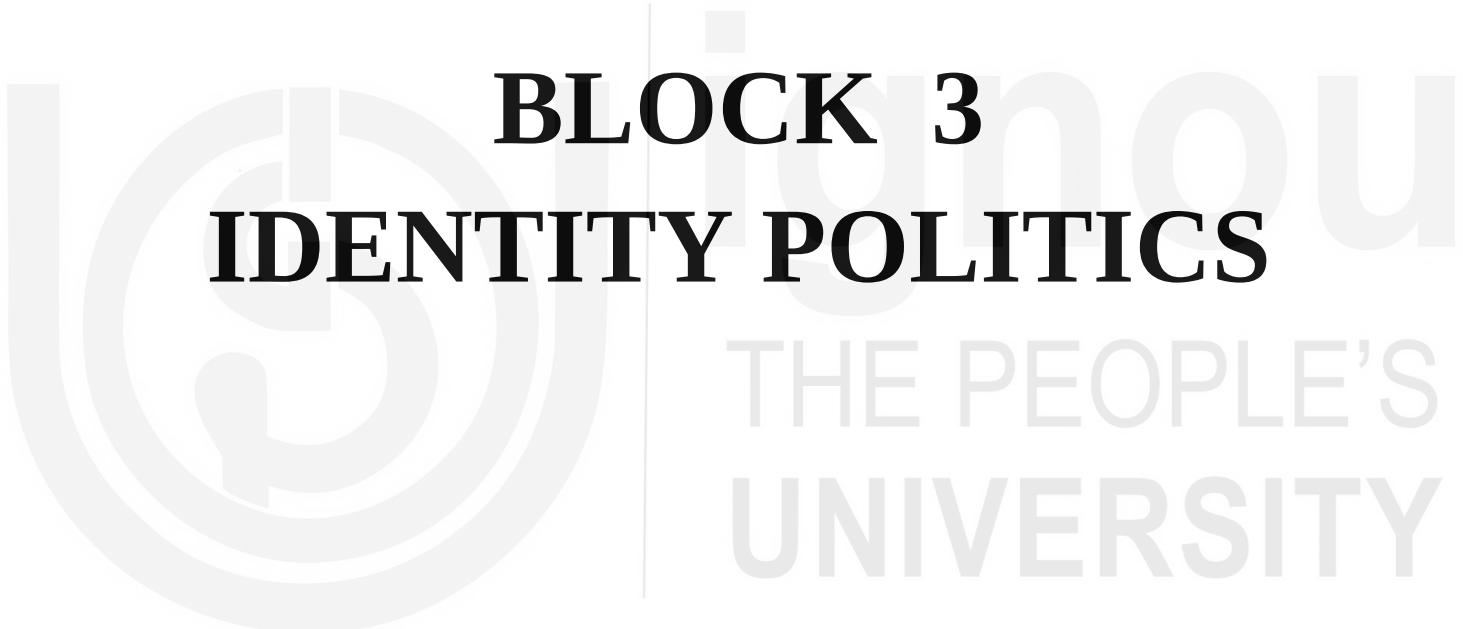




BLOCK 3

IDENTITY POLITICS

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

BLOCK 3 INTRODUCTION

The concerns of migration, Refugees and citizenship have dominated the politics and fundamental issues in Northeast India. The ethnic politics in Northeast India is very crucial to understand the region. The other major issue is autonomy movements in Northeast India. Various ethnic groups in different states have been seeking reorganisation of regions and the creation of new states. This block consists of three units and deals with the above issues in detail. Unit-7 explains the Issues of migration, refugee and citizenship. Unit-8 deals with the autonomy demands and movements in the Northeast. The unit-9 examines the politics of recognition about ethnicity and its relationship.



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 7 MIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP *

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Migration, Refugees, Citizenships: Meanings
- 7.3 Migration
 - 7.3.1 Migration in Pre-Independence period
 - 7.3.2 Migration in Post-Independence period
 - 7.3.3 Conflict on issue of migration
- 7.4 Refugees
- 7.5 Citizenship
 - 7.5.1 Emergence of Citizenship Issue
 - 7.5.2 The NRC and CAA, 2019
- 7.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.7 References
- 7.8 Answers to Check your Progress

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the meaning of concepts of migration, refugee and citizenship;
- Discuss the phases of migration in Northeast India;
- Elaborate upon the issue the questions relating to refugees in Northeast India; and
- Discuss the issue of citizenship in the region.

7.0 INTRODUCTION

The issue of ‘migrants’ has dominated the politics in Northeast India since the 1930s. It continues to play a decisive role in the region’s politics during the post-colonial period. During 1979-85 it was the central issue in the anti-foreign national movement in Assam. In the discourse on ethnic or ethno-nationalist politics in Northeast India, the migrants are often alluded to as “outsiders” by the indigenous communities. In terms of group identities, migrants and indigenous communities broadly belong to different ethnic groups. In tribal areas, the

* Prof: Sajal Nag, Professor of History, Assam University, Silchar, Assam.

differences between the migrants and indigenous communities are often manifested in the form of differences between the tribal and non-tribal groups. The tribal areas in the Northeast have often witnessed anti-outsider or anti-migrant movements resulting in violence. Migration has been an important issue in election campaigns, non-electoral mobilisation, debates within the legislatures, and popular discourse in different states of Northeast India, especially Assam, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. The arrival of refugees from East Pakistan in the wake of the partition of the country or later Bangladesh and the question of citizenship in this century has also become central to political mobilisation in Northeast India. This unit is about the issues of migration, refugees and citizenship in Northeast India.

7.2 MIGRATION, REFUGEES, CITIZENSHIP: MEANINGS

Migration is a movement of people from one place to another for long or short-duration settlement. A refugee is a person who is forced to migrate to another country from his/her original habitat because of displacement. The displacement can be due to reasons such as persecution because of status as an ethnic minority, natural calamities, state policies, external aggression, social strife, etc. Citizens are those natives of a country who are granted legal rights to live in that country and enjoy all the entitlements by the state. Refugees are sometimes granted citizenship in the country of their migration, and sometimes they remain permanently as refugees. Citizenship could be acquired by birth, naturalisation or application. When the migrants are accepted by the hosts, they are granted citizenship which means enjoying all the rights and entitlements that the original citizens have. The Citizenship Act of India 1955, while defining Indian citizenship, also defined 'illegal immigrants. According to this Act, an illegal immigrant is the one who enters into India without a valid passport or other travel documents or such other document or authority as may be prescribed by or any other law in that behalf or without a valid passport or other travel documents or authority as may be prescribed by or any other law in that behalf but remains therein beyond the permitted period of time. The illegal migrants are also referred to as infiltrators. The host country can prosecute them, or they can be deported to the country of their origin.

7.3 MIGRATION

Migrations into Northeast India took place in two phases: One, during the colonial period, and two, after independence.

7.3.1 Migration in Pre-Independence Period

Migration into Northeast India from other regions of undivided India began in the third decade of the nineteenth century following the occupation of territories that later constituted Assam. This migration occurred with the patronage and encouragement of the British. They encouraged and patronised people from other regions to engage in various economic and administrative activities: tilling the

land, working in tea plantations, doing unskilled labour, service in public institutions, army, trade, etc. The colonial authorities realised that migration of peasants was necessary for cultivating the massive uncultivated/ wasteland which they discovered at the time of occupation of Assam in 1824. In order to generate revenue by increasing agricultural productivity, they decided to cultivate the wasteland. For this purpose, the colonial authorities decided to populate Assam with migrants from neighbouring Bengal districts and settle them in the wastelands of Assam. The colonial authorities also recruited indentured labour from other parts of the country to work in the tea plantation. Besides, for farming land and tea plantation, there was migration to Northeast of collar workers, artisans, traders, dairy farmers, merchants and speculators, labour force working in the petroleum and coal industries of Assam. The migration of people from outside Assam was thus able to transform the demography of the province. The recruitment continued till 1950.

Migration for specific activities generally took place on a regional basis. Migration and settlement of dairy farmers and ex-army men came mainly from Nepal. Migration of White-collar workers/salaried employed in the government as well as plantation sectors mainly took place from Bengal. Tea plantation migrant workers mainly belonged to the mixed population, mainly of tribals from India's Eastern and central provinces. In the plain areas of Assam like Brahmaputra valley and Barak Valley, migration was initially of landless agriculturists of Bengal who were encouraged to come and settle in these lands. Assam witnessed a larger share of this migration. The tribal areas such as Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura did not experience in large scale migration from other parts of India except government officials and Christian missionaries. While migration for farming and into the tea plantation sector was linked with land and rural economy, migration into cities was linked to urban economy – services in offices, trade and business, other kinds of activities. Migration and settlement into the capital region of Shillong (Meghalaya) and Imphal (Manipur) was largely that of government officials, traders and merchants (as there was no prohibition in settlement). Colonial interests moulded the British migration policy in the Northeast. Although the colonial authorities encouraged outsiders (people from other regions) to Northeast India, they did not allow it into every part of the region. The British regulated it by introducing the Inner Line Permit System, which prohibited the entry of non-tribals into tribal areas. Due to such policy, different areas in the Northeast witnessed different levels of migration.

7.3.2 Migration in Post-Independence Period

After the partition, the people who moved from other regions into Northeast India can be categorised into three types: migrants, refugees, and illegal migrants. As a refugee, by definition, is a person who migrates from his/her country to another country; with East Bengal becoming a part of a new country after the partition (Pakistan), migrants came to be categorised as refugees. Apart from the refugees and illegal migrants from the neighbouring countries such as East Pakistan or Myanmar, migration from other parts of India continued after Independence labours classes, white-collar workers, skilled and unskilled labour force,

managerial groups, entrepreneurs, businessmen, traders and speculators from other parts of India. Tea estates, major oil refineries at Guwahati, Digboi and Bongaigaon, tertiary sectors involving infrastructural needs like the expansion of roads etc., attract migrant labourers from the other regions. Educational institutions in the states of northeast India such as central universities and other central government offices like the Railways, Postal sector, Banking sector, the telephone sector also attract migration of middle-class employees to northeast India from other parts of the country.

7.3.3 Conflict on the issue of migration

Migration has often been perceived as detrimental to local or indigenous communities' economic interests and social and cultural identities. This happens with reference to both kinds of migration: the migration from neighbouring countries, especially Bangladesh, and internal migration, i.e. from other regions of India to the states of Northeast India. There have been ethnic conflicts between the migrants and indigenous population in the region. In states with a substantial tribal population, the conflict relating to migration often becomes a conflict between tribals and non-tribals. The Assam movement (1979-1985), which was led by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) is the most important example of a movement against foreign nationals in northeast India. The detection of bogus voters during a by-election in 1979 to Mangaldai Lok Sabha constituency sparked off the anti-foreign National Movement. It spread to other Northeastern states led to a series of violence which included the Shillong riots (1979), the Nellie Massacre (1983) and the Mandai Massacre (1985). The movement ended in 1985 with the Assam Accord, which agreed to confer citizenship of India to all those immigrants who came to India up to 1971. It had a caveat that those who entered between 1961-71 would have to complete a term of ten years before the conferment of citizenship.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) Explain the meanings of migration, refugees and citizenship.

2) Discuss the phases of migration into Northeast India.

7.4 REFUGEES

The entry of refugees into Assam started after the partition of the country in 1947. Indeed, the people who were simply considered migrants into Assam from another part of British India in the pre-Independence period came to be known as refugees after East Bengal became East Pakistan in 1947 and Bangladesh in 1971. As you read section 7.2 of this unit, refugees, by definition, are displaced migrants from other countries. Partition of India and communal riots that accompanied it displaced many people (Hindus) in East Pakistan. The displaced people migrated to Assam as refugees. The first substantial influx of refugees took place following the Noakhali Riots in October 1946. The stream of refugees decreased considerably after the riot. But the outbreak of fresh communal violence in the 1950s resulted in increasing the number of refugees into Assam, mostly in the Cachar district. The largest number of the refugees came from Sylhet, followed by those from Mymensingh and Dhaka. The number of refugees declined following the signing of the Nehru-Liaquat Khan Pact of 8 April 1950. The Nehru-Liaquat Pact envisaged security, freedom and protection of property of the minorities in both countries. However, the Nehru-Liaquat Pact could not stop the process of movement of the refugees into Assam. During the Bangladesh war of 1971-72, lakhs refugees entered Assam and West Bengal. While many of them returned to Bangladesh after the war, it is presumed that a chunk of this population did not go back and settle in these provinces. In Tripura, the migration of Bengalis resulted in the demographic transformation of the state. In all states of the region, there is resentment against the influx of refugees. Apart from Assam, the Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram also witnessed the arrival of Chakma and Hajong refugees from East Pakistan in the 1960s. Their displacement leading to their migration, was caused by dam construction in the Kaptai river. During the second half of this century, a large number of Rohingyas have come to Tripura, Assam and Mizoram.

Host-Refugee Conflict: There were strong resentments against the settlement of these refugees in these states, and despite the Supreme Court verdict to confer their citizenship status, the matter remains unsolved. This led to resentment against Bengali domination/hegemony among the indigenous people in Tripura, against Chakma Hajong in Arunachal Pradesh and against Chakmas in Mizoram.

7.5 CITIZENSHIP

7.5.1 Emergence of Citizenship issue

The citizenship issue in Assam arose immediately after the commencement of the Indian Constitution in 1950. There were complaints of continuation of illegal migration into Assam even after the partition. The Government of India took different measures after the partition to deal with the question of citizenship. Among these were the Foreigners Act 1948, The Foreigners Order 1948, Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act 1950, The Citizenship Act 1955, Permits System, PIP (prevention of infiltration of Pakistanis) Scheme 1965, The

Foreigners (Tribunal) order 1964, The Foreigners (Tribunal) Amendment order 2012, The Passport (Entry into India) Act 1920, The Citizenship (Registration of citizen & Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules 2003, The Citizenship Rules 2009, Foreigner Tribunal and illegal migrants (Determination Tribunal), and Illegal Migrants (Determination Tribunal) (IMDT) Act 1983. A category of 'D' voters was used to detect, deport and intern the suspected infiltrators. According to a Government report during 1951-61, a total of 2,20,691 Pakistani infiltrators entered Assam, of which 1,22,476 were detected and deported by June 1965. Between 1985 and July 2005, after the formation of IMDT, a total of 1,12,791 persons were referred to as foreign nationals, of which 1,284 were declared to be so, and 1,547 actually deported. Between 1985 and July 2012, a total of 61,774 persons have declared D voters, of which 6,590 persons were actually declared foreigners. Evidently, there were endeavours to detect and deport foreign nationals all along the period. The government also established a number of Detention Camps where 'doubtful' citizens were incarcerated till their citizenship was proven or were deported. But there were gross human rights violations in these camps.

In 1951, the National Register of Citizens (NRC) was prepared to keep the record of genuine citizens of India in Assam. The Citizenship Act 1955, which envisaged the citizenship laws in India, was enacted five years after the commencement of the Constitution. The makers of the Indian Constitution did not give a complete code of citizenship and left modification and regulation of citizenship rights to the Parliament. Therefore, under Article 11 of the Constitution, the Parliament passed in 1955 a comprehensive law to deal with citizenship. The main objective of the Act is to provide for the attainment and termination of Indian citizenship. The provisions of the Act may be broadly divided into three parts i.e., acquisition of citizenship, termination of citizenship and supplemental provisions. The Act provides five modes of acquiring the citizenship of India. The modes are acquiring citizenship by birth, descent, registration, naturalisation, and incorporation of territory. The Act also provides for loss of citizenship by renunciation, termination and deprivation. The citizenship Act of India 1955 took due care of the previous history and geography of the country, which had undergone two hundred years of colonial rule and vivisection during independence. Those who were inhabitants of parts of India, which had now become another sovereign country, were not deprived of Indian citizenship, if they decided to migrate to this part of India. The citizenship laws were changed as per the provisions of the Assam Accord signed in 1985. According to the changes, all those who migrated to India from Bangladesh before March 1971 were considered citizens.

Citizenship became a dominant issue in Northeast India during the Assam Movement (1979-1985). As citizenship is about the right of individuals to reside and vote, own, inherit and transfer property, etc., the detection and deportation of foreign nationals from Assam are related to the question of citizenship. The leaders and supporters of the Assam movement argued that their citizenship rights were adversely affected because the illegal migrants (non-citizens) had

encroached upon their rights: usurped their land, economic opportunities, and got themselves illegally included in the voters list. Inclusion of illegal migrants/non-citizens in voters' lists harmed the rights of the indigenous people. By-election to Mangaldai Lok Sabha constituency for the first time triggered the six years of anti-foreign movement in Assam. The Congress government passed IMDT Act 1983 to identify the illegal migrants and deport them to Bangladesh. The leaders of the Assam movement disapproved of the IMDT on the following grounds: the Assamese opinion was not taken into consideration while passing this Act; the onus of proving the charge of illegal citizenship was on the complainant, not on the illegal migrant. The foreign national issue continued to prevail even after the Assam Accord was signed in 1985: a large number of foreign nationals were still present in Assam. The issue reemerged at the centre stage of politics in 1998 when the report of Lt. Gen S.K. Sinha, then Governor of Assam, which he sent to the President of India, had become public. Lt. Gen. Sinha's report mentioned that about a crore of illegal Muslims had infiltrated into Assam with a grand design of Pakistan laying claim to the territory; lakhs of Bangladeshi nationals were staying illegally in Assam. This might reduce the indigenous Assamese into a minority. Fears grew in the indigenous communities that the rise in the Muslim population in Assam would decrease the number of indigenous communities. Against this background, in 2005, a petition was filed by Sarbabanda Sonowal, AGP leader (who later joined BJP and became chief minister of Assam) in the Supreme Court challenging the validity of the IMDT Act, 1983. The Supreme Court declared the IMDT Act null and void in the same year.

Citizenship is giving citizenship rights to the citizens and denying it to the non-citizens such as illegal migrants. Illegal migrants have been defined in Assam Accord as those who infiltrated illegally after December 24, 1971. However, the stream that infiltrated illegally between January 1, 1966, and December 24, 1971, was not to be deported and was to be given Indian citizenship after a lapse of ten years. In other words, to declare a person an illegal immigrant, it has to be proved that a person is not an inhabitant of India and had entered and/or stayed in India without authority irrespective of the country, language, religion he/she belongs to. However, if anyone has the documents to show that he/she is an inhabitant of India, and therefore a legitimate citizen according to the country's citizenship laws, he/she could not be accused of being a foreign national and illegal immigrant. Despite that, the Assam continued to complain about the large-scale entry and presence of illegal immigrants since India's independence.

7.5.2 The NRC and CAA, 2019

Both NRC (National Register of Citizens) and Citizenship Amendment Act, 1919 (CAA, 2019) are about citizenship. As mentioned earlier, the NRC was first prepared in 1951. The Parliament passed the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 to Amend the Citizenship Amendment Act, 1955. The CAA proposes to grant citizenship to persecuted religious minorities – Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains or Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The NRC is a contemporaneous register prepared by the officers appointed under the provisions

of the Census Act in the course of census operations. In 2005 the first proposal to upgrade the NRC of 1951 was made in a tripartite meeting between the AASU, Assam government, and the central government. Its immediate context was the tripartite meeting of the Supreme Court's verdict, which declared the IMDT Act, 2013 null and void. The court verdict was on a petition filed by Sarbanand Sonowal to challenge the IMDT Act. Subsequent meetings were held to discuss the citizenship issue in 2011 and 2013 by the then Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi to update the NRC. But the process of updating of NRC by the Gogoi government in 2012 was halted following the protests in Dhubri and Goalpara, and riots between the Muslims and Bodo tribals in Bodoland areas in 2012 and 2014. In 2014 a new organisation called *Assam Sanmilita Mahasangha*, filed a petition in the Supreme Court to examine the constitutional position of the laws of citizenship in India and to upgrade the National Register of Citizens prepared in 1951 for Assam. The Supreme Court delivered judgment on these petitions in December 2014, which allowed upgrading of the NRC of 1951 to resolve the issue of the citizenship and illegal immigration. The upgrading of the NRC, 1951 had become necessary of its limitations. Its enumeration was a hurried one, in which the register of citizens of the entire nation was prepared in an impossible span of mere twenty days: between 9th February and 28th February, 1951. It was a casual attempt and a by-product of the Census Act of 1948, and the untrained census enumerators issued a slip for every entry in the census. Thus, the register was prepared based on the slip. In due course, even the process of tallying the slip was abandoned at the orders of the Registrar General of Census. The Guwahati High Court held in 1970 that the NRC, 1951 was inadmissible evidence according to the Evidence Act.

Because of the Supreme Court's verdict of 2014, the Assam Government started enumeration of the NRC. The NRC enumeration results were declared in 2019, by which more than 19 lakh population of Assam was declared illegal. Simultaneously another legislation called Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) the Government of India passed in 2019. Citizenship was given to the persons belonging to five persecuted religious minorities from the three countries (mentioned earlier) that had arrived in India before 2014. The CAA 2019 was opposed by all the states of northeast India as they feared that the Act would grant citizenship to refugees whom they seek to expel from their territory. In other parts of the country, it was opposed on the ground that excluding Muslims it was violating the secular spirit of the Indian Constitution. The CAA 2019 is among the latest of such attempts. As mentioned in sub-section 7.5.1, the Government of India took several measures on the question of citizenship after Independence.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) What is NRC?

2) What is CAA, 2019?

7.6 LET US SUM UP

Migration, Refugees and citizenship are crucial issues in academic, political and popular discourse on Northeast India. Migration implies a movement of people from one place for settlement. Refugees are the people who migrate from their original habitat to another country due to their persecution as an ethnic group, displacement caused to state policies, social strife, external aggression, etc. Migration into Northeast India began in the colonial period after the British occupied different areas of Assam from the third decade of the nineteenth century. During the colonial period, the colonial authorities encouraged people from other parts of the country to migrate to the region to carry out administrative and economic activities: plantation, dairy farming, labour to develop infrastructure, government jobs, army, etc. The migration into the Northeast continued in the post-Independence period. After the partition, migrants from East Pakistan/Bangladesh became known as refugees, illegal migrants or infiltrators. Migration in the Northeast has been a source of conflict in Northeast. In Assam, migrants from Bangladesh are seen as the main cause of economic and cultural problems. In tribal states, non-tribal migrants are viewed as the main source of economic problems and identity crisis. In Assam, migration sparked off an anti-foreign movement in 1979-85, and in the tribal states, it resulted in ethnic crises. Following the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, citizenship became one of the central issues in the politics of Assam and other Northeastern states.

Assam Accord did not resolve the foreigners' issue. From 2005, it got linked with the citizenship question. A tripartite meeting between the state government, the AASU and the central government resolved to upgrade the NRC of 1951, which had several limitations. In 2014, giving a verdict on a petition, the Supreme Court directed the Assam government to prepare a new NRC. The NRC was prepared in 2019 (which had many flaws). Meanwhile, the Government of India passed the CAA in 2019, providing citizenship to the persons belonging to persecuted religious minority communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who had entered India before 2014. The CAA faced opposition in Northeast India on the apprehension that it would encourage infiltration/movement of foreigners into their region.

7.7 REFERENCES

Baruah, Sanjib (1999), *India Against itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi

Ghosh, Partha S. (2016), *Migrants, Refugees and the Stateless in South Asia*, Sage Publications, New Delhi.

Guha, Amalendu (1977), *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics*, Indian Council of Historical Research, New Delhi.

Sajal Nag, (2018), “The NRC: Ethnic Cleansing Through Constitutional Means”, *Analytical Monthly Review*, September, vol. 16 no. 6.

Nag, Sajal (2016) *Beleaguered Nation: the Making and Unmaking of Assamese Nationality*, Manohar, Delhi.

Shamshad, Rizwana (2017), *Bangladesh Migrants in India: Foreigners, Refugees, or Infiltrators*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Migration is a movement of people from one place to another for short or long-duration settlements. Refugees are migrants displaced from their original places due to persecution, social strife, state policies, and external aggression. Citizens are people who have a legitimate right to exist in a country and enjoy democratic rights.
- 2) Migration into Northeast India took place in two phases. The first started after the British occupied Assam from the third decade of the nineteenth century. The British encouraged the migration from different parts of India into Assam in this phase to carry out economic and administrative activities. The second phase of migration took place in the post-Independence period. During this phase, apart from the migration from other regions of India, there was also the influx of refugees and illegal migrants from neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) NRC (National Citizen Register) is a register that maintains a record of all citizens in Assam. It was first prepared in 1951. However, it had several limitations. The Supreme Court of India ordered the upgrading of NRC in 2014 in a judgment. Accordingly, the Assam government completed upgrading the NRC, but it has errors.
- 2) CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act), 2019, was passed by the Parliament in 2019. The Act seeks to provide citizenship to persecuted religious minorities – Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains or Parsis from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.

UNIT 8 AUTONOMY MOVEMENTS *

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Features of Autonomy Movements
- 8.3 Forms of Autonomy Movements in Northeast India
 - 8.3.1 Insurgencies
 - 8.3.2 The Hill State Movement
 - 8.3.3 The Plains Tribes of Assam: The Bodo Movement
 - 8.3.4 Other Examples
- 8.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.5 References
- 8.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the meaning and features of autonomy movements;
- Discuss the reasons for the rise of autonomy movements in Northeast India; and,
- Elaborate upon the forms of autonomy movements in the region.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Autonomy movements are among the most important themes of political, academic and popular discourse on Northeast India. Derived from the Greek words, 'auto' meaning 'self' and 'nomo' meaning 'law' or 'rule' autonomy means 'self-rule' or to make one's own law. Therefore, it has the connotation of being free to govern oneself. It also means that one is independent to decide whether one wishes to be influenced or controlled by others or be free and rule oneself. From the political and legal aspect, autonomy connotes the ability of people to govern them or have the power to legislate to regulate their affairs. Autonomy movements are the collective mobilisation of people or groups that seek autonomy. Various ethnic groups in different states in Northeast India have been seeking reorganisation of federal structure. Through reorganisation of federal relations, the ethnic groups seek to formulate and execute policies

*Dr. Moses Kharbithai, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Assam University, Silchar.

pertaining to their community and region. The foci of these movements have varied from reorganisation of federal structure from creation of new states from the existing state (s) or Union Territories to creation of autonomous district, regional or territorial councils. Some of these movements have demanded the creation of sovereign states. In this unit, you will learn about the autonomy movements with some examples from Northeast India.

8.2 FEATURES OF AUTONOMY MOVEMENTS

Autonomy movements have some features. Autonomy movements arise when a group of people in a certain region feel that their region has not received proper treatment or is discriminated against by the authorities – the government or other regions. Such people may share some common features – region, culture, language, customs, history, etc. Autonomy movements aim to give expression to distinct cultural-linguistic identities and to uplift the backward socio-economic conditions of people in an area. Such movements are organised and led by political or social leaders, students, middle classes or civil society organisations. These are opinion makers who make people conscious of their grievances, articulate their interests and mobilise people into collective action or social movement. The opinion-makers generally argue that outsiders exploit their economic sources; they are not paid royalties in proportion to usage of their resources. Sometimes, they also allege that their regions have become “internal colonies” of other regions or governments. They also allege that due to improper policies pertaining to migration and development, their culture – language, social and cultural identities are adversely impacted. They complain that they do not get adequate representation in the existing set up political institutions, and their opinions are not considered in policy formulation. Some of them argue that regions or communities have been nations since time immemorial, and they have lost political sovereignty in the existing federal structure. The opinion-makers in such regions argue that their grievances can be solved if they are political autonomy to manage and regulate their affairs. Autonomy movements in Northeast India share these features in different degrees.

8.3 AUTONOMY MOVEMENTS IN NORTHEAST INDIA

In units 4-6 of Block 2, you would have read there are different provisions in the Constitution of India to protect and preserve social and cultural identities, economic interests and political autonomy of institutions in Northeast India. As you would read in those units, these provisions are the VI Schedule, Special Status to all states of Northeast India, Articles 371A – 371 C, and 371F – 371 H; Inner Line Permit (IL) in four states Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, and North Cachar district of Assam. The autonomous district councils were supposed to empower political elites among the tribes in the art of self-governance while also ushering economic development, yet the spirit of enthusiasm was missing. However, these provisions have not resolved the grievances of people in the region to their satisfaction. Therefore, over the years,

demands for autonomy in one or the other form have been raised in different regions/by different communities in Northeast India. Autonomy movements in Northeast India occurred in different forms of in the post-Independence period: demand for sovereign states, formation of new states or Union Territories, creation of autonomous councils or state within states. On several occasions, the collective mobilisation for such demands has led to ethnic violence or insurgency. On some occasions, it has resulted in the acceptance of some demands or the signing of Accords. However, such demands arise from time to time. Either the old demands get revived or new demands for autonomy are raised. Demands for autonomy and sovereignty are different but sometimes interrelated: autonomy is about the rearrangement of federal structure within a Sovereign state, the insurgency is about getting a sovereign state. They are interrelated in the sense that initially, a demand might be raised for autonomy, but it might turn into a demand for a sovereign state. Or initially, a demand which may be about granting a sovereign state might be changed into a demand for autonomy in a different political context. This unit discusses different forms of autonomy movements with some examples from Northeast India.

8.3.1 Insurgencies

Insurgency is associated with organised assistance that supports all or some sections of society to challenge the state and change the political regime. There are examples of insurgency in Northeast India. Duration, number and intensity of cases of insurgency in the region have varied. Manipur has had the largest number of insurgent groups in the region. Nagaland, Mizoram, and Manipur have seen more sustained insurgencies than in Assam or Meghalaya. In Assam, the United Liberation Front Assam (ULFA) has been active since the 1980s, and in Meghalaya, the Hynniewtrip National Liberation Council (HNLC) has been active since the 1990s. Let us briefly look at the features of insurgencies in Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur. Insurgency in Nagaland is the first example of autonomy movement in Northeast India. The notion of Naga autonomy or self-determination originated with the formation of Naga Club in 1919. The NNC argued that the Nagas had been a nation since time immemorial, and only some regions in Naga Hills became part of the British Empire after the latter annexed those areas from the nineteenth century. They argued that after the British left, the Naga nation was not part of any other nation because the Naga had a unique history. In June 1947, an agreement was signed between the Naga leadership (Aliba Imti and T. Sakhrie) and the Governor of Assam, Akbar Hydari, known as the nine-point agreement. The agreement was agreed that ten years after the agreement, the “Nagas will be free to decide their future”. After World War II, the Naga Club was converted into a new organisation, i.e. Naga National Council (NNC). The NNC launched a movement under Angami Zapo Phizo’s leadership to establish a sovereign state of Nagaland. As India was to celebrate independence, disregarding the Nine-Point agreement, the NNC declared independence on August 14, 1947, a day before India celebrated its freedom. It refused to be part of the Indian Union: rejected its Constitution and flag, refused to accept the VI Schedule, boycotted the first general election (1951-52). In 1951

the NNC conducted a plebiscite in the Naga Hills district and declared that 99 per cent of the Nagas voted for independence and appealed to the Indian government to respect the people's verdict and grant independence. In 1956 the Naga insurgent group formed what they called the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN) and initiated insurrection to carry out a struggle for what they considered independence. The Government of India responded by enacting various Acts: Assam Maintenance of Public Order (Autonomous Districts) Act 1953, the Assam Disturbed Areas Act 1955, the Armed Forces (Assam, Manipur) Special Powers Act (AFSPA), 1958. This resulted in violence between the forces and the Nagas. The government of India responded by the formation of Nagaland state on June 1, 1963. In 1964 the Naga Peace Mission reached an agreement to cease fire with the NNC. In 1975, the representatives of the underground Naga organisations signed the Shillong Accord with the Government of India. Under the Shillong Accord, the underground organisations accepted the Constitution of India; to bring out the underground arms and deposit at places, and the representatives of underground organisations were to be given reasonable time for formulating issues for final settlement. This displeased leaders such as Isaac Swu, Th. Muivah and Khaplang with the NNC led by Fizo. They formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) in 1980 and carried on the movement. In 1988 however, the organisation split into two factions. Over the years, further splits led to the emergence of other Naga militant groups: The NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K). These groups entered into agreements with the Government of India at different times. The NSCN wants to create a state of Greater Nagaland for the Nagas – known as Nagalism-consisting of areas inhabited by the Nagas across states – Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland some parts of Myanmar.

Mizoram witnessed insurgency between 1960 and 1986. It started with the formation of the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) in 1960 and ended following the signing of the Mizo Accord in 1986 between the MNF leader Laldenga and the Government. In February 1987, Laldenga became the first chief Minister with the elevation of Mizoram to the level of state from a Union Territory. The reason for the formation of MNFF was the realisation on the part of Mizo leaders that both the central and state government of Assam did not address their grievances caused due to the bamboo famine (the *Mautam*) of 1957-59. Mizo hills were part of Assam at that time. The MNFF believed that the central and state governments could not address Mizos' problems, and they would be resolved only if they had their own sovereign state. For meeting the purpose, the Mizo under the leadership of Laldenga (MNFF) started insurgency. After the famine ended, the MNFF was converted into a party MNF in 1960. The MNF started a movement for the formation of a sovereign state of Mizoram, leading to violence between the Mizos and security forces. The Mizo insurgency saw a decline after almost a decade of its beginning. In 1975 an agreement was signed between the MNF and the Government of India, leading to a gradual decline of insurgency in Mizoram Union Territory. Finally, the signing of the Mizo Accord in June 1986 between the MNF and the Government of India

resulted in the end of the insurgency in Mizoram. Following the agreement, the state Union Territory of Mizoram was elevated to the status of a state heralding the end of the insurgency.

As you have read in unit 1, Manipur was a princely state that was merged with the Union of India following the signing of the Instrument of Accession and remained a Union Territory until 1972, when it became a state. A section of people in Manipur believes that the Maharaja of Manipur was coerced to sign the Instrument of Accession. They argue that Manipur had been a nation prior to its merger with the Union of India, and there is a need to restore their notion. Manipur has the largest number of insurgent organisations in Northeast India. There emerged other insurgent groups in Manipur in different years. In 1964, an insurgent organisation, i.e., United National Liberation Front (UNLF) was formed under the leadership of Arambam Samerendra. It aimed to restore the sovereignty of Manipur, which is enjoyed as a princely state before its merger with the Union of India. Different insurgent organisations were established in Manipur at different times: Revolutionary Government of Manipur (RGM) in 1968, People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) in 1977, People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1978, and Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) in 1980. These insurgent groups represented different ethnic groups.

8.3.2 The Hills Statehood Demand

Statehood demands in Northeast India began with the hill state demand during the 1950s-1960s. In January 1954, leaders from hill districts of Assam – the CEMs (Chief Executive Members) of Lushai hills, North Cachar, Garo and the United Khasi-Jaintia hill districts initiated a movement of creation of a hill state to be carved of hill regions/districts of Assam. There were basically three reasons for this: One, dissatisfaction with the provisions of the VI Schedule meant to protect and preserve the identities and economic interests of the hill tribes of Assam; two, the introduction of Assamese as a language of instruction in Assam, including the regions where the majority did not speak Assamese of the people; and, three, conflict over the control of the natural resources in the hills. Again in October 1954, Assam Hills Tribal Leaders' Conference was held. This conference was attended by 46 delegates excepting those from the Mizo Hills districts. The Conference resolved to get a state of the autonomous districts of Assam. It sent a memorandum to the State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) to consider their demand. The SRC rejected the demand on the ground that demand for a separate state was largely confined to Khasi and Jaintia hills, which excluded other areas of Assam. However, the government appointed Pataskar Commission to look study the feasibility of a new state. The Pataskar Commission did not suggest the formation of the new state; instead, it recommended the formation of a state within the state of Assam. As you have read in unit 1, consequently, the state of Meghalaya was created within the state of Assam (State within the state) in 1971, and in 1972, it was elevated into a state separate from Assam. The state of Meghalaya was created according to the 22nd Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) for Act, 1969. In 1972, apart from Meghalaya

becoming a separate out of Assam, two Union Territories, Manipur and Tripura, became states; North-East Frontier Tract (NEFT) Arunachal Pradesh along with Mizoram became Union Territories, and they became states in 1987.

8.3.3 Plain Tribals in Assam: The Bodo movement

The most numerous single plain tribe in Assam inhabiting Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang and Udalgarh districts, Bodos, have been involved in the autonomy movement since the advent of British rule. They constitute almost seventy per cent of the tribal population of Assam. They are also found in other northeastern states such as Nagaland, Tripura, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. The Bodos complain that they suffered at the hands of the dominant Assamese community in terms of allocation of resources, land and dismal electoral representation from the colonial era. They claimed that their sufferings continued over the centuries despite the fact they have been the original inhabitants of Brahmaputra valley over the centuries. Their perception of alienation, exploitation and discrimination culminated into the Bodo movement, which turned militant at some point of time. The origin of the Bodo autonomy movement can be traced to the colonial period. In 1929, they submitted a memorandum to the Indian Statutory Commission demanding political power. In 1933, they formed a political party, All Assam Plain Tribals League (AAPT) to protect the identity and interests of plain tribals of Assam. In 1953, The Bodo Sahitya Sabha submitted a memorandum to Assam chief minister Bishnuram Medhi. The introduction of the Bodo language as a medium of instruction in schools was the main demand in the memorandum. It was preceded by few years of the introduction of the Assam Official Language Bill, 1960 that led to Anti-Assamese agitation in the non-Assamese speaking areas of Assam. The movement also achieved the Bodos' demand for the introduction of Bodo language as the medium of instruction in schools in Bodo dominated areas in 1963. In 1967 the Bodos demanded the creation of a state or Union Territory Udyanchal. The demand for Udyanchal vacillated between demand for creation of the state out of or within the state of Assam. The demand arose in the context of creation of the state of Nagaland in 1963 and the growing demand for hill states in the 1950s-1960s. The Bodos' demand for a new state did not sustain itself. However, the Bodo Autonomy movement picked up momentum after the Assam movement against the foreigners (1979-85), followed by a signing of the Assam Accord in 1985 between the leaders of the Assam movement, Central government the government of Assam state. The Bodos who had participated in the Assam movement felt clause 6 of the Assam Accord neglected their cultural and economic interests. They understood that the Accord would endanger their identity as it would be merged with the Assamese identity, which was different from the Bodos. The provision in the Assam Accord to make Assamese as the state's official language left the Bodos with a sense of deprivation and discrimination. This led to the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma to assert their rights for political, economic and cultural suzerainty. The post-Assam Accord period also saw the formation of BdSF (Bodo Security Force). It was renamed as National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), which split,

resulting in the Bodoland Liberation Tribal Force (BLTF) formation in 1995. The NDFB and BLTF were rivals that engaged in violent clashes involving the extermination of each other's members. The split in the NDFB led to the split in ABSU. The ABSU emphasised that the Bodos are ethnically different from other tribes of the Assam, and hence they were entitled to their aspiration for a separate state of Bodoland. Sanjib Baruah, in the book *India Against Itself* (1999) observes that the All India Bodo Student Union's 92-point of charter contained the main demands of Bodos. He classifies these demands into three categories – cultural and linguistic, economic and residual demands. The charter was used to mobilise Bodos for a Bodo homeland.

As a consequence of the Bodo autonomy movement, three Accords were signed between the Bodos, Government of India and the Assam government in 1993, 2003 and 2020. The first Bodo Accord was signed between the Bodos and the Government of Assam on February 20, 1993. According to the provisions of this Accord, Bodoland Autonomous District Council (BAC) came into existence in the Bodo dominated areas. But this Accord did not define the territorial jurisdiction of BAC. Due to this limitation, election could not be held for BAC. The BAC was not accepted by one section of Bodo leadership. The Accord did not satisfy all outfits of Bodos. From 1994, this also led to internal conflict among the Bodo leadership over leadership to underground groups and also the BAC. This resulted in agitations, including organisation of bandhs, fasts, road blockades, extortion, loot, murder, kidnapping and ambushes. In 2003 the second Bodo Accord was signed between the BLT, the Central government and the government of Assam. The outcome of that Accord was the creation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). After the establishment of BTC, four districts: Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang, and Udalguri were all included under its jurisdiction. The NDFB, however, did not accept the second Bodo Accord and sought to struggle for a sovereign state. In 2020, the third Bodo Accord was signed. It was a tripartite agreement signed by the Indian government, the government of Assam and the Bodo organisations. It laid the new model of power-sharing and governance in Assam under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian constitution. The Bodo parties that signed the third Bodo Accord were the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), the United Bodo People's Organisation (UBPO) and all the four factions of the NDFB. The new Accord provided for the scope of expansion of the BTC territory empowered the BTC not to depend on the state government for funds, to have a say in the appointment of Deputy Commissioners, Superintendents of Police. However, the Home and Police department will continue to be with the state government.

8.3.4 Other Examples

The examples discussed above are among the most important cases of autonomy movements in Assam. There are several other examples in the Northeast of different forms of autonomy movements. In Assam, while the Bodo movements are those of the plain tribals, the autonomy movements of the Karbis and Dimasas Cacharis pertain to the hills tribes of Karbis Anlong and Dimasas Cacharis in

North Cachar hill districts of Assam, respectively. As you have read in unit 5, tribal areas of Karbi Anglong and North-Cachar Hills (Dima Hasao), were given protection under the VI Schedule. But Karbi and Dimasa Cachari tribes have not been satisfied with the provisions of the VI Schedule. The Karbis and Dimasa Kacharis have been feeling that their grievances have not been addressed, and they have been ignored within the existing federal structure. The Karbis demand the elevation of the administrative unit of Autonomous Council to a state within a state to govern themselves (Monirul Hussain 1987). In the latest move, a tripartite memorandum of peace was signed between the Government of India, the Assam government, and the Karbi Dimasa insurgent groups representatives on September 4, 2021. In the Barak valley, a demand was made in the 1980s by some Bengalis for the creation of a state or Union Territory with a substantial Bengali population.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) Discuss the meaning and features of autonomy movements.

2) Identify major issues of Autonomy movements in Northeast India.

3) Discuss the forms of autonomy movements in Northeast India.

8.4 LET US SUM UP

Northeast India has witnessed autonomy movements over the years since the 1940s. Autonomy movements are collective actions of people in a region who want reorganization of federal relations to get autonomy to decide about the issues concerning them. In Northeast India, these movements take different forms: insurgency aiming to get a sovereign state; collective action for statehood or Union territory to be carved out of existing state or movement for getting autonomous district, regional or territorial councils. The movements arise

because of the understanding among the leaders, activists and supporters of the autonomy movement that they have not been fairly treated in the existing federal structure in various aspects – social, cultural, economic and political. This is so despite the fact that there are constitutional provisions about the region to protect and preserve the identities of ethnic communities, traditional institutions, and customary laws and institutions. Besides, all the Northeastern regions falling under the purview of the sixth Schedule enjoy special status entitled to tax rebates and other benefits. The opinion makers, especially the student leaders, politicians, intellectuals, and civil society organisations in the region, understand that these provisions have not fulfilled their respective regions' expectations and aspirations. They are able to mobilise people into collective action or autonomy movements. On several occasions, these autonomy movements result in ethnic violence or violence between the state agencies (especially the central government institutions) and the people. Insurgencies in Naga and Mizo hills, in Manipur; Bodo movements in the plain areas of Assam; Karbi and Dimasa autonomy movements in hills of Assam; and demand of district or territorial autonomies in other areas of Northeast India form some important examples of autonomy movement in the region.

8.5 REFERENCES

Baruah, Sanjib (1999), *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.

_____ (2005), *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press.

_____ (1999), *India Against Itself : Assam and Politics of Nationality*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Bathari, Uttam (2015), “The Case of Karbi-Dimasa Autonomy Movement”, in Sandhya Goswami (ed.), *Troubled Diversity: Political Process in Northeast India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Bhattacharya, Dipankar (1993), “Karbi Anlong Revisited” *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 28.

Chaube, S.K. (1999), *Hill Politics in Northeast India*, Hyderabad, Orient Longman.

Das, Samir Kumar (1994), *ULFA United Liberation Front of Assam: A Political Analysis*, Delhi, Ajanta.

Gohain, Hiren (2019), *Struggling in a Time Wrap: Essays and Observations on the Northeast's History and Politics with Particular Reference to Assam*, Guwahati, Bhabani Books & Gifts.

Hussain, Monirul (1987), “Tribal Movement for Autonomous State in Assam”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 8, pp. 1329-32.

Hussain, Wasbir (2020), “How the Bodo Accord was accomplished, establishing a wider templet for peace in the Northeast”, *The Times of India*, February 06, 2020.

Nag, Sajal (2002), *Contesting Marginality: Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism*, Manohar, New Delhi.

Phadnis, Urmila and Ganguly, Rajat (2001), *Ethnicity and Nation-Building in South Asia*, New Delhi: Sage.

8.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Autonomy movements are collective mobilization of people in a region for reorganisation of federal relations to get autonomy to make rules about their issues and implement them. They arise because inhabitants of these regions feel that their region is not treated fairly in the existing federal structure. The people demanding autonomy realise that they share a common feature - region, culture, language, customs, history, etc. They argue that their problems can be resolved by political autonomy to legislate and execute decisions.
- 2) The major issues of Autonomy movements in Northeast India are related to restructuring the federal structure so that the community seeking autonomy can enjoy autonomy to legislate and execute decisions about them. These issues largely include utilizing their economic resources and opportunities, protecting and preserving their social and cultural identities and customary laws, and having political representation.
- 3) The forms of autonomy in the Northeast India are: insurgency movements, movements for the statehood or Union Territories, and mobilisation for getting autonomous district, regional or territorial councils.

UNIT 9 ETHNICITY AND POLITICS OF RECOGNITION*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Concepts
 - 9.2.1 What is Ethnicity?
 - 9.2.2 What is Politics of Recognition?
 - 9.2.3 Relationship between Ethnicity and Politics of Recognition
- 9.3 Politics of Recognition in Northeast India
 - 9.3.1 The Context
 - 9.3.2 Social and Cultural Dimension
 - 9.3.3 Political Dimension
- 9.4 Let Us Sum
- 9.5 References
- 9.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

9.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the meaning of ethnicity and politics of recognition;
- Establish relationships between them; and
- Discuss politics of recognition in the context of Northeast India.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

In Northeast India, several communities have been complaining of unequal treatment meted out to them either by the central or state governments or by other communities. They say that generally, their opinions are neglected in the formulation of policies; vested interests exploit their natural resources, and they have limited economic opportunities for development. In their perceptions, their neglect, exploitation, and limited economic opportunities lead to erosion in their social and cultural identities, economic disadvantage and political exclusion. Often such feelings get manifested in political aspects and ethnic relations. Attempts on the part of communities to seek equality and autonomy in

* Jagpal Singh, Professor of Political Science, School of Social Sciences, Indira Gandhi National Open University, Maidan Garhi, New Delhi-110068.

relationship with other communities and treatment from the state can be understood in terms of politics of recognition. In this unit, you will read about the politics of recognition with reference to ethnicity in Northeast India.

9.2 THE CONCEPTS: ETHNICITY AND POLITICS OF RECOGNITIONS

9.2.1 What is Ethnicity?

Ethnicity is related to a kind of group identity. Such identity is formed when a group of people think that they share common characteristics – language, culture, customs, history, economic needs, race, kinship, etc. These are called markers. But every group identity is not an ethnic identity. A group identity becomes an ethnic identity only when it compares itself with another group identity. Thus, different group identities in relationships are ethnic identities. The relationship between different ethnic groups is known as ethnicity. These relationships can be different kinds of relationships – conflictual, competitive or cooperative. Their relationships depend on political context, e.g. elections, government formations, competition among and within the parties, among leaders. The number of markers that form ethnic identities varies. An ethnic can be formed on the basis of a single marker such as language, culture, customs, traditions, race, clan, religion or any other. It can also be formed on the basis of multiple factors cumulatively. The choice of their number depends on the perspective of a scholar defining ethnicity. Some scholars, especially stationed in western academic institutions, consider identity formed on the basis of a single marker as ethnic. However, those settled in Indian academic institutions designate single-marker identity in the name of that marker – caste, linguistic, regional, communal or religious identity. For them, an identity based on multiple markers is an ethnic identity. With reference to Northeast India, ethnic identity generally alludes to as the group formed on the basis of multiple factors such as tribe, race, kinship, culture (food, dress, and songs), region, customs, history, religion, economy, etc. Every state in Northeast India has multiple ethnic identities. In a situation of ethnic conflict between different ethnic groups, even if the conflict originally results from a single marker, the ethnic identities involved in the conflict get formed on the basis of multiple markers.

There are two perspectives that explain the nature of ethnic identities: primordial and instrumentalist or constructionist. The primordial perspective suggests that ethnic identities are naturally given. This perspective gives priority to the “ethnic core” or ascriptive factors as the principal cause for the formation of ethnic identity. On the contrary, according to the instrumentalist or constructivist perspective, ethnic identities are not natural. They are constructed or imagined. Ethnic identities are formed by the elite who manipulate the “imagined”, “constructed” or “invented” markers to form an identity. Ethnic identities are not permanent, and their shape is malleable. Both these perspectives have limitations. The primordial perspective does not explain how the ascriptive or primordial factors get political manifestation. The instrumentalist approach does not explain

why the elite are able to manipulate the markers of identity formation. Alternatively, why do members of ethnic groups respond to the call of the leaders from their ethnic group? Some suggest that a combination of primordial and instrumentalist perspectives can better explain the formation of ethnic identities (Singh 2011).

9.2.2 What is politics of Recognition?

The politics of recognition is about relationships between two or more groups or individuals. Charles Taylor (1992) explains the notion of recognition. It denotes that every individual is an embodiment of self-respect. It is also based on the premise that a reciprocal and equal relationship exists between two or more groups or individuals. That means the groups or individuals should have mutual and equal respect for each other. Lack of equality in a mutual relationship shows a lack of recognition or presence of misrecognition/non-recognition on the part of one of the groups or individuals. An attempt to seek equal treatment in mutual relationships by the misrecognised groups or individuals and response to them by other groups or individuals is an indication of the politics of recognition. Charles Taylor (1992) has conceived the politics of recognition within the framework of multiculturalism. This framework is about mutual and equal relationships among different groups about their democratic rights. A framework of multiculturalism focuses on respect, recognition, and autonomy of discrete identity groups. This framework was originally applied to the western context. Gurpreet Mahajan (2002) points out that the western discourse on multiculturalism locates the source of discrimination within the nation-state. It overlooks the sources of discrimination that exist outside the nation-state, such as discrimination against the minority groups in connivance with the government functionaries. In its application to India, a multicultural framework has been applied with reference to religious groups (Mahajan 1998, Ali 2000) or caste groups (Singh 2021). In the context of Northeast India, Haokip (2021: pp. 371-72) discusses the question of accommodating ethnic minorities in regional councils in terms of politics of recognition as defined by Charles Taylor.

9.2.3 Relationship between ethnicity and Politics of Recognition

What is the relationship between ethnicity and politics of recognition? When we apply the notion of recognition to ethnicity, we need to consider relationships of different ethnic groups among themselves and with the state/nation-state, government, officers, etc. In political recognition relating to ethnicity, there are different stakeholders: rival ethnic groups, state agencies. The issues in this politics involve rights of ethnic groups about political representation, political autonomy, recognition of national symbols; protection and preservation of their cultural identity (language, race, language, customs, status of women), natural resources, etc. In politics of recognition, ethnic groups feel that the rival groups do not treat them fairly/equally. The aggrieved ethnic groups attempt to recognise their rights, cultural and symbols, ethnic identity, protection and preservation of their social and cultural identity, and economic resources and opportunities. In such an attempt, they appeal to the state agencies or other ethnic communities. If

they feel that the state or other communities do not respond to their concerns in a fair/equal manner, they make their efforts to get recognition. They either invent or discover their cultural symbols and project them not inferior to the symbols of other communities. They also resort to collective political mobilisation. Grounds for grievances of ethnic groups are not always based on reality. On various occasions, they are constructed by the political elite such as middle classes, politicians, student leaders or other civil society organisations. Politics of recognition is manifested in different forms such as ethnic conflict, insurgency, attempts by the communities to address their grievances, demand for political autonomy in terms of autonomous councils, demands for new states/union territories. As ethnicity is based on both realistic and imagined markers, politics of recognition is also based on realistic and imagined factors. Whether such politics is shaped by realistic or imagined/constructed factors depends on the elite, which play a decisive role in politics of recognition. Moreover, this again depends on political context: rise middle classes/elite, elections, competition between leaders within ethnic groups. In ethnic politics of recognition, the state institutions generally get identified with one or the other ethnic groups. In such a situation, they also become part of the politics of recognition. They support or oppose the stance of one or the other ethnic group. The state responds by formulating policies or taking executive actions. Therefore, in politics of recognition, along with the ethnic groups, the role of the state or public institutions is included.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

1) What is meant by ethnicity and politics of recognition?

2) Discuss the relationship between ethnicity and the politics of recognition.

9.3 POLITICS OF RECOGNITION IN NORTHEAST INDIA

In view of their meanings explained above, we can understand the relationships between ethnicity and politics of recognition in Northeast India around the following points. These are the context, generation of a perception that ethnic communities do not get required recognition, and dimensions of politics of recognition. We can identify two broad dimensions of politics of recognition in Northeast India: social, cultural, and political. The social and cultural dimension is related to protecting and retaining symbols of social and cultural identities. The political dimension includes political autonomy, sovereignty, representation, creation of new states or Union Territories out of existing states or states or institutions such as autonomous district, regional or territorial councils to ensure political autonomy, and recognition of flag or constitutions ethnic communities claiming to be nations. The politics of recognition pertaining to ethnic groups in Northeast India has broadly three forms; One, with reference to relationships between the principal ethnic groups in a state such as between Bengalis and Assamese in Assam or tribals and non-tribals in Meghalaya, etc.; two, about relationships within an area between the communities each claiming to be indigenous and considering the other as non-indigenous/migrant, e.g., the conflict between Nagas and Kukis; and three, with reference to the relationship between ethnic groups and the state institutions (which are seen to be siding with one or the other ethnic groups). The politics of recognition in Northeast India is caused by the birth of consciousness within an ethnic community to seek social and cultural, and political recognition. It may arise due to realisation within an ethnic community that in comparison to or due to the other ethnic communities or neglect by the governments (centre or the state), it is not getting proper recognition by the state agencies or the other communities. With the help of some examples, this section of the unit deals with the context and dimensions of politics of recognition in Northeast India. This section of the unit is largely based on some literature on Northeast India: Sanjib Baruah, *Durable Disorder* (2005, *Beyond Counter-Insurgency* (2009); *India Against Itself* (1999); S.K. Chaube, *Hill Politics in North East India* (1973); Udayon Misra, *Burden of History* (2017); Sajal Nag, *Contesting Marginality* (2002), *Roots of Ethnic Conflict* (1990); and Joy L.K. Pachuau, *Being Mizo* (2014).

9.3.1 The context

The politics of recognition in Northeast India plays out in a specific political context. The latter is represented by the rise of opinion-makers, especially the middle classes/elite among the ethnic groups, elections, some significant political development other than elections, competition among politicians within the same parties or different parties, bargaining for ministerial berths at the time of formation of governments, etc. A leading role in politics of recognition in Northeast India has been played by middle classes/elites, students, or other civil society organisations. The rise of the middle class among the communities in the

Northeast can be traced to the colonial era. Such class emerged across the communities – tribals and non-tribals (Assamese and Bengalis). Its emergence among the tribal communities is more spectacular. But even among the tribals, its growth had not been even over the period. During the first half of the twentieth century, a middle class emerged among the tribes like in other communities. During the pre-Independence period, having got educated in Calcutta (now Kolkata), Guwahati and Shillong, the middle class of indigenous ethnic communities played a decisive role in articulating grievances of their respective communities. This class continued to grow in the post-Independence period among different indigenous communities in Northeast India. It had close relations with their ethnic communities. Their close association with their respective communities enabled them to reflect on issues or grievances of their respective communities. The grievances covered a wide range of issues social and cultural identities, political autonomy, and preservation of economic resources and opportunities. The elites from the indigenous ethnic communities in the Northeast - middle classes, students, politicians or civil society organisations generally identified the reasons for their grievances in nature of their relationships with the nation-state agencies/central police/governors, migrants from other regions, etc. They underline that such relationships lack equality in reciprocity. They are not given due recognition; their opinions are neglected, the central government often uses central government institutions to impose its decisions on them. Such opinion can be based both on reality and imagined factors. The efforts on the part of opinion makers to seek autonomy, equality in the relationship, self-respect, etc., indicate the existence of politics of recognition on the part of the communities in the region.

9.3.2 Social and Cultural Dimension

Some of the important aspects of the social and cultural dimension of the politics of recognition in Northeast India are related to language, recognition of the discrete identity of a tribe, preserving and protecting the identity of a tribe from the erosion in its original features. Language and Patois have been a source of ethnic conflict in Northeast India. The roots of it can be traced to the colonial period. Sajal Nag in *Roots of Ethnic Conflict* (1990) explains that during the colonial period, middle classes belonging to ethnic groups – Assamese and Bengalis-competed for recognition of their respective language – Assamese or Bengalis as an official language. Arguing in favour of the Bengali language, the Bengali intellectuals and middle classes argued that Bengali should be the official language and that Assamese was a Patois of Bengali. The Assamese gave a counter argument that Assamese was developed and independent with a long history; it should be recognised as an official language. Both sides appealed to the colonial authorities for recognition of their respective language as an official language. The colonial authorities took different stances depending on their interests or the pressure of respective ethnic communities. In 1838, the colonial authorities recognised Bengali as an official language in Assam. Bengali began to be taught in schools in Assam. The initial introduction of Bengali as an official language, official work in Assam (Ahom regime) was done in Persian. In 1873,

Bengali was replaced by Assamese as an official language. In the conflict over language questions during the colonial period, the colonial authorities supported the Bengali middle class; the missionaries supported the Assamese middle class. In the post-Independence period, during the 1960s, Assam witnessed language conflicts. The Assam Sahitya Sabha passed a resolution suggesting Assamese become an official language in the entire Assam, which included areas where non-Assamese languages formed lingua franca: hill areas (Khasi, Garo and Jaintia hills), and plain areas (Bengali-dominated Barak valley). The move faced opposition in the areas inhabited mostly by the non-Assamese linguistic communities. The language was also one of several issues in the Bodos' politics of recognition. These issues were included in the 92- points charter of demands of the All India Bodo Students Movement prepared after the 1987 Assam Accord. The Bodos objected to clause 6 of the Accord, which included Assamese as a concept for people of Assam whose interest the Assam Accord was expected to protect. In their opinion, the term Assamese subsumed the identity of smaller tribes such as Bodos. Instead of being known as Assamese, they wanted to be recognised as Bodos. "We are Bodos, not Assamese", they asserted (Baruah, *India Against Itself*, 1999). They argued that Bodos were original inhabitants of Assam, and the high castes of Assam had migrated from other parts of India. The Bodo intellectuals argued that Bodos were known by different names as the original inhabitants of Assam common language: Bodo. They argue that the language of Bodos and Kacharis, "the original master ruler of Assam," is "the most original and widespread in Assam". They counter the suggestion to make Assamese a "link language" in Assam by suggesting that Bodo can be a "link language" of the Assamese. They assert that their language (Bodo) is different from that of the ethnic Assamese; they also follow different cultural practices. For instance, unlike the ethnic Assamese, who burnt their dead bodies, the Bodo buried them or left their corpse in the open to be fed by vultures (Baruah, 1999: pp. 184-85). They also underline that their food and dressing patterns are different from those of the dominant communities, the Assamese (Baruah 1999, p. 186).

Several tribal ethnic groups in the Northeast feel that their indigenous identity has been eroded over the years. As ethnic identities in Northeast India are formed on the basis of multiple markers – language, race, kinship, the specific character of a tribe (such as matriarchy among the Khasis), the status of women, natural resources, etc, erosion in any of these markers is viewed as erosion in an entire identity. The indigenous communities complain that erosion of their identity is reflected in every marker of their identity, which impacts their overall ethnic identity. The reasons for their perception are both real and constructed. They count several factors accountable for erosion in their identity - unequal treatment by the state (especially the central government and institutions/agencies associated with it), the role of immigrants or non-indigenous ethnic communities. According to H. Kham Khan, Suan Post-colonial state "seems unduly privileged" to have exclusive material and symbolic power to designate a tribe as it wished: the encounter between tribes and the state was unequal (Suan 2011: 158).

Although it is the post-colonial state that has been largely held responsible for unequal treatment of the indigenous communities in the Northeast, scholars and activists from the Northeast often trace it to the policies of the colonial state. The post-colonial state does not consult them while devising policies about the region; this neglect is their misrecognition. Over the years, cultural practices and features of several indigenous tribes in the Northeast have undergone changes. As mentioned earlier, these changes have often been viewed as erosion in the features of the indigenous tribes. Among the Khasis of Meghalaya, such changes have generated a debate within their community. Various sections of the Khasis – students, middle classes, civil society organisations argue that the identity of the Khasi society has been adversely impacted due to exploitation of their economic resources and opportunities by the immigrants and other vested interests, and inter-ethnic marriages. Especially, inter-ethnic marriages are considered to be the main reason for the erosion of their matrilineal system. The changes in the features of the matrilineal system and other issues relating to the social and cultural identities have generated a debate within the Khasi tribe about the reasons for the changes and measures to be taken to preserve and restore them.

Both colonial and post-colonial authorities have created generic categories consisting of several individual tribes. For examples, Nagas and Mizos are not the original names of the tribes. Some of the individual tribes which form these generic groups prefer to be recognised by the names of their individual tribe. Mizos in the state of Mizoram largely identify themselves as Mizos. But those with domicile outside Mizoram prefer to identify themselves with their distinct names, such as Hmars and Paites. Even within Mizoram, the tribes such as Maras (formerly Lakhers) and Lais (also known as Pawis) prefer to be called by these names rather than Mizos (Pachau, 2014: pp. 10-12). Some tribes complain that the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order 1950 committed “errors” in their names. This has caused them problems for the indigenous tribes in availing government policies (especially outside Northeast India) and recognising indigenous names. For instance, some tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh – civil society organisations, especially students, have been demanding recognition of individual dignity (indigenous identities). They complain because of errors by the Constitutional (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, and “colonial interpretation”, ambiguity has been created in their identity. They understand that because of ambiguity in nomenclature, their number in Arunachal Pradesh is projected less than their actual numbers. In response to their demand, the Parliament in (the first week of August 2021) passed the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2021 to amend the list of Scheduled Tribes in Arunachal Pradesh. The Bill was passed after one year of cabinet approval to it. The Bill seeks to modify Part-XVIII of the Scheduled to the Constitution (Scheduled Order), 1950. The 2021 Bill seeks to correct the names of the 16 tribes whose names were spelt incorrectly, adds names of a few tribes whose names were written ambiguously or had their parent group only. However, the replacement of “Any Naga tribe” in the bill with specific names of these four Naga tribes i.e. Nocte, Tangsa, Tula and Wancho is opposed by the NSCN (IM)

on the ground that it will conceal their Naga identity. It is argued that it will undermine the cause of the creation of Nagalim or Greater Nagaland (Agarwala, 2021).

9.3.3 Political Dimension

As stated earlier, the basis of an ethnic identity formation may start with a single marker. But in due course, it may expand to include multiple markers. The elite/middle classes from ethnic communities in the Northeast channelised the feeling of neglect or recognition of their respective communities into political demands. These demands span from seeking regional, district or territorial councils, formation of new states, formation of states within old states, the introduction of Inner Line Permit (IPL), creation of a sovereign state, etc. In some cases, political mobilisation on these demands gets manifested in insurgency or ethnic conflicts. The context to the political dimension of politics of recognition in Northeast India is indicated by the rise of middle classes or elite; major political developments in any state of the region; elections; bargaining among political leaders at the time of government formation. In most Northeast Indian states, indigenous communities discover or invent symbols such as flags, constitutions, territorial autonomy, institutions, etc. They argue that they have been nations since time immemorial. Their nations had culture, territory, political sovereignty, autonomy, etc. These nations suffered at the hands of the state – colonial and post-colonial. The colonial state subjugated them, and the post-colonial state did not give them due to recognition. The latter imposed central institutions, neglected them, etc.). Some of them (such as Nagas) argued that they were never part of India: the British had subjugated them. After the withdrawal of the British, they said, they remained nations: they demanded that they should be accorded sovereignty. Other communities did not claim that they were never part of India but demanded recognition as a sovereign state.

In the 1950s-1960s, the Nagas and Mizos were engaged in insurgencies. The end of colonial power became a political context for the Nagas to assert that they had always been an independent nation. They discovered symbols of their nation and claimed to have a sovereign nation. Non-adherence to the Hydari accord in 1956 led to the birth of the Naga insurgency. However, the formation of Nagaland state in 1963 resulted in a decline of the Naga insurgency until the signing of the Shillong Accord in 1975. Demand for the creation of Nagalim is the latest phase of politics of recognition. The Mizo insurgency began in the wake of the famine of 1956 in Mizoram. The Mizos felt neglected by both the central government and state government in Assam, of which the Lushai (Mizo) hill was then apart.

The feeling of neglect on the part of Mizos implied that they were not treated equally in their reciprocity with the central and state government. The formation of Meghalaya state in 1972 provided a new political context for competitive politics in the new state. The new context was different from the earlier period. At that time, competitive politics took place within the state of Assam, between the Assamese and Assamese. After the formation of Meghalaya, the competition shifted to politicians with the new state. In the new context, the politicians

competed with each other. They alleged that the social and cultural identities of the indigenous were feared to be eroded (along with the exploitation of economic opportunities and resources). In the process, the indigenous tribes were neglected and discriminated. They underlined that their autonomy and identities needed to be protected. They adopted a two-pronged strategy to retrieve and protect their identity: efforts at the community level to invent and discover symbols of their identity, etc. and political mobilisation, formulating policies, etc. Elections often became the proper context for raising these issues.

Again in the 1960s, people in hills (Khasi, Jaintia, Garo and Mizo/Lushai) demanded the formation of a new hill state. There were two reasons for this: dissatisfaction against the functioning of the SDCs under the VI Schedule, and opposition to the introduction of Assamese as an official language, and medium instruction in areas where Assamese was not spoken. This finally resulted in reorganisation of Assam, leading to the formation of Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur as states and of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh as Union Territories. In the 1980s, some Bengalis in the Barak valley of Assam demanded separate statehood or Union Territory of Cachar. In the post-Assam Accord, the Bodo demanded the creation of Bodoland. Bodoland is an indigenised nomenclature of the more Sanskritised version of Udayachal, a demand for a new state of Bodos made earlier.

The non-indigenous communities also often complain that they are not equally treated with the tribal communities by the state-level agencies and local institutions in the federal structure. They complain that their misrecognition becomes more acute during a conflictual situation such as ethnic conflict, insurgency or disputes at individual levels.

Check Your Progress 2

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of the unit.

- 1) Discuss social and cultural dimensions of politics of recognition in Northeast India.

- 2) Explain political manifestation of politics of recognition in Northeast India.

9.4 LET US SUM UP

Ethnicity and politics of recognition have specific meanings. Ethnicity denotes relationships among groups that are formed on the basis of a consciousness that members of such groups share certain common features or markers. Such markers are culture, language, dressing pattern, dance, food, clan, race, customs, etc. An ethnic identity can be formed on the basis of single or multiple markers. Recognition denotes the existence of reciprocal and equal relationships among different ethnic groups. Recognition is based on the premise that every individual or group deserves self-respect and dignity. Recognition is provided by equality and reciprocity in the relationship. The absence of equality and reciprocity in the group relationship denotes a lack of recognition or misrecognition of the less resourceful/influential group. Politics of recognition means attempts to seek equality, self-respect or recognition in relationships among individuals or groups. In a multicultural society, ethnicity and the politics of recognition are interlinked. The relationship between ethnicity and politics of recognition suggests attempts on the part of an ethnic group to seek equality, self-respect, autonomy from the state or other ethnic group. In Northeast India, politics of recognition in relation to ethnic groups are of two types: One, relationship between different ethnic groups; two relationships between ethnic groups and state agencies. Politics of recognition in Northeast India has social and cultural, and political dimensions. Its social and cultural dimension includes attempts on the part of tribal groups to preserve and protect their cultural identities. They feel that these identities have been eroded because of the unequal treatment meted out to them by the state policies/central government and outsiders. Political ramifications of politics of recognition take the shape of insurgencies, demands for political autonomy by creating regional, districts or territorial councils or formation of separate states. Elite/middle classes play the principal role in this politics. Such politics also occurs in a specific political context.

9.5 REFERENCES

Agarwala, Tora (2021), “How Revising Arunachal Pradesh ST list helps self-identification”, *The Indian Express*, August 14.

Ali, Amir (2000), “Case of Multiculturalism in India”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 35, Nos. 28-29, 15 July, pp. 2503-5.

Baruah, Sanjib (ed.) (2009), *Beyond Counter-Insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

_____ (2005), *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press.

_____ (1999), *India Against Itself : Assam and Politics of Nationality*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Chaube, S.K. (1973), *Hill Politics in India*, Orient Longman, Delhi.

Taylor, Charles (1992), *Multiculturalism and Politics of Recognition*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Mahajan, Gurpreet (2002), *The Multicultural Path: Issues of Diversity and Discrimination in Democracy*, Sage Publications, New Delhi.

_____(ed.) (1998), *Democracy, Difference and Social Justice*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Misra, Udayon (2017), *Burden of History: Assam and the Partition – Unresolved*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Nag, Sajal (2002), *Contesting Marginality: Ethnicity, Insurgency and Subnationalism*, Manohar, New Delhi.

_____(1990), *Roots of Ethnic Conflict: Nationality Question in North-East India*, Manohar, New Delhi.

Pachau, Joy L.K. (2014), *Being Mizo: Identity and Belonging to North-East India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

Singh, Jagpal (2021), *Caste, State and Society: Degrees of Democracy in North India*, Routledge, London and New York.

_____(2011), “Contextualizing Ethnic Riots in North-East India: “Local” and “Outsiders” in Shillong City of Meghalaya” in Maya Ghosh and Arun K. Jana (eds.), *Development and Disorder: The Crisis of Governance in Northeast India and East of India*, South Asia Publishers, New Delhi, p. 188-211.

Suan, H. Kham Khan (2011), “Rethinking ‘Tribe’ Identities: The Politics of Recognition among the Zo in North-east India”, *Contributions to India Sociology*, 45, 2: 157-187.

9.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Ethnicity is about the relationship between ethnic groups. Ethnic groups are the groups that are formed on the basis of consciousness among the members of a group that they share common markers such as language, culture, customs, kinship, etc. Ethnic groups exist in relationships with other such groups. Politics of recognition denotes a reciprocal and equal relationship between different ethnic groups.
- 2) The relationship between ethnicity and politics of recognition implies attempts on the parts of ethnic groups to seek recognition of their social and cultural identities and political autonomy, representation, etc, the response of other ethnic communities and the state agencies.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The social and cultural dimension of politics of recognition is about protecting and preserving symbols of a community’s social and cultural identity. When a community realises that its language, customs,

indigenous features, etc., have to be protected or preserved, and it makes attempts in that direction, it is about recognising social and cultural identity.

- 2) In Northeast India, political manifestation in recognition assumes the form of demands for new states or union territories or a sovereign state, for creating autonomous regional, district or territorial councils, etc. Sometimes, it assumes the form of insurgency or ethnic riots.



