstream national questions convinces oneself that the women's question was restricted down merely to the grandiloquence of the nation as mother land. The word 'allowed' is of significance as women had no active presence, it was the male members who ruled and led the movement. It was these male members who also decided whom to choose as participant in these movements. The basic concerns of women were sidelined and projected women as the upholder of cultural domain (Sen, 2005). The importance of the feminist discourse derives from the discovery, that women are placed in a very particular way in any situation due to their social roles as ascribed by the society. Their status and the identity as transmitters of cultural identities make them vulnerable and susceptible to gender-based abuse in particular. Hence, there is a need to be very specific about the specific security needs for women as this violence is embedded in their patriarchal subordination and that plays out in the daily experience of peacetime or the dramatic times of conflict (Manchanda, 2008).The incidence of domestic violence mostly escalates in conflict situations. Contrastingly, the need to protect women from violence in their homes barely features in any security sector reform. In fact, we rarely find space for this kind of analysis or concern.

Women's recruitment into United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was not just a premeditated move of the leaders but also reflected the need of women to free themselves from the constant abuse they encountered or endured in their society. Within ULFA they saw the prospect of tackling social discrimination and disparities as they see violence as the starting point and not the product of social change. It is therefore of paramount importance

to see women's political experience that have been ignored and added to the current reconceptualisation of the state. The relationship between women and the formal organised politics has often been one that demonstrates the complexities, inconsistencies in the working of those politics. Women's movements, struggles in Assam that drives the forces of reform in both formal public spheres and informal realms have hardly been recognized, as they lack a proper organisational structure. Such efforts should include the scope of social and private actions that women participated in an around the world to claim their fundamental rights.

4. Intersectionality: Reconfiguring Autonomy and Countering Hegemonies

Research on women's organisations in North-east India claims them to be fragmented and also addresses them as a failure to reach out across tribal identities (Kolas, 2014).The major social structures – caste, class, gender and ethnicity always remain interconnected that describe the location of women within overlapping systems of subordination (Lewis, 2013). The presence of these overlapping systems of subordination however is not an exclusionary feature in Assam too. Intersectionality shapes the experiences of different women in different ways as patterns of subordination intersect in the context of violence against women. Hence different women express solidarity with violence contrarily. Ethnicities, identities, power and marginalisation in everyday life is structured through intersectional marginalities. When discussing the diverse cradles of dissatisfaction within the feminist movement, one should not interpret discontent as a critical trend (Jamil, 2018)

Like the rest of the world, the deprived women being aware of their subjectivity spurred into an earlier women's organization, Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti, the Mahila Sanga. This galvanisation of the older women

organisation also led to the creation of new women's organisation like all Assam Lekhika Sanstha (Assam Literary Organisation) and the All Assam Lekikha Smarooh (Assam Literary Convention). These two organisations though primarily literary-cultural organisations started on the basis that women were discriminated against in all areas of life and therefore, had to develop their own separate platforms for self-development (Mahanta 1998). The All Assam Lekhika Samaroh held in Nalbari in the year 1980 organised a seminar on violence against women and raised the question that bar the entry of women in Barpeta Naamghar (a religious place in Assam) (Karna, 1998). They also challenged women's indistinctness in other domains of life. Numerous cases of rape by the landlords and murder of peasant women created a strong impact on the media (1998). Nari Mukti Sanstha (NMS) was the one to take these cases forward. Assam State Commission for Women (ASCW) was also established in 1994. ASCW's most important function was to investigate and discuss all issues related to the infringement of women's rights, to review grievances either on the basis of complaints lodged or to take *suo motu* note on issues. The Asom Mahila Samity that was latter known as Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samity was formed under Chandraprabha Saikiani in 1926. The internal tribulations and complications among the members of the organisations resulted in fragmentation of the larger single group into various smaller groups, while Tezpur District Mahila Samiti remained its core constituent. The developments and reforms led by various movement, as well as the struggle for freedom poised a new understanding of gender relations and the status of women (Hazarika, 2015). It indicated a new era for women as they moved from home, their private sphere to public sphere which had been male dominated. Education performed the most essential function in making women sensitive and conscious of their ontological as well as epistemological perspectives.

Women's movement in Assam has yet to develop a distinct identity of its

own. There have been numerous local agitations against dowry deaths and rape led by Mahila Sangha, Nari Mukti Sanstha, Sadau Asom Nari Sanstha all associated with left party, as well as Mahila Samity an independent women organisation. But all these agitation and programs have remained confined as well as failed to develop into full-fledged movements (Mahanta, 1998:48). In one of the interviews the member of the women organisation of Barpeta district claims that women were never restricted from joining politics but neither were they encouraged. Therefore, ways to make women politically active as men, needs to be deciphered. The problem is that in interior areas of Assam, politics is not based on issues, but on favors and personal connections (Barpeta Mahila Samity, 2018).

The autonomous women's group with a feminist orientation tends to remain small. The larger women's organisation with mass following is usually the affiliates of large political organisation and parties. When the Dhumuka rape case happened in Kokrajhar, it seems only tribal women were protesting so there always existed a difference in cause to fight for. Employing a gender lens to grasp conflict as socially constructed highlights the ways in which gendered power relations are distorted or reconfigured in conflict (Cockburn 2005; Enloe 1993). It is of significance to mention that the demand for Bodoland a movement for political autonomy for the Bodo people led by the ABSU and proposed by various Bodo intellectuals, did not deny a role to Bodo women. They did not want the Bodo women to be sidelined in the process, as they could play a special contributory role to the overall welfare of the Bodo Society (Paul, 1989; Bhattarcharjee, 1996). Accordingly, an organisation in the name and style of All Assam Tribal Women's Welfare Federation (AATWWF) was formed at Kokrajhar on 14 July 1986, with the objectives of establishing equity between men and women, addressing problems concerning women, traditional or otherwise, as well as empowerment of weaker sections (Mochahari, 2014).

Mrs. Promila Rani Brahma, Assam forest minister, was the organisation's founding president in 2017. As the group was founded in the years preceding the Bodo revolution, it became actively involved with the movement, collaborating as it did with ABSU to confirm that the movement took place democratically (Narzaree, 2015).

Subsequently, the organisation's name substitutes from AATWWF to All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF) in the Third Annual Conference of the federation in 1993**.** Hence solidarity in terms of gender issues has always been ruptured (Mahanta, 1998). This brings us to look at 'women's political activity' and their new way of 'doing politics' (Waylen, 1992). Through approaches inspired by post-modernism and post-structuralism, political action is perceived, in part, as a battle over prevailing concepts, including dominant ideas, of women with the goal of changing them. What is required instead, is some examination of the bases on which women can come together. This must also contemplate on how women use their traditionally defined roles to perform in the social, political arenas addressing the relationship between gendered identities and political activity, without ignoring their own traditionally apportioned locations as well as the shape these activities takes.

The women's organisation was founded to address a variety of issues ranging from race and sexuality to problems that represent systemic gender, status and power inequality. The emergence of a strong and all-embracing Indian women's movement has been a matter of contention. The movement getting the tag of being Indian, suggests a political, cultural singularity that overshadows the complexity, disparities and contradictions of the movement (Shahin, 2012). Whether these movements can effectively resolve the issues concerning women in this vast country's geographically distant corners like Assam is the problem that becomes over-riding. The question that becomes

significant is to know how these movements can adequately address the issues concerning women in geographically remote corners of this vast country. Whether indigenous movements which emerged while aligning themselves to the larger 'women's question' also at the same time addressed women's concerns which were more local (Shahin, 2012). Exploring the growth of women's activism in a conflict-ridden district of Assam, helps to see how as political activists these women relate to conventional gender roles and also relate to other political actors. By mapping the fractured idea of everyday, a lived-experience enables us to be accessible to the contested versions that represents the multi-dimensionality of what is constructed as domineering reality. Therefore, this segment contends for an intersectional praxis as methods for structure alliances crosswise over marginalities. The discussions have indicated that women's movement cannot be understood by a blind confidence in inclusive sisterhood ideology as it is not only characterised by gender but other ranks and affiliations too. This paper has tried to contribute to this research gap, as well as edify other researcher interested in peace and conflict in Northeast India about the political agency, methods, and agenda of women activists of Assam. It tried to highlight the complex and multifaceted dynamics of gender in the everyday negotiation of power, which is firmly joined with other power elements in overlapping space of women's associations, tribal communities, armed groups and party organisations.

Conclusion:

Keeping the above arguments in mind, this paper examined critically the presence of a cohesive women's movement in Assam. This is of significance because there has been an overall rethinking of the women's question all over in today's neo-liberal world. Such an examination is important also because patriarchy continues to remain profoundly embedded, impelling the structure

of political, social institutions while defining the prospects accessible to women and men. Such an inquiry is also sought to be attempted, as at the historical level, the women have been mobilizing and playing historically important public roles since independence but these mobilisations have not converted into greater political positions or have had any substantial impression on the masses of people. This study underscores the way Assam Accord of 1985 led to the fractured political situation of Assam leading to series of identity movements in Assam. Therefore, this study not only excavated that intersectionality has impacted women's movement in Assam leading to fractured solidarity but also discovered how it has a substantial influence on the way movements emerges and takes forms in Assam.

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Policing in Meghalaya: Some Reflections

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Abstract: The role of the police in society is sacrosanct and hallowed. They are the primary agents responsible for the maintenance of law and order in society. The Constitution of India envisages policing as a State subject, falling under Entry II of List II of the Seventh Schedule, and therefore, the states have been granted autonomy to enact legislations and provisions for governing the functioning of the police in India. On account of this, the provisions governing policing differ from state to state. The state of Meghalaya is one of the seven sister states of Northeast India. Like its other sister states, the state of Meghalaya has also, since its formation in 1972, formulated certain legislative and policy measures to govern policing within the state. The guidelines and directives issued by the Honorable Supreme Court of India, primarily in the landmark Prakash Singh case of 2006, has also been an instrumental force in governing policing in Meghalaya. Over time, a synergy of checks and balances has developed which has enabled the police to function effectively and efficiently.

It is in this backdrop that the present paper seeks to analyse the status of police and policing in the state of Meghalaya. The paper aims to focus on contemporary developments pertaining to policing in Meghalaya by analysing the efficacy of legislative enactments and policy measures adopted by the state government in this regard. It also tries to understand whether various judicial guidelines have been adhered to or not. Finally, it seeks to also analyse certain niche areas such as women policing, border policing

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and the role of autonomous district councils in policing that have unique repercussions for the state of Meghalaya.

Keywords: policing, rural policing, Meghalaya Police Act 2010, effective policing, border policing.

I Introduction

Policing, in a word, describes the maintenance of law and order in society. The policeare the State's law enforcement agents whose role is to maintain public tranquillity and prevent crime in the state. The word '*police*' is associated with the Greek word '*politeuein*' which means "*to be a citizen or to engage in political activity,*" and '*polis*' means '*a city or state'*(Roberg, Novak, & Cordner, 2005). Black's Law Dictionary defines police as the function of that branch of the administrative machinery of government which is charged with the preservation of public order and tranquillity, the promotion of public health, safety, and morals, and the prevention, detection, and punishment of crimes. In India, the police force is divided into two categories: Civil Police (maintaining law and order, preventing and detecting crime, and law enforcement) and Armed Police (performing during natural disasters or riots/civil unrest)(Jain & Gupta, 2017). Article 246 of the Constitution of India has included the subject of police in the state list of the Seventh Schedule, along with S. 3 of the Indian Police Act, 1861. Article 246 also provides that the police force be a state subject. Hence, the states have been entrusted to make laws for the police force to protect the citizens' life, liberty, and property and maintain peace in the state. However, it does not prevent the Parliament from drafting legislations that apply to the police force of states. Furthermore, Article 355 of the Constitution of India provides power to the Union to protect every state against external aggression and internal disturbance and ensure that the state carries out its functions as per the provisions of the Constitution (Singh P. , 2016).

Over time, the police force in India has gone through a voyage of reformations to make them more effective in dealing with the ever-changing society. The prominent case that has brought a great reformation in the sphere of the police department is the *Prakash Singh v. Union of India,* (2006) 8 S.C.C. 1, which broadly deals with the autonomy, accountability, and efficiency of the police organization, and this is supplemented by seven directives issued by the Honorable Court to both the Union government and the various state governments across the country. These directives include setting up of a State Security Commission in every State, a Police Establishment Board in every State, Police Complaints Authorities at the state and district levels, the appointment of the D.G.P. of state police from among three senior-most officers, separating the investigating Police from law-and-order Police, and establishing a National Security Commission(Chaturvedi, 2017)(Singh & Bhardwaj, 2018). However, very few states of India have complied with the directions of the Supreme Court. The Model Police Act, 2006 was also enacted to suggest necessary changes in the then Indian Police Act 1861(Dutta & Baruah, 2008).

II Contemporary Conditions of Policing

The State of Meghalaya is situated in the North-eastern Region of India. It is also one of the seven sisters of this region of India. The etymology of the word "Meghalaya" is derived from two Sanskrit words- "*alaya,"* which means "abode*,"* and "*megha",* which means "(of) the clouds"(Ragahavan, 2021). The capital of Meghalaya is Shillong, which is also called the "Scotland of East*,"* has been named by the British authorities during their rule. It was created on January 21 1972, after its separation from the state of Assam. When Meghalaya attained its statehood in 1972, under the Sixth Schedule and Article 244 of the Constitution of India, three district councils were established, namely:

- The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council.

- The Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council.

- The Garo Hills Autonomous District Council.

Meghalaya Police came into existence after 1972. By virtue of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India, police is a state subject; and pursuant to the same, the state of Meghalaya has enacted the Meghalaya Police Act, 2010, with an aim to "regulate the role, functions and management of police establishments" in the state. The recent amendment of the Act has led to the Meghalaya Police (Amendment) Act, 2018. Despite these commendable strides towards a coherent body of laws for regulating the police force, regrettably, the state of Meghalaya is still following the Assam Police Manual. The three primary criminal law legislations that apply to India, namely, the Indian Penal Code, 1860; Criminal Procedure Code, 1973; and Indian Evidence Act, 1872 also apply to the state of Meghalaya, and play an important role in governing the functions of the police in the state. Finally, two amendments have also been enacted by the state – the Criminal Procedure Code (Meghalaya Amendment) Act, 1988, and the Criminal Laws (Meghalaya Amendment) Act, 2013.

The Mission Statement of the Meghalaya Police includes their major goals to ensure effective policing in Meghalaya, such as

- To prevent crime;

- To maintain public order;

- To uphold justice;

- To ensure the Rule of Law;

- To have honesty, integrity, and fairness in their dealings;

- To ensure the safety and security of all citizens (Police, 2021).

There are 74 sanctioned police stations in Meghalaya, including 11 women police stations in each district (BPR&D, 2020). The sanctioned strength of the police till August 2020 is 16494; actual is 14,555 and Vacancy is 1,940, and the total strength of women police is 686.According to the Bureau of Police Research and Development Report (BPR&D Report), 2019, as against the United Nations recommended norm of a minimum police strength of 222 per 1,00,000 people(BPR&D, 2014), the total Police Per Lakh of Population (Sanctioned) (Civil + D.A.R. + Armed) as of 01-01-2019 in Meghalaya is 561.57. In comparison, according to BPR&D Report, 2019, among the North-eastern states, the total Police Per Lakh of Population (Sanctioned) of Meghalaya state (561.57) is the second lowest next to Assam (236.39). Conversely, the highest total Police Per Lakh of Population (Sanctioned) is in Tripura (757.48), Sikkim (962.20), Mizoram (1,016.22), Arunachal Pradesh (1,078.80), Nagaland (1,278.56) and Manipur (1,314.84)(BPR&D, 2020).

One of the significant factors required for the development of police personnel is training because it imparts skills and knowledge and develops their attitude and values. In Meghalaya, there are training academies like the North Eastern Police Academy (NEPA) at Umsaw Khwan in Ri-Bhoi district and the Meghalaya Police Academy located at Umran, Niangbyrnai, Ri-Bhoi district to make the police personnel more effective for the administration of justice.

Supreme Court Directives for Policing and their Implementation in Meghalaya

According to the data compiled by the Commonwealth Human Rights

Initiative (herein after CHRI), the state of Meghalaya is partially compliant of the seven directives on police reform that have been issued by the Honorable Supreme Court of India.(CHRI, 2020)

State Security Commission (S.S.C): A State Security Commission has been established in the state of Meghalaya. It is functioning relatively well. However, there are certain lacunae in its formation and functioning. Firstly, although it includes independent members as part of the S.S.C, it nevertheless does not provide an independent selection panel for their appointments. This leads to a scenario wherein the selection process of the S.S.C. members wherein a conflict of interest may be pertinently raised. It is an example of excessive control by the political executive and is undemocratic in its nature and character. This is one ground where the state has not adhered to the directive of the Honourable Apex Court and the same has also been reflected by the CHRI in 2020. This means that the binding recommendations made by the Honourable Apex Court in this regard have been implemented only in broad terms and there is no significant judicial element in the actions of the state government.

*Tenure and selection of the Director-General of Police (D.G.P.):*In Meghalaya, it omits short-listing by the Union Public Service Commission (hereinafter UPSC) and empowers the state government with the sole discretion to select the candidates for the post of the D.G.P. In Meghalaya, S.S.C. is responsible for shortlisting the candidates for the post of D.G.P. Meghalaya provides a tenure of 1 year. In addition, there are problematic provisions such as premature removals, which can be affected on two grounds, namely – firstly, "on other administrative grounds to be recorded in writing"; and secondly, "in the public interest". These two grounds are very vague in their scope and are liable to be misused. In this regard, it has been remarked by CHRI that Meghalaya has also not complied with this directive.

Minimum Tenure of key field-level officers: Meghalaya complies with the requirement to provide a 2-year minimum tenure. However, notwithstanding this, it lays down vague and objective grounds for premature removal which can become a problem due to misinterpretation.

Separation of Investigation and Law and Order: Meghalaya has taken measures to separate the investigation and law and order duties of the officers concerned.

Police Establishment Board (P.E.B.): Meghalaya does not comply fully with the directive in the composition, functions, and powers of the P.E.B.

Police Complaints Authorities (P.C.A.): The State of Meghalaya only has P.C.A. at the state level, and the recommendations of the P.C.A. are binding.

However, initiatives have also been taken by the government to fully comply with the seven directives of the Honorable Supreme Court, and this is largely due to the efforts made by the judiciary itself to follow up on the implementation of their directives.

III Special Cells of Meghalaya Police

The evaluation of policing in Meghalaya can be determined through the effective performance of the various cells of the state police. Various special cells of the Meghalaya police have been mentioned below:

Criminal Investigation Department, Meghalaya: The government of Meghalaya has vide an official notification of 1994 authorized the headquarters of the Criminal Investigation Department (hereinafter C.I.D) to be deemed as a Police Station within the scope of Section 2(5) of the C.r.P.C, 1973.

The different units of the Criminal Investigation Department are-

- *Crime Investigation Units:* These units act as Police Stations and empower control over the State. They record the cases that are committed within the territorial jurisdiction. The Superintendent of Police of the District issues the details of such a case to the Deputy Inspector General of Police, C.I.D (Meghalaya Police Website, 2021).

- *Criminal Intelligence Gazette (C.I.G.) Section:* This section issues monthly C.I.G. and publishes the Gazette. This section also scrutinizes the Gazettes obtained from other States and issued in the Gazette relevant to the State (Meghalaya Police Website, 2021).

- *Narcotic Cell:* This cell regulates matter like illicit traffic in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and returns about them, and collection and compilation of statistics regarding narcotics and correspondence with other concerned agencies of the Central and State Government on the subject and also the investigation of such cases taken up by C.I.D come under the watch of the Narcotic Cell.(Meghalaya Police Website, 2021).

- *District Crime Records Bureau:* This bureau has different teams like crime team, police computer cell, crime branch, and fingerprint section (Meghalaya Police Website, 2021).

- *State Crime Records Bureau:* This bureau has different teams like a computer centre, training wing, fingerprint bureau, and searchers (Meghalaya Police Website, 2021).

- *Photographic Cell:* This cell provides aid to the Police by clicking photographs of documents under question, criminal

investigation work, and fingerprint detection (Meghalaya Police Website, 2021).

- *Dog Squad:* The dog squad locates an individual or an object that is hidden or to detect crimes like murder, robbery, dacoity, etc. The dogs are used for guarding, patrolling, tracking, scent identification, search of missing persons, etc.(Meghalaya Police Website, 2021).

- *Juvenile Guidance Bureau*: This bureau directs the native police for Juvenile crime investigation and to prevent crime against children (Meghalaya Police Website, 2021).

- *Law and Research Section*: The Law Section examines the legal and procedural matters emerging out of police administration and examination within the State; drafts any legislation required by the Government; supervises the circulars, notifications, etc., furnished by the Police Dept, etc. The research sections examine the problems concerning criminal wrongs and measures to control crime; issues concerning police association; improvement and speed in the examination, etc. (Meghalaya Police Webiste, 2021).

- *Anti-corruption Branch:* The officers of this branch carry out their functions under the Criminal Investigation Department. They enforce the provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

- *Vigilance Department:* This branch is also related to the Criminal Investigation Department. The Office of the Director-General of Police and Inspector General of Police, Meghalaya, Shillong, passed circular no. 2/ 1989 to intensify vigilance measures to

combat corruption in the police department. There shall be a Chief Police Vigilance Office (CPVO). The Headquarters of the CPVO shall be at Shillong.

Cyber Crime Wing, Meghalaya: The cyber cell of the Meghalaya Police is -

- *Cyber Crime Police Station:* It has jurisdiction over cybercrime cases, cyber terrorism, cyber fraud, etc.

- *Cyber Forensic Training Lab:* It is to provide training and conduct testing around Shillong City and other districts such as Nongpoh, Nongstoin, Tura, and Jowai.

- *Cyber Assistance Cell*: It assists with cyber complaints.

- *Monitoring Cell:* It monitors the cyber cases registered and the status of investigations.

Meghalaya Forensic Units: The Meghalaya Forensic Science Laboratory was set up in Shillong in the year 1987(Meghalaya Police Website, 2021). It is in the developing stage. Presently, the laboratory is functioning with four Technical Divisions, namely, the physical, chemical, biology, and document.

Meghalaya Police Radio Organisation: The Meghalaya Police Radio Organisation is controlled by operators, G.D. (General Duty) constable, and other staff. They communicate major information to the Meghalaya Police.

Meghalaya Fire and Emergency Service Units: The Meghalaya Fire Service started in 1972. Initially, it had only two Fire Stations, one at Shillong and the other at Tura. It had a few fire appliances and only a handful of personnel.

Tourism Cops: The Tourist Police Officials have been authorized for safety and security, crime reporting, assisting tourists with information etc.

<u>Traffic Police, Shillong:</u> The Traffic Police Officials control the movement of people and vehicles on the road, minimize traffic jams, prevent violations of traffic rules, etc.

<u>Anti-Infiltration Branch, Meghalaya:</u> The P.I.F. (Prevention of Infiltration of Foreigners) was introduced in Meghalaya in 1962 (Meghalaya Police Website, 2021). There are only 279 sanctioned police officers under this scheme. This branch prevents and scrutinizes the illegal entry of foreigners. They identify, prosecute, and deport illegal foreigners after conclusive proof is established against them.

IV Emerging Areas of Effective Policing

There are some new emerging areas for effective policing such as community policing, women policing, rural policing, and border policing**.**

Community Policing

Community policing, often called Neighbourhood policing, is an important step towards democratizing policing (Aston & Paranjape, 2012). The police reach out to the community and make relations with the people that change the community's perception towards the former. If the police want to perform effectively and efficiently in society, they need the community's support. To solve the community's problems, the police and the community must collaborate. Active public participation should be encouraged by the police through various community policing programmes. One significant aspect to promote community policing in Meghalaya is better coordination between the Village Councils (Village Councils are generally known as *Dorbars* in Meghalaya) and the police. Though the effort to bring the people and the police together started in the late 1990s, much more needs to be done in this field.

In Meghalaya, the Police Stations of each district organize various awareness programmes to initiate community policing and maintain a great connection between the cops and the public. The police officers in the department visit colleges or schools and/or localities to create awareness among the people by discussing social issues like drug abuse, wrongdoings against women and children etc. The police have organized programmes to create awareness of the negative impact of drugs among the young generation as drug abuse cases are rising in Meghalaya. The East Khasi Hills District Police observed the "International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking" on June 26, 2005 (Meghalaya Police Website, 2015). The Meghalaya Police also invited schools and colleges to visit their Police Stations to better understand their functioning in society. The Sadar Police Station had organized a programme called 'Visit my Police Station' on May 12, 2005 to provide a better sense of understanding of their work. Police Stations also try to organize Citizen Committees at the lower level to effectively coordinate between the police and the public (Meghalaya Police Website, 2015). Safe & Secure Shillong Program with the local community is an informal program organized by the East Khasi Hills Meghalaya Police (Shillong Police, 2021). They interact with the people about a particular issue and try to make them understand how the perpetrators use witchcraft to fulfil their vested interests. West Jaintia Hills Police have taken similar initiatives to make the people believe and realize that community participation with police can help tackle their problems and fight against wrongdoings. The district has 216 registered Village Defence Parties (V.D.P.s) and more than 3000 volunteers (Meghalaya Police Website, 2021). The V.D.P. assists the police in arresting criminals.

Women Policing

According to Hunt (1990), "the introduction of females to operational duties caused concern amongst the rank and file because women were associated

with moral virtue, cleanliness, honesty, nonviolence, and irrationality"(Alley, Waugh, & Ede, 1996). The 'National Centre for Women and Policing' cites a report that defined six vital advantages of employing women in law enforcement agencies. These are:

- They are proven to be as competent as their male counterparts.

- They are less likely to use excessive force.

- They help to implement community-oriented policing better.

- They can improve law enforcement's response to violence against women.

- Their number must be increased in the police force as it will reduce sex discrimination and harassment within the force.

- They can bring about beneficial changes in policy for all officers. (NCJRS, 2021) (Cook, 2014)

The Constitution of India, under Articles 14, 15, and 16, has enshrined the principles of non-discrimination and gender equality, and they are guaranteed in all spheres of civil, political, social, and economic life (Natarajan, 2008). The new Model Police Act, 2006, has taken steps to address the question of increasing women workforce in policing. According to this Act of 2006, each police station must have women police personnel in the Women and Child Protection Desk to record complaints of crimes against women and children and to deal with the tasks relating to the administration of special legislation relating to women and children. The Ministry of Home Affairs advises adopting a reservation policy for women in police forces.

In Meghalaya, the recent amendment of the Act is the Meghalaya Police (Amendment) Act, 2018, which has introduced a 10% reservation for

women at the Constable and Sub – Inspectors ranks (Dutta A. , 2020).

All 11 districts of Meghalaya Police Stations have Women Police Stations and the names are Amapati Women PS, Baghmara Women PS, Khliehriat Women PS, Jowai Women PS, Mawkyrwat Women PS, Mendipathar Women PS, Nongpoh Women PS, Nongstoin Women P.S., Shillong Women P.S., Tura Women P.S., and Williamnagar Women P.S.

As per the BPR&D Report, 2019, the actual strength of total police (Civil + District Armed Reserve +Armed) is 15,014 and the actual strength of women police (Civil + District Armed Reserve +Armed) is 741. The percentage of women police (Civil + District Armed Reserve +Armed) is 4.94%. Comparing the percentage of women police in the North-eastern states of India, Meghalaya and Nagaland have (4.94%), the lowest percentage and the highest percentage is in Sikkim (10.82%), followed by Manipur (7.52%), Mizoram (6.88%), Assam (6.22%), and Tripura (5.10%)(BPR&D, 2020). This data indicates the lower enrolment of women in policing in North-eastern Indian states. And even in this region of India, the position of Meghalaya is at the bottom along with Nagaland. And hence, some special drives can be initiated to attract women to join the force.

Border Policing

The state of Meghalaya shares an international border of 443 kilometre with Bangladesh (Goyal, 2019), out of which fencing has been erected over a length of 319.747 km, with the rest either being unfenced or being buffered by natural forces. The state police are committed to effectively contain the illegal influx of Bangladeshi nationals' trans-border movement.

Table 1: Detection of illegal Bangladeshi nationals within Meghalaya from 2016- (Aug) 2020.

Year	No. of detention	Prosecution	Deported	Sent back Directly
2016	115	115	102	524
2017	34	34	34	1315
2018	21	21	11	4382
2019	7672	18	25	7652
2020 (till August)	1687	18	5	1669

Source: Meghalaya Police Document

Chart 1: Detection of illegal Bangladeshi nationals within Meghalaya from 2016- (Aug) 2020
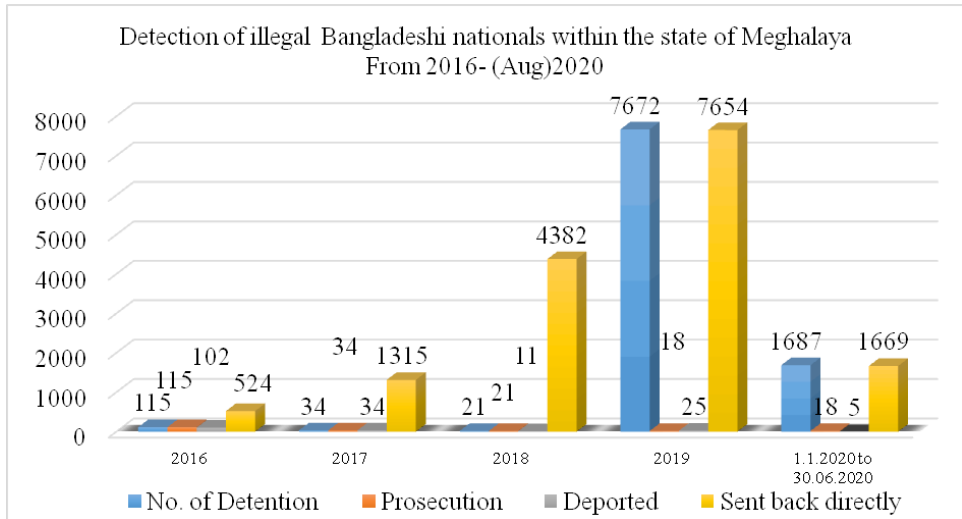
Here, in this chart, we observe that the influx of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh has increased between 2016 and 2020. Most illegal immigrants from Bangladesh detected by the police have either been prosecuted, deported, or sent back directly to their own places. The number of illegal immigrants detained and sent back was the highest in the year 2019. Therefore, it is important that the police strictly focus on border policing to prevent the illegal influx of Bangladeshi immigrants.

Rural Policing

Rural policing is one of the most significant components of policing in the state of Meghalaya considering that a major portion of the state's territory is rural. The Meghalaya Police Act has included many provisions for policing in rural areas and village police systems, such as the Ch. VII of the Meghalaya Police Act, 2010. S. 59 is concerned with Police Stations in rural areas. These police stations must be self-sufficiently organized in matters of accommodation and have furnished amenities under S. 11 (5) of Chapter II of the Act. Besides, communication facilities, transport, and police housing provisions must also be included. The facilities of forensic science and scientific aids must be sufficiently present in each such police station of the State for investigating any cases that fall within the ambit of S. 59 of the Act. Furthermore, S. 60 (1) of the Act provides that the Officer-in-Charge of Police Stations shall visit every village under his/her jurisdiction, as ordered by the Superintendent of Police.

Village Guard: S. 61 (5) of the Act provides about Enlistment of Village Guard and Selection Criteria. There shall be at least one Village Guard in each village of a district. The D.S.P. select the Village Guard from among the competent candidates between the age of 21 and 50 years as mentioned under S. 61 (1) of the Act. The village guard has a "tenure of three years" that may be renewed upon satisfactory and efficient work. S. 62 of the Act provides the Duties and Responsibilities of the Village Guard such as: to report any crime or law and order in the village, at the earliest, to the Police and assist the Police in bringing the offenders to book; to maintain vigil in the village to prevent crime and maintain law and order and inform such problems to the Police; to remain alert and sensitive to any information about any suspicious activity and report it to the Police; to assist any citizen in arresting or handing over to the Police Station any person or persons under S. 43 of the Cr.P.C., 1973 without delay. In case the arrested person

is a woman, a male Village Guard shall be accompanied by a woman; to secure and preserve the scene of any crime till the arrival of the Police; to report on such activities and incidents on crime, law, and order or other policing concerns in the village to Officer-in-Charge of the Police Station; to maintain the prescribed records and registers, and to record any public grievances or complaints concerning policing as mentioned under S. 62 of the Act.

Village Defence Parties (V.D.P.): There is also a V.D.P. in each village. V.D.P. is a group of respected local people, comprising more than 15 members (as per population and size of the village), selected by the concerned S.P. for each village to carry out certain duties and functions in collaboration with the Village Guard like patrolling, measures to control crimes and provide assistance to the Police prescribed under S. 63 (1) of the Act. The members of the parties elected by the S.P. consult with the Community Liaison Group. These members are competent people with good character and antecedents and permanent domicile persons of the village. The V.D.P. shall be reconstituted every three years prescribed under S. 63 (3) of the Act. There is no renewal granted after a person has reached the age above fifty years or who is incompetent in S. 63 (2) of the Act. The members can be removed from V.D.P. at any time under conditions prescribed under S. 63 (2) of the Act. The V.D.P.'s membership shall be voluntary and honorary. The members of the V.D.P. wear Identification Badges issued by the D.S.P.

Community Liaison Group: S. 64 of the Act provides '*Community Liaison Group*'. The D.S.P. created this Group for each Police Station. The local people of the region with good character are included in the Group. This Group shall have a competent and fair gender representation in the Police Station area. It is also provided that the members of this group shall not be convicted by a court of law or any charges have been framed by a court of law in a criminal case, etc. It is also provided that a person in connection

with any political party is not eligible to be a member of this Group. This Group shall decide ways of policing in that area considered by the O.I.C. of the Police Station in preparation of the annual policing strategy and action plan and submit it to the D.S.P. This Group shall carry out all the prescribed functions. The members meet at least once in each quarter of a year and shall be attended by the Sub-Divisional Police Officer as well as the officer in charge of the Police Station and the Circle Inspector. Occasionally, S.P. will also attend the meetings of this Group at different Police Stations. The meetings are open to the public.

Operation Hillstorm-3: The Meghalaya Police has launched a programme titled '*Operation Hillstorm*' to reach out to the unemployed youth of the State (Sentinel Digital Desk, 2016). The Meghalaya Police initiated the "rural unemployed youth reach-out programme". This programme was initiated to identify the rural youth from remote villages for employment in the Police. The Police have already started imparting training to both male and female aspirants.

V Checks and Balances in Policing

The Constitution of India provides that among three organs, i.e., the executive, the legislative, and the judiciary, the judiciary is regarded as Independent and has been given the power of judicial review. The Supreme Court and the High Courts have been giving importance to the inalienable and invaluable nature of liberty and maintaining peace and law and order. Articles 32 and 226 of the Indian Constitution empower the Supreme Court and the High Courts to enforce the rights mentioned in Article 21 of the Indian Constitution(Sivakumar & Kameswari, 2020).The SC contended Article 21 of the Indian Constitution is a potent tool to tackle the excesses and inadequacies in the criminal justice system, including illegal arrest and delayed and improper investigations, custodial violence, bail, speedy trials,

lack of proper legal representation, and aid and irregularities in certain other aspects of a fair trial. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution provides that the right to a speedy trial is a fundamental right as proclaimed by Supreme Court decided by the *Hussainara Khatoon & Ors vs Home Secretary, State Of Bihar*, 1979 AIR 1369, 1979 S.C.R. (3) 532.Therefore, there are three principal functionaries in the administration of the Criminal Justice System, namely, the Police, the Judiciary, and correctional services(Deb, 1992). There should be cooperation and coordination between the judiciary and Police to achieve social defence.

Article 50 of the Constitution of India provides for the separation of the executive from the judiciary. Meghalaya is one of the four North-Eastern states, along with the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram, where the separation between executive and judiciary has been recently implemented.

In the year 2003, the Honorable High Court of Gauhati and the Supreme Court of India had furnished the Meghalaya government to separate the judiciary from the executive following a petition filed by city lawyer S. Chakravarty(Telegraph India, 2011). The members of the permanent executive such as Deputy Commissioner, and his junior officials, acted as judicial officers in Meghalaya. The Magistrates appointed in such manner were heavily overburdened since they had to fulfil their roles as both executive and judiciary, thereby leading to a scenario where the quality of justice was severely hampered.(Telegraph India, 2011). The Chief Justice Biswanath Somadder of the Honorable high Court of Meghalaya, in a programme held at the Deputy Commissioner's Office Complex in Resubelpara, expressed his views regarding the separation of judiciary from the Executive which would open a door to justice and benefit the general public (The Shillong Times, 2020). He informed that the District Legal Services Authority would reach out to monitor whether the people were getting access to justice.

The state of Meghalaya also has autonomous councils, which perform legislative and financial actions, for the upliftment and development of the state's three primary tribes – the Khasis, Garos and Jaintias. In the case *of Meghalaya v. Melvin Sohlangpiaw* SLP (Crl.) No. 1218 of 2018, the case has been transferred from the Court of the Sessions to the District Council, Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council. In this case, the respondent, a member of the Khasi Scheduled Tribe, was tried for the offences under s. 302 and 201 of the Indian Penal Code (I.P.C.). A dead body was found at a riverbank on March 26, 2017 and an F.I.R. was registered in Nongstoin. On investigation, it was found that the deceased person was also a member of the Khasi Scheduled Tribe. The accused was arrested as the last call of the deceased person was to him, and he planned to bury the dead body. The case went for trial under the Court of the Sessions Judge, Nongstoin, on November 8, 2017. However, the accused filed a petition to transfer the case to the Court of Judge, Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, Shillong, as both the parties are tribals. The High Court, Meghalaya, allowed this Petition. The offence took place in West Khasi Hills District, an autonomous district that is included in the Para 20 Schedule VI to the Constitution of India, which deals with the administration of tribal areas in the State of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura, and Para 4 and 5 of Schedule VI of the Constitution of India deals with the judicial dispensation.

In *Ex. Constable PADH S.D. No. v. The Union of India*, WP(C) 000218/2016, a writ petition was filed before the Court for protection and justice. In this case, the Petitioner is a resident of Nongkriah Village, Hima Malaisohmat, East Khasi Hills District, who was a teacher by profession. However, one day, the headman of the village, Mr. Blu Borman (respondent No. 7), issued a demand notice for Rs. 50,000 only and told him that if he failed to pay, he would remove the Petitioner from the village. After that, the Petitioner filed a F.I.R. with the Officer-in-Charge, Dangar Police Outpost, East Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya, but no action was taken. The

learned counsel, on behalf of the Petitioner, contended that this is not only a matter of contempt of Court against the Court judgment that directed all the headmen to refrain from all the illegal activities. The Court directed the Police to register the case after making an immediate preliminary enquiry and take action following law and give full protection to the Petitioner and further ordered that Mr. Blu Borman (respondent No. 7) be present in Court on 31-07-2017. Superintendent of Police, East Khasi Hills District, and Officer-in-Charge, Dangar Police Outpost, East Khasi Hills District, are also directed to be present in court along with the report.

In *Shri. Jengbha R. Marak v. State of Meghalaya* W.P. (C) No. 233/2014, the writ petition has been filed by the Petitioner; it is also alleged that the Officer In-charge, Shallang Police Station, West Khasi Hills District refused to register an F.I.R. lodged by the Petitioner. In this case, the Petitioner along with some friends went to the house of one Shri. Bidan M. Sangma, to watch the FIFA World Cup opening ceremony on Television/T.V. Then, they found that there was no signal on the T.V., and they called the Dish T.V. mechanics. While the Dish T.V. mechanics were trying to get the T.V. repaired, suddenly some police personnel in uniform belonging to Shallang Police Station, led by one constable, came to the house of Shri. Bidan M. Sangma and Sangma was indiscriminately beaten for no reason. Therefore, the Petitioner lodged an *ejahar* before the Officer-in-charge, Shallang Police Station, West Khasi Hills District, for taking action against the Shallang Police Station personnel. The learned counsel of the Petitioner also contended that the Petitioner is not getting a copy of the said F.I.R. The Court directed to furnish a copy of the said F.I.R./Case to the Petitioner within 2 (two) weeks from the date of receipt of this order and also directed that once the F.I.R. had been registered, it is the bounded duty of the investigating officer to complete the investigation as soon as possible. The Court has given four months to complete the investigation of the said F.I.R. from the date of receipt of a certified copy of this order.

In *Ramesh Bawri v. State of Meghalaya and Others*, W.P. (Crl.) No. 2 of 2020, the Court observed that "police being the enforcer of law and order and arbiter of public peace and in situations of this kind as is evident from the submission of the parties, due process of law and procedure has to be complied with to come to a logical conclusion to afford the parties concerned to proceed to the next step." The Petition was disposed of. In this case, the Petitioner has lodged an F.I.R. dated December 19 2020 with the Officer-In-Charge Umiam PS (Respondent No. 2) primarily on the allegation that some workers of the Proforma Respondent No. 4 Shri Wally Marbaniang had illegally trespassed into his plot of land known as "Lumbawri" situated at U.C.C. Road Umbir village. The police authorities, after investigation, have taken the view that they are not in a position to take any action and that no protection can be afforded to the Petitioner, inter alia, on the ground that there exists a civil dispute between the parties and that the Title Suit No. 7(T) 2017 preferred by the Petitioner before the Court of the learned Assistant to Deputy Commissioner, Nongpoh has since been dismissed for default vide order 17.10.2017. Thus, being aggrieved by the alleged inaction of the Police, the Petitioner has approached this Court with this instant Writ Petition. However, the learned counsel on behalf of the Petitioner stated that the Court may be pleased to direct the Police to function within the statutory provisions of law and procedure and that protection may be given to the Petitioner as far as his property is concerned as per s. 149 Cr. P.C., it is the duty of the Police to prevent the commission of any cognizable offence. This was opposed by the learned counsel for the respondent, that the petitioner has efficacious, alternative remedy as provided under the Cr. P.C. particularly s.154 (3) and 156(3) amongst others, and as such, this Petition is devoid of merit and is liable to be dismissed.

In *Coal Truck Driver and Handymen Welfare Union (Operating in Garo Hills) v. State of Meghalaya and Others*, W.P. (C). No. 351 of 2020, the Petition filed by the Petitioner has been disposed of by the Court. In

this case, the Petitioner was a registered associate under the Meghalaya Societies Registration Act, 1983, and the objectives of the association was to ensure the protection of the common interest and welfare of its members engaged in the maintenance of transport trucks in the transportation of coal. They also have a registered office at village Wageasi of District North Garo Hills, Meghalaya. According to the Petitioner, the respondents, the police personnel, were interfering with the functions of the petitioner association. The Court has disposed of the Petition and ordered the Petitioner not to collect membership fees from non-membered truck drivers, and police personnel can interfere only in the event of unlawful activities of the petitioner association.

In *Nelson Kharnabi v/s State Of Meghalaya,* W.P. (C) No. 269 (S.H.) of 2008, the petitioners challenged the decision of the State not to appoint them to the Meghalaya Police Service (M.P.S.) posts. However, they were included in the select list drawn by the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) in 2003. In this case, MPSC (respondent No. 4) furnished an advertisement on April 15 2001 regarding the recruitment of fourteen posts of M.P.S. through direct recruitment. The petitioners appeared in the written tests and were found eligible for the posts of Deputy Superintendent of Police and their name was published on the merit list. However, again a new select list was uploaded by respondent No. 4, in which the petitioners did not find their names in the list. The validity of the select list was for one year which expired on December 22 2003. The Petitioner filed writ petitioners before this Court till the validity period of the select list. On December 10 2004, the Court passed an interim order observing that the pendency of the writ petition would not be a bar against the State (respondents) because of the case of the petitioners for the appointment. The petitioners accordingly approached the State-respondents to consider their case for the appointment as two vacant posts. According to the petitioners, it was the duty of the respondent authorities to make the appointment of the candidates out of the

select list prepared by the respondent No. 4 of the highest marks, but they have been deprived of their appointment to the Junior Duty Posts under the M.P.S. due to sheer discrimination and malafides. However, according to the respondents, the appointment of twenty-five candidates is based on the reservation policy laid down by the Government. It is asserted by the respondents that the advertisement mentioned that reservation of posts would be as per the Government policy and the Select List prepared by the MPSC was for one year. The MPSC has issued a fresh advertisement for recruitment to the posts of M.C.S. and M.P.S. The Court found that there is no merit in this writ petition. Firstly, the writ petitions filed by the petitioners, the Select List, expired on December 22 2003. Moreover, for the vacancies beyond the 25 posts already filled up, a fresh advertisement has already been issued by the MPSC.

VI Areas for Improvement

There are many lacunas in the Police force concerning manpower, infrastructure, housing, working hours, Police Manpower, training, modernization, etc.

Manpower: According to BPRD *Data on Police Organization* as (of January 1 2019), the Police per lakh Population Ratio (PPR) in India against sanctioned total Police (Civil + D.A.R. + Armed) during the year 2018 is 198.65, which is insufficient against the recommendation of the U.N. norms on Police. Although the Police per lakh Population Ratio (PPR) of the state of Meghalaya is more than the minimum number recommended by the U.N, nevertheless, there still remain a lot of vacancies that need to be filled up.

Infrastructure: Police Manpower alone is not sufficient to curb the crime, maintain law and order, and other essential requirements unless they are supplemented with facilities and necessities like forensic science labs, servers, computers, Laptops, CCTV cameras, speedometers, Breath

analyzers, Vehicles, Telephones & Wireless/Mobiles, etc. They should also be motivated and facilitated with necessities such as equipment, transport, housing, medical insurance, etc.(NCRB, 2017).

But as per the BPR&D Report 2019, there are shortfalls in the transport, communications, forensics in Meghalaya, which are analyzed below:

Table 2: Forensic Science Laboratories/ Mobile forensic sciences vans of Meghalaya in BPR&D Report (BPR&D, 2020):

Year	Main Laboratories		Regional Laboratories		Mobile Laboratories	
2019	On December 31 2017	Added In the year 2018	On December 31 2017	Added In the year 2018	On December 31 2017	Added In the year 2018
	1	0	0	0	7	0

Source: BPR&D Report.

As per the BPR&D report, out of 81 main laboratories, 72 regional laboratories, and 506 mobile laboratories in India, there is only one main Forensic Science Laboratory, 0 regional laboratories, and 7 Mobile forensic science laboratories in Meghalaya. In North-East India, only Assam and Sikkim have one regional laboratory.

Table 3: The number of servers, computers, Laptops available in Meghalaya in BPR&D Report(BPR&D, 2020):

Year	Servers		Personal Computers		Laptops	
2019	On December 31 2017	Added In the year 2018	On December 31 2017	Added In the year 2018	On December 31 2017	Added In the year 2018
	13	1	205	60	31	3

Source: BPR&D Report.

As per the BPR&D report, there are only 14 servers, 265 personal computers, and 34 laptops in comparison to the total number of 1, 548 servers, 130, 662 personal computers, and 11, 591 laptops in India.

Table 4: Number of CCTV cameras, speedometers, Breath analyzers available in Meghalaya in BPR&D Report (BPR&D, 2020):

Year	Camera used	CCTV cameras	Speedometers	Breath analyzers
2019	-	158	6	75

Source: BPR&D Report.

As per the BPR&D report, out of 4,27,529 CCTV Cameras, 1776 Speedometers, and 17,607 breath analyzers in India, only 158 CCTV cameras, 6 Speedometers, and 75 breath-analyzers have been installed in Meghalaya, which is the lowest.

Table 5: Number of Police Stations Having /Not Having Vehicles, Telephones & Wireless/Mobiles in Meghalaya as per the BPR&D report (BPR&D, 2020).

Year	Number of Police Stations Having / Not Having Vehicles, Telephones & Wireless/ Mobiles	Police Stations having					
		Vehicles	No Vehicles	Telephone	No telephone	Wireless/ Mobiles	No Wireless/ Mobiles
2019	73	60	13	16	57	58	15

Source: BPR&D Report.

We can analyze from the table that some police stations in Meghalaya don't have vehicles and wireless/ mobiles to use, and most of them don't have telephones. In India, there are 14,784 vehicles allotted to the Police Stations, and only 60 vehicles are there in the Police Stations of Meghalaya. There are 14,424 telephones allotted to the Police Stations in India and only 16 telephones are there in the Police Stations of Meghalaya. Also, there are

14,754 Wireless/Mobiles allotted to the Police Stations in Meghalaya, and only 58 Wireless/Mobiles are there in the Police Stations in Meghalaya.

Therefore, an attempt has to be made by the Meghalaya Government to provide the necessary facilities to the Police officials, etc.

Modernization: The NITI Aayog included the umbrella scheme of Modernization of Police Forces (M.P.F.) as a 'core' scheme in 2016. This scheme was approved by the Government on September 27 2017, for implementation during 2017-18 to 2019-20. Under this 'core' scheme, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and 8 North-East States viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim & Tripura are eligible to receive 90% of Central assistance, and the States need to provide 10% of the funds. According to the M.H.A. Report, 2019, a 3.66 crore fund was released under the scheme for Modernization of State Police Forces (the new name 'Assistance to States for Modernisation of Police') on March 31 2019, for the State Meghalaya.

Crime in Meghalaya: According to the National Crime Records Bureau Report of 2019 (hereinafter NCRB Report), 3125 numbers of I.P.C. (Indian Penal Code) cases and 772 numbers of S.L.L. (Special &Local Laws) cases have been registered in Meghalaya in the year 2019. The Police have disposed of 6407 cases during the year 2019 and 5368 cases are still pending. The court has disposed of 3704 IPC cases and 13341 IPC cases are pending at the end of the year 2019. The court has disposed of 444 SLL cases and 2128 SLL cases are pending at the end of the year 2019. The data shows that many cases are pending before the Police and the court and hence, there is a need for speedy disposal of such cases and to render justice properly.

Crime against Women and Children: One of the important features of Meghalaya State is that the State follows a matrilineal social system. However, the NCRB Report data shows that 558 numbers of I.P.C. and

S.L.L. crime cases have been registered against Women in the year 2019, which shows that the criminal offences like rape, kidnapping & abduction, assault, cruelty under S. 498A, dowry deaths, human trafficking, etc. are happening against women of this State. According to the NCRB Report total of 813 cases have been disposed of by the Police, and 885 have been pending investigation during the year 2019.

According to NCRB Report, 379 numbers of I.P.C. and S.L.L. cases against children have been registered in the year 2019. These cases include offences like infanticide, foeticide, etc. According to the NCRB, Report, a total of 487 cases have been disposed of by the Police, and 572 have been pending investigation during the year 2019.

Therefore, we can analyze from the data of NCRB that the Police must dispose of the pending cases and the special cells working under Police for the women and children must look into such cases very seriously.

VII. Conclusion

The Meghalaya Police are adopting the best practices to implement Smart policing in Meghalaya which is a need in the present time. The NITI Aayog has also suggested in their article the way to implement smart policing in society. The Meghalaya Police force also need to attend various training programs in other States to make policing better in Meghalaya.

The Meghalaya police must bring internal administrative reform in policing such as behavioural approach towards the public especially women and children, transparency in the recruitment process, etc. They should be highly disciplined and responsible in their work. Sometimes their inappropriate behaviour makes the victim insecure in making any complaints. The Meghalaya Police should have its own Police Manual rather than follow the Police Manuals of other States.

In this digital world, the State must initiate advanced training for the police force to handle the new challenges as the *modus operandi* of crime is changing. There is a need to change the perception of the public towards police officers. The Meghalaya Police must initiate more programs of community policing to link the relationship between the Police and the public. This will help to end crime in the society because police force needs the support and cooperation of the people. The trust and confidence of the people are also necessary for better policing. The police force must earn the confidence of the public to eradicate trust deficit between the public and the Police for the betterment of society. The influx of illegal Bangladeshi nationals is also seen to be increasing. The Police must take the initiative to detain and send them back to their native place.

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