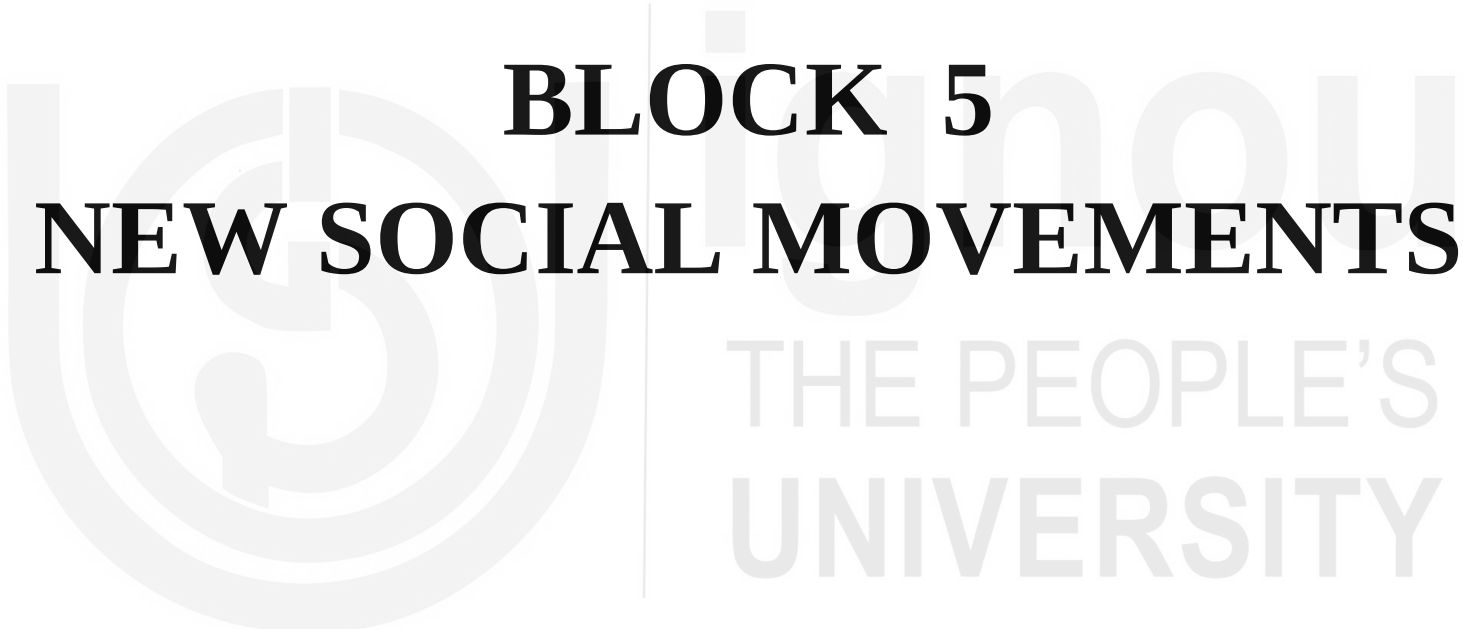




BLOCK 5

NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Social movements play a significant role in the democratic political system and influence development discourse and processes. This block aims to appraise the role and significance of social movements in the northeast region. This block consist of 4 units. Unit-11 Elaborates upon the significant issues and patterns in Northeast India students' movements regarding their role in the region's politics. Unit-12 deals with women's movements in Northeast India, the reasons and characteristics, and their role in social transformation and challenging gender stereotypes. Unit-13 presents a brief description of the environmental movement and its central concerns in the Northeast. Unit-14 aims to present a broad depiction of the dynamics and nature of human rights movements in Northeast India. The unit discusses human rights violations and explains the nature and operational dimensions of human rights movements in the region.



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UNIT 11 STUDENTS' MOVEMENTS*

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Movements in the Northeast India
 - 11.2.1 Assam
 - 11.2.2 Meghalaya
 - 11.2.3 Arunachal Pradesh
 - 11.2.4 Other States
- 11.3 Student Movement and Party Politics
- 11.4 Let Us Up
- 11.5 References
- 11.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the significance of students' movements in Northeast India;
- Discuss their role in addressing various issues in the regions; and
- Analyse their role in the politics of the region.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Students' movements in the Northeast India are the most vocal, influential and articulate group. All states of the regions have witnessed students' movements to varying extent. They have addressed all kinds of issues in their respective issues which pertain to the academic institutions, ethnic or tribal identity, migration, boundary disputes, political autonomy of their respective regions, corruption, social issues, environment, development, Inner Line Permit, citizenship, etc. The priority given to these issues varies according to the political and economic context of the students' movements in different states. Generally, the students' movements in the Northeast collaborate or converge with other movements. Political leaders often consult student leaders in their respective states. Although students' movements in the Northeast India became more visible in the public space in the post-Independence period, they were active in pre-Independence period too. An important feature of students' movement in Northeast India is its

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relationship with ethnic or tribal identity. The students' organisations that play leading role in the movements in different states of Northeast India can be identified on the basis of ethnic or tribal identity. Their movements are supported by other sections of the society which are not students or in many cases the other social organisations than the students also participate in the movements of the students. The common way to mobilise their support is bandh/blocake, public curfew, etc. On several occasions the students' movement leads to violence between the police and students. Sometime it also results in ethnic conflict between different ethnic groups. In such riots, students get identified with their ethnic communities. In all these movements, the leadership was provided by the newly educated young elites. In the subsection 11.2, you will read about the students' movements in different states of Northeast India. As all states do not witness equal levels of students' mobilisation, the discussion in this unit deals with examples from some states. The discussion focuses on the broad patterns in students' movements in some states of Northeast India.

11.2 MOVEMENTS IN THE NORTHEAST INDIA

11.2.1 Assam

Among the issues which have been raised in the students' movements in Assam are related to migration, setting up of oil refinery, ethnic and cultural identity and political autonomy. Some students organisations such as the All Assam Students Union (AASU), All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU), All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), Karbi Students Association (KBA), and Dimasas Students Union (ADSU) and All Cachar Students' Association (ACSA) have been mobilising students in Assam. The role of the students in setting up of refinery in Assam and for getting language accepted as the state language in the 1960s, and ant-foreign national movement, and from the 1980s the role AAMSU and of the Bodo students about the protection of their ethnic identities and getting political autonomy are important examples of students' movement in Assam. The principal way of mobilisation included demonstrations, rallies, bandhs, *satyagrah*, economic blockade, etc. The six year movement against the foreign nationals led by the AASU is the most important example of one the longest movements in the country. This movement became a reference point of the students' movements in the Northeast India from 1979. This movement began in 1979 and ended in 1985 with the signing of Assam Accord between the AASU, state the central government. The immediate reason for the movement was the reported inclusion of a large number of bogus voters in the voters' list for the by-election to Mangaldai Lok Sabha seat. This was highlighted by the Chief Election Commissioner S.L. Sakhdhar, who warned that if inclusion of illegal migrants was not stopped, it might change the demographic composition of the state. The inclusion of illegal voters in the voters' triggered six year anti-foreign national movement in Assam. In the 1960s, the students of Assam along with other sections of the society demanded getting Assamese declared as the state language in Assam. Indeed, the involvement of the Assamese students to get the recognition of Assamese recognised as official language against Bengali had

been happening during the colonial period from the third decade of the nineteenth century. Despite the protest in the areas where Assamese was not spoken by most people, the government declared Assamese as the state language. The recognition of Assamese as an official language in entire Assam that consisted of areas where Assamese was not spoken by most people led to protest in other regions, the hills and the Barak Valley. There emerged the demand for formation of the hill state out of hill districts of Assam, and for the formation of Purvanchal in Barak valley of the state. In 1966, the All Assam Students Union (AASU) emerged as a platform of Assam's students. The students of Assam along with Asom Sahitya Sabha and Assamese intellectual launched the oil refinery movement in the 1960s. The oil refinery movement was launched to this decision of the central government in (Kolkata) Calcutta, not in Assam which had oil reserves. The students in Assam considered the decision of the central government as an act of step motherly treatment to Assam. As a consequence of the students' protest, the central government established oil refinery in Noonmati, Guwahati on January 1, 1962.

The six year movement was led by the AASU, in which other organisations such as Asom Gan Parishad participated, and other sections including the plain tribes such as Bodos had participated. This movement was largely led by the students belonging to Assamese middle classes. The Bengali speaking Hindu and Muslims felt directly threatened by the demand of AASU to detect and deport the illegal migrants from Assam. They thought the movement wrongly targeted them as illegal migrants. In May 1980, the students belonging to these groups formed a new organisation known as the All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU). The AAMSU demanded that the immigrants who came into Assam before 1971 should be given citizenship. The AASU had opposed the formation of the AAMSU, and there were violent conflicts between the supporters of two organisations in the areas where the "immigrants" formed substantial population.

The students belonging to the plain tribes such as Bodos had participated in the six year movement. But they developed differences with the clause 6 of the Assam Accord. The Bodo students along with their community complain that the provisions of the Accord do not recognise their cultural identity – language. They realised the need to have political autonomy to decide about the linguistic and cultural identity and bring about development. This realisation resulted in revival of their demand for an autonomous state of Bodoland. The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), which was formed on 15, 1967 submitted memorandum in 1987 to chief minister of Assam, Prime Minister of India, and the President of India demanding provisions for protection of their social and cultural identity, protecting their language and economic interests. In the same year, the ABSU also launched the Bodoland movement for creation of a state of Bodoland out of Assam. As you have read in Unit 8, the Bodo autonomy movement finally led to the signing of three accords which granted autonomy to the Bodos.

Students from the hills tribes of Assam – Karbis and Dimasas also have mobilised support for fulfilment of demands relating to students from their tribes as well as general demands of their tribes. The Karbi Students Association along with other

organisations of their tribes seeks measures for retention and protection of their social and cultural identity. In 1991, the Dimasa students founded All Dimasa Students' Union (ADSU). The ADSU has been demanding for creation of state of 'Dimaraji' comprising those all territories, which according to them were included in the ancient Dimasa Kachari kingdom. In their perception creation of a new state will give them autonomy to decide about their welfare.

11.2.2 Meghalaya

Students' movement in Meghalaya is the most vocal articulate and frequent social movement in the state. There is hardly any issue in the state which the students' has not taken up. Most common issues on which students have been mobilised include influx of migration into Meghalaya, protection of the tribal identity, increase in reservation in the state government institutions for the local tribes, protection of natural resources and environment, introduction of Inner Line Permit in Meghalaya, governance, power and railway projects, etc. Student movement in Meghalaya on several occasions has resulted in their confrontation with police resulting in arrest of students leaders. This gets linked to their demand and agitation for the release of students from the police custody. The common modus operandi of the movement include blockade, junta curfew (curfew imposed by the students, not the government).

The most popular student organisation in Meghalaya is the Khasi Students Union (KSU). It was set up in 1978. Prior to the formation of the KSU, there had existed some students' organisations in Meghalaya. The first students' organisation, i.e. the Khasi Students' Association (KSA) was formed in 1955 when the Khasi Hills were part of Assam, before the Meghalaya state came into being. It raised the issue of educational backwardness of the Khasi tribe. In 1960, the Hills Students' Union was formed. It mainly focused on demand for setting up a university and law college in the hills. In 1968, the Meghalaya Students' Association (MSA), and in 1970 the Shillong Students' Union (SSU) were established. The MSA and SSU had opposed the shifting of Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) headquarter from Shillong to Tura. In 1975, the Meghalaya Students' Union (MSU) was formed. Its main demand was deportation of the Bangladeshi refugees who came into Meghalaya during the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971. By the time the KSU was formed, the organisations were borne earlier had ceased to exist. Apart from the KSU, the Garo Students Union (GSU) also plays an active role in Meghalaya's student politics.

Students' movement in Meghalaya began with protest against introduction of Assamese as a language medium of education in higher educational institutions in Assam in the 1960s. The students in the hills that later became state of Meghalaya had also participated in movement for creation of a hill state. The student movement in Meghalaya became consistent after the formation of Meghalaya state in 1972. In the 1970s, the KSU took lead in demanding prevention of immigration of Bangladeshis and Nepalis into Meghalaya. It also demanded exit from the state of migrants which had come to Meghalaya from other parts of the country. The students argued the migration of people from

other parts of the country deprived the local tribes of economic avenues, and affected their ethnic identity. They demanded that the local tribes should be provided increase in reservation of jobs in public institutions, increase in the seats for them in the state legislature, and expulsion of the migration from other states, etc. They also demand introduction of Inner Line Permit to prevent the outsiders from coming into the state. On these demands, the KSU and the FKJGP (Federation of Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo People) have launched several agitations since the 1970s. Their agitations have certain patterns. The agitations begin with some rally, in which student leaders deliver the speeches, and call for bandh in Shillong city or imposition of junta curfew. During the 1970s-1990s, students' agitations in Shillong resulted in ethnic violence between the local tribals and non-tribals, who migrated into Shillong in different phases from the late nineteenth century. Three ethnic riots in Shillong which took place in 1979, 1987 and 1992 were related to the KSU agitation (Singh 2011). In 2000, and 2013, the students' movements led by the KSU, GSU, FKJGP demanded implementation of the IIP for immediate control on the influx of outsiders, giving work permit to outsiders for working in Meghalaya, along with demand for introducing other measures for protecting the identities and interests of the local tribes – the Khasis, Garos and Jaintias. As you will read in units 13 and 14, there were other social movements too, against the illegal extraction of coal from the mines in Jaintia Hills in 2018, and against the Government of India's project to mine uranium by Uranium Corporation of India Limited (UCIL) from the regions of West and South West Khasi Hills Districts since 1993. The KSU has also protested against the illegal coal mining in the Jaintia Hills and extraction of Uranium by the UCIL. The students in Meghalaya have also protested against the railhead project. They argue that the project will encourage the influx of outsiders into the states.

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) What was the six year movement about?

2) Discuss the role of the KSU in students' movement in Meghalaya.

11.2.3 Arunachal Pradesh

The Adi-Mishing' Student Union (AMSU) was the first student organisation which appeared in Pashighat in North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) that became Arunachal Pradesh a Union Territory in 1972. The students belonging to the Adi and Mishing tribes started the student movement under the banner of the AMSU. The AMSU union focussed on creating awareness of social change through emphasis on education. The AMSU was renamed as All-North Eastern Frontier Agency Students Union (ANEFASU), and it was again renamed Arunachal Pradesh Students union (AAPSU) in 1972 after Arunachal Pradesh became a Union Territory. The AAPSU is the most vocal and largest student organisation in Arunachal Pradesh having its units in almost educational institution in the state. It maintains coordination with the students studying outside the state. The AAPSU focuses on various issues concerning the students and society in general in the state. These issues largely include boundary dispute between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, detection and deportation of foreign nationals from the state, effective control of infiltration on foreign nationals, withdrawal of land allotment permit and trade licence from the people who are Arunachalis. During around the first decade of its existence, of the AAPSU was limited only to sending petitions to the government. The petitions focussed on the problems of the student community, and in some instances the issues concerning general public interests. In 1980, the AAPSU called for a two-day bandh in the whole of Arunachal Pradesh. The bandh got support from the students as well as public. The AAPSU sent a memorandum to the government. Its principal demands included: 80 percent jobs reservation to the Arunachalis, stopping of allotment of contract to non Arunachalis, etc. Taking cue from the AASU movement against the foreign national in Assam, in the year 1982, the AAPSU demanded for the deportation of Bangladeshis from the Arunachal Pradesh, i.e, the Chakmas, Hajongs, Tibetans, Yobins refugees. The common issue – expulsion of foreign nationals from their respective states established coordination between the AAPSU and the AASU. The students also demanded stricter implementation of the ILP for Indian citizens. After the signing of Assam Accord in 1985, the students in Arunachal Pradesh fear that the Accord would have a fall out: infiltration of foreigners into Arunachal Pradesh from Assam. On February 3, 1986, the AASU launched an agitation demanding 100 percent reservation to Arunachalis. A student, named Kipa Kache of Nypin secondary school was killed in the agitation due to the police firing.

11.2.4 Other States

Apart from Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh as discussed in the sub-sections above, there also exist students' organisations in other states of Northeast India. These organisations mobilise students on their specific issues, and along with other sections of the society on other issues such as migration, ethnic identity. Some examples of these organisations are: All Nagaland College Students Union (ANCSU), Dimpur Naga Students (DNS), Angami Students' Union (ASU) in Nagaland; All Manipur Students' Union (AMSU), Manipur

Students Federation (MSF), Students Union of Kangleipak (SUK) in Manipur; Sikkim University Students' Association (SUSA), Students Union of Sikkim (SUK) in Sikkim; Tribal Students Union (TSU), Twiptra Students' Federation (TSF), All India Students Association (AISA) in Tripura. In Mizoram also there exist students' organisation that mobilise students in the state. This section discussed students' movement in Mizoram as an example of patterns in the students' movements in these states.

Students' movements in Mizoram like their counterparts have been active in the region playing important role in social and political issues. The origin of students' movement in Mizoram dates back to 1924 when the first student association named Lushai Students' Association (LSA) was established by students studying in Calcutta (Kolkata), Guwahati and Shillong. In 1935, the Mizo students studying in Shillong formed another students' organisation known as Lushai Zirlai pawl (LZP). Later, the name of the LZP was changed to Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZP) or Mizo Students' Association. Mizoram also saw the emergence of various other students organisations such as Mizo Students' Union (MSU), Mara Students' Organisation (MSO), Hmar Students Association (HAS), Lai Students' Association, Siamsin Pawl Pi (SSPP). Among these organisations, the MZP and the MSU emerged as the most effective and active students' movements in Mizoram. The main objectives of the MZP are to safeguard the rights and unity of all Mizo students, preparing them to become helpful citizens, uniting all Mizo tribes for the creation of an independent Mizo state, prevention of corruption and conservation of traditional Mizo values.

Among the most important role of Mizo students was their protest against the neglect of the Assam government during Mautam famine or Bamboo famine of 1959. It resulted in significant loss of lives and damage of crops. This attitude of the then Assam government incensed the students. The students launched a fasting protest in Shillong against the Assam government. The crisis during the *Mautam* famine led to the creation of the Mizo National Front (MNF). In 1972, along with the announcement for the autonomous state of Meghalaya, the government of India upgraded the Mizo District Council into Union Territory. The students saw this as an insult to the Mizo people and contrary to their aspiration for having political autonomy. The decision was also seen as an effort by the central government to weaken the MNF. The Mizo students submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India demanding for a peaceful settlement of the Mizo problems through peaceful negotiations with the MNF.

The Mizo students played decisive role in restoring peace in the Mizo Hills or Mizoram that had witnessed insurgency for around two decades. Under the leadership of the MZP and MSU, the Mizo students played important role in convincing both the government of India and the MNF to come to the peace table. In 1976, the students' movement was successful in bringing both parties for talks. However, the peace talk could not succeed. The failure of the peace talk on January 12, 1982 was followed by the imprisonment several students' leaders. This resulted in some students joining the underground political activities, some others joined the Mizoram Congress (I), few of them joined the ruling party and

some others formed a another students organisation known as the Students' Conference for Action Programme (SCAP) supporting the ruling party. Meanwhile, a students' organisation known as Mizo Peace Forum (MPF) was jointly formed by the Mizo Students' Union (MSU) and the All Mizo Post Graduate Students' Union (AMPGSU).

The students formed Students Joint Action Committee (SJAC) in 1985 following the resumption of talks in 1984 between the central government and the MNF. The peace talks again failed. However, on the insistence of the SJAC, the peace exercise was resumed. The SJAC organised public procession, agitations and protest in Aizawl during 1986 to speed up the peace negotiation. Finally the Peace Settlement was signed in New Delhi by the MNF and Government of India on June 30, 1986. Apart from mobilising support for restoration of peace in Mizorm, the students in Mizoram have been active in raising the issue of settlement of the Chakmas in the state. They point out that the Chakmas are not indigenous community of the state of Mizoram. In 2013, the Federal Assembly of MZP passed a resolution to have a "Chakma Foreigner Census." They also demanded for the abolition of the Pawi Lakher Regional Council and the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) because the MZP believed that the CADC is a safe haven for Chakma foreigners whom they consider to be illegal migrants from Bangladesh.

11.3 THE STUDENT MOVEMENT AND PARTY POLITICS

Relationship between the student movement and politics can be viewed in two ways. One way is about their role in mobilisation on various issues with maintaining their autonomy from political parties. Another way is mobilisation by the students' organisations working as students' wings of political parties. In Northeast India, students' movements apparently remain apolitical in the sense of not being affiliated to a party. While they collaborate with the movements of other social groups, they maintain their autonomy. However, in practice, it is difficult for the students' movement to remain aloof from party politics. Student leaders and their organisations seek support of political parties and leaders in resolution of their grievances. Similarly, political parties and leaders also consult the student leaders on various issues. Sometimes, students launch movements in certain political context: before after the elections, competition between leaders and parties, formation of government (Singh 2011). In Assam, the regional leadership of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) had emerged from the six year student movement. The first AGP chief minister of Assam, Praful Kumar Mahanta, was the leader of the AASU before the formation of the AGP. In other states too, leaders belonging to political parties started their political activities as students' leaders.

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) Discuss the features of students' movement in Mizoram.

2) Explain the relationship between students' movement and party politics in Northeast India.

11.4 LET US SUM UP

Students' movements' are the most assertive and sustained social movements in Northeast India. Students' organisations in all states of the region carry out students' movements with varying degree of intensity and duration. They address not only issues concerning students and educational institutions but also general issues relating to their society and ethnic communities. Students' organisations in Northeast India can generally be identified with respective ethnic communities or tribes. Often, they collaborate with the movements of other social groups in their respective areas. The most common issues of mobilisation in students' movements relate to academic institutions, ethnic or tribal identity, migration, boundary disputes, political autonomy of their respective regions, corruption, social issues, environment, development, Inner Line Permit, citizenship, etc. Apart from the common issues, the students' movements address specific issues concerning the tribe or ethnic group with which the students' organisation is identified. The modus operandi of students movements include strike, dharna or road blockade. Sometimes the students' movements lead to the clashes between the students and police or ethnic violence. Six year Assam movement (1979-1985) led by the AASU against foreign citizens was the most sustained student movement in Northeast India. It became the reference point of other students' movements in Northeast India. Formally, the students' organisations in the Northeast are generally not part of party politics. In that sense they claim to be apolitical. But they are not completely disassociated from the party politics. On several occasions the political parties and the students' movements collaborate with each other. In Assam, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and its leadership had emerged from the students' movements. In other states also, some political leaders have emerged from the students' movements.

11.5 REFERENCES

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11.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) The six year (1979-1985) movement was against the foreign nationals in Assam. It started with the reports of inclusion of false names in the electoral roles on the occasion of by-election to Mangldai Lok Sabha election. The movement was led by the AASU in which other civil society organisations and social groups had participated. The movement ended with the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985.
- 2) The KSU is the most prominent students' organisation in Meghalaya. It has been active in mobilising students on issues concerning students and society in general. It takes up issues such migration, social and cultural identity, environment, mining, corruption, etc. It operates in collaboration with other sections of the society. Several political leaders in Meghalaya began their political career in the KSU.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) The students' movement in Mizoram like those in other states of Northeast India address concerns of the students as well as general issues of society, mainly cultural and social identity, political autonomy, corruption. But they have also played important role in peace building exercises during the phase of insurgency in Mizoram.
- 2) Generally, the student movements in the Northeast have been apolitical in the sense that they do not have formal affiliation with political parties. But they maintain coordination with political parties. And some political leaders in the Northeast started their political career as student leaders.

UNIT 12 WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS*

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Issues and Characteristics
- 12.3 Movements in the States
 - 12.3.1 Nagaland
 - 12.3.2 Manipur
 - 12.3.3 Assam
 - 12.3.4 Mizoram
 - 12.3.5 Meghalaya
- 12.4 Limitations
- 12.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.6 References
- 12.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify the issues of the women's movements in Northeast India;
- Explain the reasons for the rise of these movements;
- Discuss their characteristics and patterns of mobilisation; and
- Explain the challenges and limitations before the women's movements in the region.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Women's movements in Northeast India are among the most visible movements of this region as well as other parts of India. They have raised voices against gender-based injustice, alcoholism and drug abuse, the coercion by the agencies such as the army or police, as well as for political autonomy or representation. They are effective agencies of social transformation in society. Some of them are redefining and challenging gender stereotypes. As collective action, these movements contribute to the consolidation and deepening of democracy. There exist women's organisations in most states of the region. In comparison to other regions of the country, the literature on the women's movement in Northeast India is limited. It is obvious in the literature review on women's movements in

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the book *Social Movements in India: A Review of Literature* by Ghanshyam Shah (2004).

This unit deals with the collective mobilisation or women's social movements in Northeast India. Especially, it focuses on the women's movements in the region regarding the issues they address, organisations, leadership, mobilisation, and their limitations and challenges.

12.2 ISSUES AND FEATURES

Women's issues in Northeast India have some common issues and share certain characteristics. However, as you will read in section 12.4 of this unit, the priority of women's movements' issues varies in different states of the region. The women's movements in Northeast India operate in collaboration with the movements or civil society organisations in their respective states. The issues which the women's movements take up are not confined exclusively to women's or gender-based issues. These movements address all kinds of issues relating to their societies – social, cultural, economic, and political issues. Specifically, these issues include: restoring peace during insurgency or ethnic violence, opposing AFSPA or excessive use of force by police or army, getting representation in political institutions, civic vigilance against alcoholism or drug misuse, gender equality within the community, environmental issues, self-respect, right to inheritance and succession, natural calamities, corruption, etc. These issues can be categorised as social and cultural recognition, political representation, autonomy and self-determination, and redistributive/economic justice and opportunities. In other parts of India, the women's movement's major common issues include rape, sexual harassment in the workplace, violence against women in public and workplaces (Shah 2004: 164).

Women's movement in Northeast India share come features. They are apolitical. It does mean not that they do not participate in politics. Indeed, their mobilisation into collective action or social movement is a political act what it means that they do not have a formal relationship with political parties. However, they may be supported by political parties or they may support political parties. Even the individuals in the movement may have affiliations with political parties. But by and large, women's movements are apolitical. They are also believed to be spontaneous. Their spontaneous emergence has some background or political context. Even though women play a dominant role in their movement, they mobilise the support of other sections of the society or work in collaboration with them. These movements are largely peaceful. They have strong roots in their communities.

12.3 MOVEMENTS IN THE STATES

There are variations in women's movements in different states of Northeast India in terms of priority of the issues, leadership, level of people's participation, ethnic support, etc. Because of this, the unit focuses on some patterns of women's movements in some states of Northeast India.

12.3.1 Nagaland

Nagaland often has been witness to disturbances caused due to insurgency or ethnic conflict. This has affected the life and livelihood of the people in the state. Women in the state have attempted to restore peace in the state. Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) is one such women's organisation in Nagaland. The Naga Mother's Association was born on February 14, 1984. Its preamble underlined the need for sensitising the Nagas towards a meaningful life and human development. And this could be possible by restoring a peaceful atmosphere in the state. The NMA adopted the principle of "Shed No More Blood" as its motto. The NMA took it upon itself to initiate peace in the region. It was instrumental in facilitating a ceasefire between the Government of India and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issac- Muivah) NSCN (IM) in 1997. During the Naga-Kuki conflict in the 1990s, women's groups belonging to both ethnic communities, Nagas and Kukis, attempted to restore peace. The NMA, Naga Women's Union Manipur (NWUM) and the Kuki Women's Association engaged with their respective groups to stop the violence. These women's groups walked through long stretches of hills for days to persuade underground outfits belonging to their respective communities from indulging in violence.

The NMA also sought representation through elections in Municipal bodies. In 2016, Naga civil society groups, under the banner of the Joint Action Committee on Women Reservation, filed a petition in the Gauhati High Court and later in the Supreme Court on holding elections to the Local Urban Bodies (LUB) in Nagaland. In response to this petition, the Supreme Court vacated the stay on the order of the high court. In the light of the Supreme Court's order, the state government was expected to hold the elections in February 2017. The Gauhati High Court had stayed its earlier order in which it had ordered the Nagaland government in June 2012 to hold the election to the Local Urban Bodies. That order of the High Court too was passed in response to the petition filed by the Naga civil society groups in June 2011, challenging the refusal of the state government of Nagaland to hold the elections to the Local Urban Bodies according to the Nagaland Municipal (First Amendment Act) 2006. In the light of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1994, the 2006 Act provided for 33 % reservation for women in the local urban bodies. The suggestion to give 33% reservation to women to contest seats for Local Urban Bodies was opposed by the Naga Ho Ho, an apex body representing various Naga tribes, that giving reservation to women in elected bodies violated Art. 371A because no law passed by the Parliament, if it violates customary laws, can be applied to the Nagas. The Naga Ho Ho suggested that women can represent in Local Urban Bodies through nomination but not by contesting elections. The women's group argued that Local Urban Bodies were not traditional institutions, and thus reservation in them did not violate customary laws (*Economic and Political Weekly*, June 21, 2017).

12.3.2 Manipur

Women's movements in Manipur can be traced to the colonial period. In 1904 and 1939, *Nupilan* (*Nupi*=Women; *Lan*= War) in Manipur had protested against a British order. In this order, men were asked to rebuild the British Political Agent's house which had been doused in fire. The women viewed this as forced labour called *Lallup*. In *Lallup*, the men within the age-group of 17-60 were forced to work without payment for 10 days in the period of every 40 days. A large number of women participated in the movement, which lasted for a week. The British later suppressed the movement but had to withdraw the order later. The *Nupilan* became a source of inspiration for the women's movement in the post-Independence period. In the 1980s, a women's group, *Meira Paibi* (*the torch bearer*), which sought inspiration from *Nupilan* worked to dissuade young males from drinking. *The Meira Paibi* would go around their localities with lit torches and detain young males indulging in "anti-social activities" like drinking, taking the drug, etc. They were also vigilant when the armed wings of the state came to localities to arrest the youth. The modus operandi of *Meira Paibi* to mobilise people includes clanking on the electric poles. It has a ripple effect as *Meira Paibi* groups start gathering on the streets. The mobilisation by the *Meira Paibi* groups is sustained. The *Meira Paibi*, like the other women's organisations in the regions, face opposition from the state agencies. They have not acted at the bidding of any political party or organisation. They also do not follow any political ideology.

Along with other sections of the society, women in Manipur have been involved in collective mobilisation and at individual levels to demand the withdrawal of the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Power Act), 1958. The hunger strike undertaken by a social activist, Irom Sharmila, for this purpose is noteworthy. Irom Sharmila set the longest hunger strike, more than 16 years long, demanding the withdrawal of the AFSPA.

12.3.3 Assam

Women's movements in Assam took up different kinds of issues – violence against women, self-respect for women, gender-based wage discrimination, patriarchal values/hierarchy, restoration of peace during conflicts, promotion of education, ban of alcoholism, political representation/autonomy. During the colonial period, *Chandraprabha Saikiani* established *Mahila Samiti* in 1926 in Tezpur, there were various movements against violence against women, women's low literacy, gender discrimination wages and workplaces and encouraging women's self-esteem in society, in general. They also conducted peace campaigns and raised their voice against unequal treatment of women in society, and challenged the patriarchy inherent in it. Later this organisation broke into various smaller groups with *Tezpur District Mahila Samiti* as the major constituent of it. In the post-independence period also, the *Mahila Samitis* have been promoting education among women, bringing out their skills and act against alcoholism and other vices. In the situation of violence that occurred during the ULFA's activities, the women's movements in Assam worked for establishing

peace. Award winning author, Mamoni Raisom Goswami, mediated for peace between the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the State of India on her own without associating herself with any formal organisation. In 1992, Daimary formed the Bodo Women Justice Forum to bring about awareness of the community's rights. As the leader of the Bodo Women Justice Forum, she protested against the deployment of army in the region. The Bodo women have also participated in Bodo autonomy movement, especially after the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, for establishment of a separate state of Bodoland led by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU). The Bodo women also used literary means to articulate their views and spread awareness about the social, economic and political issues. They wrote scripts for street plays, poetry with strong political messages. Anjali Daimary wrote a satire in verse on the 'Corpse of Democracy' after witnessing the many irregularities in the first democratic elections to the BTC (Bodo Territorial Council). In this satire, she pointed out the rise of elites among the Bodos and deprivation of the poor. She is a Sahitya Academy Award winner.

12.3.4 Mizoram

Mizo women have been participant in collective action for, and changes in the customary laws that govern marriage, political autonomy, and representation in the legislative bodies. etc. The Mizo women under the banner of an organisation Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP) have been demanding for changes in Mizo Marriage Laws, especially they demand abolition of Mizo Bride Price in Mizo marriages. The MHIP was created in 1974. Unlike several women's organisation that focus making peace, the Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP) questions the customary laws. The members of the MHIP said underline that just like the age old customs such as child-marriage can be illegal, the bride price in Mizoram need to be declared illegal. They have also been campaigning against violence against women, discrimination in workplaces, and for 33% women's reservation in the political system of their state. The Mizo Women's Movement have been campaigning with the *State Law Commission* to review The Mizo Marriage Bill 2013, The Mizo Inheritance Bill 2013 and The Mizo Divorce Bill 2013. The Commission has taken the cognisance to review these Bills. This was the result of long struggles of Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl (MHIP). After years of advocacy and repeated attempts at sending memorandums and draft bills to the Assembly and other executive bodies, the MHIP finally managed to push the system into considering judicial and legislative changes in the marriage, divorce, inheritance and succession laws in order to safeguard the interests of ordinary women.

During the period of Mizo insurgency which began following the severe *Mautam* (Famine) of 1959, Mizo women had protested against the army. Especially, the women had protested the rape of two women allegedly by the soldiers. It happened when army retaliated in response to the MNF's attack on the army convoy in Champhai village in east Mizoram. In retaliation the army also allegedly herded the villagers together and set fire to their homes. After several

years, a compensation of Rs five lakh each to two women was announced. It was such crimes that prompted various women's groups to come together and fight for their collective rights. Among their main challenges has been to convince people to change traditional systems and customs that are discriminatory to women.

Check Your Progress 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) Identify the main issues of the women's movements in Northeast India.

2) Discuss the role of women's movements in peace making in the Northeast India.

12.3.5 Meghalaya

Women in Meghalaya have been addressing different issues of society through the civil society organisations or in their individual capacities. Some of these issues include welfare of marginalised sections of society such as children, differently abled persons or the poor; environmental degradation due to mining and deforestation, and reforms with the social system. *Synjuk Kynthei* an organisation runs crèches and supports poor students. '*Seng Teilang Ki Kynthei Laban*' and '*Ka Lympung Ki Seng Kynthei*' (1992) concerned themselves with the uplift of differently abled persons, marginalised women and children. They pioneered crèches in the community to encourage women to work; a pre-primary school; maternity and child welfare centre; and conducted training for tailoring, knitting and embroidery from which students could establish themselves. A section of women seek changes in traditional rules of inheritance and succession defined by the matrilineal system that exists among the Khasis.

12.4 LIMITATIONS

The women's movements in the states of Northeast India largely operate within the boundaries of specific ethnic groups. Although they form broad alliances with the movements of other social groups within their own communities in their respective states, they do not have inter-ethnic alliances in their respective states

or across the states. There is a need to form a joint front of the women from all the ethnic groups in the whole North east region. Their exclusion from the decision-making bodies restricts them to effectively impact policy formulations. Besides, the defined gender roles constrain women's participation in politics or collective action.

Check Your Progress 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) Write a note on Women's movement in Meghalaya.

2) Enumerate the limitations of Women's movements in Northeast India.

12.5 LET US UP

The states in Northeast India have witnessed women's movements. They have addressed various issues - gender-based injustice, alcoholism and drug abuse, the coercion by the agencies such as the army or police, for political autonomy or representation, restoration of peace during insurgency or ethnic conflict. Conceptually, these issues can be categorised as those relating to social and cultural recognition, political representation and autonomy. They are agencies of social transformation and women's empowerment. They are generally apolitical in the sense that they do not have an affiliation to political parties. They are primarily instinctive and spontaneous but have a structured agency to work and priorities the issues. Women's movements generally ally with other civil society movements of their respective communities. Women's movements in different states of the region differ in terms of priority of the issues, level of participation. The movements generally focus on the issues of their specific communities.

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12. 7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The main issues in the women's movements in Northeast India are restoring peace during insurgency or ethnic violence. The women's movement also includes opposing AFSPA or excessive use of force by police or army, getting representation in political institutions, civic vigilance against alcoholism or drug misuse, gender equality within the community, environmental issues, self-respect, right to inheritance and succession, natural calamities, corruption, etc.
- 2) Women in the states, especially in Nagaland, have played a decisive role in restoring peace disturbed by insurgency or ethnic violence. Organisations such as *Meira Paibi* or Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) in Nagaland have played a leading role in restoring peace in their region.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The women's movement in Meghalaya has focused on the problems of the marginalised sections of the society, environmental issues and reforms within their social system. A section of the women's group seeks changes in the traditional inheritance and succession related to the matrilineal system among the Khasis.
- 2) The principal limitations of the women's movement in Northeast India are their ethnic exclusiveness, women's exclusion from decision-making bodies, and gendered division of labour.

UNIT 13 ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Environmental Movements in the states
 - 13.2.1 Arunachal Pradesh
 - 13.2.2 Assam
 - 13.2.3 Manipur
 - 13.2.4 Meghalaya
 - 13.2.5 Mizoram
 - 13.2.6 Nagaland
 - 13.2.7 Sikkim
 - 13.2.8 Tripura
- 13.3 Let us Sum up
- 13.4 References
- 13.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

13.0 OBJECTIVES

Environment and its preservation has emerged as a major issue in the Northeast. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the development of environmental movements;
- Describe the unique features of the northeast region, and
- Identify the important environmental issues taken up by people in the Northeast,

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Today, the environment and its preservation is receiving high priority in many societies and on the international development agenda. The conservation policies and programmes of the 1950s in the United States paved the way for what today is called environmental movements across the globe. The environmental

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movement that took shape in the early 1960s differed substantially from the previous conservation movements, emphasising efficient material resource development and management. It began to focus on environmental quality and ecology and became a much more broad, mass movement. Environmental movements encompass issues such as pollution, population growth, consumerism and resource use. These developments also challenged the western notion of progress and its narrative on social justice.

Environmental movements are of two kinds, namely (i) reformist and (ii) radical. According to the reformist approach, substantial societal change can be brought alongside environmentally sustainable development without dismantling capitalism, modern scientific and technological development. On the other hand, radical environmental movements call for replacing capitalism with local development methods, prioritising social needs and environment over technological and economic development. They also emphasise direct grassroots democracy

Since the last decade of the twentieth century, thousands of environmental groups have emerged in the third world. We can broadly identify six features of these environmental groups. (i) they seek to mobilise local people in defence of their local environment against state or big businesses that try to establish themselves in a particular region, which would have a significant impact on the local environment, (ii) environmental groups in most cases are rural-based, (iii) women have often played an important role in these movements, (iv) some may have a narrow conservation agenda whilst others may have broader socio-economic and political concerns, (v) it is possible that environmental groups will succeed when they can exploit democratic and political avenues, (vi) it is also possible that these environmental groups can align themselves with foreign environmental groups – although it may not ensure success.

Environmental movements in Northeast India, in general, seem to have a similarity in all states. Most states have movements against mega-dam construction, environmental degradation, deforestation, pollution, among others. Therefore, it is clear that these movements have been capable of at least preventing further environmental degradation by delaying the proposed dam projects and road constructions that the government of India had planned. In addition, these problems have resulted in internal displacement and, subsequently, the livelihoods and sustainable development in the region. This unit focuses on environmental movements in Northeast India, the role of various non-governmental organisations, student movements, youth organisations, civil society. The unit will provide a brief state-wise description of environmental movements in Northeast India.

13.2 ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN STATES

Rich in natural resources and covered with dense forests, this region receives the highest rainfall in the country. Along with large (the Brahmaputra and the Barak

rivers) and several small rivers flowing through the region and is a cache of different flora and fauna (Freddy, 2017). The region is host to a number of rare species. It is inhabited by tribes who cherish the environmental ethos present there. The local tribes have been protecting and making their efforts towards the conservation of these forests. The state's attitudes towards these issues have created a tense atmosphere according to their customary laws. State policies have also resulted in the gradual erosion of traditional methods of conservation and sustainable use of resources that have been practised by the local tribal population (Harsh and Sarmah, 2014). However, the region has been experiencing exploitation of natural resources, massive trans-border migration, and the establishment of plantation industry following the verdict. As a result, the environmental degradation in the Northeast has reached a dangerous stage. For several years devastation of the environment in Northeast India remained a neglected issue. It was only after the National Green Tribunal's order that unscientific mining of coal, which had polluted the air and water bodies present in Kopili Valley, was stopped (Nag, 2018).

Over the years, Northeast India has witnessed insurgency and ethnic conflicts. Such issues are nature-based conflicts that have arisen due to environmental degradation, which is one reason for their rise. Development projects such as dam constructions, highway constructions, etc., have induced internal displacement of the local population. For example, the Subansiri Project in Arunachal Pradesh, Tipaimukh in Manipur, Pagladiya in Assam have raised questions of displacement, resettlement, rehabilitation and the vital question of ecological sustainability and its impact on the rich biodiversity of the Northeast region (Harsh & Sarmah, 2014). There have been many environmental movements in Northeast India. The following sub-sections deal with the movements of these movements in the region.

13.2.1 Arunachal Pradesh

The diversity of topographical arrangements in Arunachal Pradesh is suitable for the growth of dense forests, which are home to diverse plant species and animals. In addition, the livelihoods of the people of this state are closely linked and heavily dependent on forest resources. Forests in Arunachal Pradesh are divided into tropical evergreen, semi-evergreen, deciduous, pine, temperate, Alpine and grassland, among others. There are diverse species of flowering plants, pteridophytes, conifers, bamboo, canes, rhododendron species and orchids. Forests in Arunachal Pradesh are the most important avenues for employment for the local people. They are also a source of revenue generation for the state. The Supreme Court in 1996 passed an order against the felling of trees but later allowed it with the directive that the regeneration efforts, that is, planting of trees, must be commensurate with felling.

Over the years, Arunachal Pradesh has witnessed environmental degradation. It can be attributed to economic reasons, population growth, urbanisation, intensification of agricultural produce, rising energy use, and transportation (Tame, 2014: 67).

Energy remains one of the central elements that is required for the development. In this regard, the government of India has identified hydropower as a potential source to transform northeast India and, in particular, Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, the Government of India decided to construct 168 mega-dams to tap the region's hydro energy. These projects created apprehension among the people that they would be adversely affected by them. Therefore there has been a general opposition to the construction of mega-dam projects to these projects (Hazarika, 2020). A relevant example here is the protest movement against the Siang dam project. The Siang People's Forum and the Lower Siang Dam Affected People's Forum appealed to the central governments to stop the construction of these dams (both to the UPA and the NDA led governments). They also submitted a memorandum to the Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Consequently, construction of some of the dams has been halted while others continue. The people of Arunachal were not against small dams but against big dams, and they fear that will have a negative impact on the livelihood and lives of the people, especially those who are living in close proximity to the dam sites. They also think building dams will flood their agricultural lands, destroy flora and fauna in the entire Siang belt, and displace thousands of people living in the Siang valley. In addition, local tribal men will lose their traditional hunting grounds and the link between their culture and traditional practices (Duarah, 2017). Resistance to dam projects, particularly in the Siang valley, has been the strongest where an organisation such as Forum for Siang Dialogue, Siang People's Forum, Sirit Siyom Banggo Dam Affected People's Forum, Siang Bachao Andolan, Nyiko Bachao Forum have been at the forefront. Other smaller organisations, such as the Save Mon Region Federation in the Kameng-Tawang region, have been involved in resisting the dam projects in Arunachal Pradesh (Mishra).

13.2.2 Assam

In Assam, too, there have been a number of movements that have opposed the construction of large hydro projects. Various student and civil society organisations such as the All Assam Students Movement (AASU), People's Movement for Subansiri Valley (PMSV), Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS) and Takam Mishing Porin Kebang (TMPK) have been protesting against the Lower Subansiri Hydro Electric Project. These organisations have demanded that an Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) study be conducted to estimate the negative impact that this project will have on the local population and the ecology. Such a study might suggest that necessary alternative provisions mitigate the negative impact of the large hydroelectric projects in the region. The protests also have been critical about the structural design of the dam as the region is prone to earthquakes. If constructed along with those parameters, the dam would collapse if an earthquake with 8.5 intensity were to hit the region. It might also lead to massive flooding of the region and downstream areas. The

organisations have also been pointing out the project will cause internal displacement in the region (Hazarika, 2020).

Assam has been facing erosion and flooding caused by the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries. The initiatives taken by the Rahmeria people aim to check flooding and soil erosion is a significant example of peoples initiative to protect the environment in Assam. The people of Rahmeria, a region thriving on tea plantations, had submitted many petitions to the government to alleviate their problems regard and flooding and soil erosions. The people formed a voluntary body called the Rahmeria Khahaniya O-Bnan Protirodh Samity (RKOBPS). Several local organisations, such as the Farm Coordination Committee, supported the RKOBPS and encouraged local youth to help in building the spurs. They mobilised local resources and began building wooden spurs to divert the course of the waters entering the villages and check erosion. The Rahmeria people also engaged with Oil India to solve their problems concerning erosion and flooding (Lahiri, 1999).

Coal mining projects in Assam have also faced protests from the AASU, Yuva Chatra Parishad (YCP) and the Student Science Society (SSS). Coal mining was undertaken by Coal India in Margherita, Makum and Ledo regions and have seen a steady increase in the migration of non-tribal populations into these areas. The increase in the population of migrants into the state has generated a feeling among the local tribal population, which is dependent on the tea plantations and local resources, became insecure as they felt that growing non-tribal migrant population would affect their existence and livelihoods. This insecurity eventually led to the demand for the creation of the Tirap Autonomous District Council by the Tirap Autonomous District Council Demand Committee (TADCDC). The TADCDC focused on the creation of Autonomous District Councils. It also drew the attention of the local people and the government to the environmental degradation caused by open cast mining. The TADCDC was supported by the Ledo Open Cast Mining Protection Committee (LOCMPC) and the Patkoi Pahar People's Protection Committee (PPPPC). In addition to these organisations, the All Assam Tribal Sangha, Tribal Students' Federation, Assam, Ledo Sonali Pathar Paricholana Samity also engaged in protest against open cast mining in Assam (Gogoi, 2015). There are also a number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the Centre for Environment Education, Aaranyak, Nature's Beckon, Society for Environmental Education of Northeast that play an active role in the protection of the environment, forest, land and animals.

13.2.3 Manipur

According to the data compiled by the Botanical Survey of India, Manipur is home to 249 different species of orchids, 200 species of grass, 168 species of Leguminosae. Manipur has 2601 species belonging to various categories in terms of faunal biodiversity, of which 1261 are genera, 368 families, of which five are new to science, 1232 different species of Aves, and many more. Most people in Manipur find their daily sustenance on what the local environmental resources offer for their livelihood and food (Singh, 2021). Environmental problems in

Manipur can be traced to deforestation due to Jhum cultivation, construction of highways), (ii) Mega developmental projects, and (iii) landslides, erosion and floods, among others. Loss of forests is attributed to highway road projects such as the Asian Development Bank sponsored 47 Thoubal to Kasom Khullen, Langbram, Tamei, Rengpang to Taudaijang in Tamenglong and the construction of the Trans-Asian Railway. Many villages which are situated alongside the proposed highway have protested the construction of the highway. They argue, stating that over 800 homes would be affected if the highway is constructed. A local action committee also submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in November 2014 regarding this when he visited Imphal on the occasion of the Sangai festival (Thokchom, 2021). In addition to highway and railroad projects, mega developmental projects such as the Tipaimukh Dam, Loktak Hydro Electric Project, Singda Dam, Mapithel Dam have been undertaken in Manipur. It has caused environmental degradation and the emergence of protest movements in the state (Themson, 2018).

According to some environmental activists, the projects funded by International Financial Institutions have failed to consider the impact these mega developmental projects would have on the local population in general and the environment in particular. The Centre for Research and Advocacy in Manipur did not prepare rehabilitation and resettlement. Nor did they make plans for indigenous people's action plans based on their rightful participation (Yumnam, 2016).

The Tipamukh Dam project, which aims to construct the dam on the Barak river, has also attracted some criticism on environmental grounds. It is feared that if a dam is built, it will have a severe negative impact on people particularly, the Zeliangrong communities living in that region: their houses submerged, and the ecological diversity would be destroyed (Islam and Islam, 2016). The Social Action Development Organization in Kakchin Khunnou in Thoubal District organised a cycle rally to protest against the construction of the Tipaimukh Dam (Laithangbam, 2012). A report by 'The Hindu' newspaper stated that the Loktak hydroelectric project had brought electricity to thousands and deprived thousands of their livelihoods (The Hindu, 2011). However, the Loktak hydroelectric project resulted in the displacement, loss of livelihoods of indigenous communities and submerged more than 50000 acres of cultivable lands. The All Loktak Lake Fishermen's Union, Loktak Project Affected Areas Action Committee, protested against the construction of the mega hydroelectric project in the Loktak (Yumnam, 2012).

There are also more examples of movements against environmental degradation in Manipur. The Mapithel Dam Affected Villages Organization (MDAVO) and the Mapithel Dam Affected Ching-Tam (hill-valley) Organization (MDACTO) in Ukhrul district joined together to fight for the concerns of those people who had been affected by the construction of the Mapithel Dam (Vasundhara, 2011). Oil drilling in Manipur has been another contentious issue between the government of India and the people of Manipur. With an estimated 5 trillion cubic feet of oil, Manipur's oil resources have attracted countries like the Netherlands. Its oil

industry 'Jubilant Oil' has shown interest in extracting oil resources from Manipur. However, as these come at the cost of the local people's land, the government has faced stiff opposition from the local population (Yumnam, 2021).

Check Your Progress 1

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

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

1) List some of the important concerns taken up by environmental groups in Assam.

2) What are the state-sponsored development projects that are of environmental concern in Manipur?

13.2.4 Meghalaya

In Meghalaya, some important environmental problems have been deforestation, fragmentation of forests, soil degradation, biodiversity loss and contamination of water bodies due to silting, unregulated unscientific and illegal mining and logging and the practice of short cycles of Jhum. Meghalaya has rich mineral resources such as coal, limestone, feldspar, quartz, glass sand, sillimanite, clay and Kaolin (Rao, Bhasin, et al., 2013). Sacred groves are one of the traditional methods of the protection and conservation of forests in Meghalaya. The traditional practice of sacred groves has resulted in the preservation of forests in the East Khasi hills, particularly in Mawphlang, Mawsmat, and Cherrapunjee. This traditional practice has been practised by the Khasis, Garos and Jaintias in the state of Meghalaya (Jeeva, Venugopal, Kharlukhi and Laloo, 2006). However, sacred forests, too, have undergone an immense environmental transformation. The state's environmental transformation is due to changes in the pattern of land use, unregulated tree felling, shifting cultivation, and other developmental activities.

Meghalaya, too, has seen protests against the construction of mega-dam projects. The planned dam over the Umngot River has received attention. Organisations such as the Mahila Congress and Thma U Rangli-Juki have demanded that the

government immediately scrap the dam's proposal across the Umngot. They cited that villages such as Umsawwar, Darrang, Amkoi, Shnongpdeng, Dawki, whose people make their livelihoods through tourism, would be immensely impacted. In the context of limestone mining in Meghalaya, the East Jaintia National Council (EJNC) and Khasi Jaintia National Union joined together to oppose the mining of Shale and Limestone and its expansion in the Bichyrynot. Concerning illegal coal mining, Agnes Kharshiing is known for her activism. She has been assaulted and harassed by the local mafia involved in illegal rat-hole coal mining in the state (Mukhim 2020; Karmakar, 2018).

13.2.5 Mizoram

Environmental problems in Mizoram appear in terms of increase in population, pollution caused by vehicular emissions, Jhum cultivation, lack of proper sewage systems etc. Slash and burn methods have resulted in dust concentration and air pollution. It threatened biodiversity and human health in the state. The state of Mizoram has introduced programmes for the protection and conservation of the forests in Mizoram. For example, programmes such as the Intensification of Forest Management Scheme, Green Mizoram Programme, State Bamboo Mission, National Afforestation Programme have played a significant role in protecting the forests in Mizoram (Renthlei 2018).

13.2.6 Nagaland

Economic development and population growth in Nagaland are among the main sources of environmental problems in Nagaland. This has accelerated the conversion of forests to intensive agricultural activities and urbanisation. There have been drastic changes in the land use and land cover pattern in the state. Since the 1990s and forests have been cleared for Jhum cultivation firewood due to the increase in population. According to an estimate, there have been about 82 square kilometres of deforestation taking place every year. It has brought with it other problems such as climate change and erosion. Shifting cultivation has received much attention in Nagaland since it has resulted in tropical deforestation, biodiversity loss, soil erosion, floods and landslides, downstream sedimentation, decreased runoff and soil fertility and diminishing water resources (Rawat, Zhimo and Imchen, 2018). Some organisations as the Bethesda Youth Welfare Association, Zion Welfare Society and Green Succession (Green Sons) have been engaged in raising the issues about environmental degradation in Nagaland. They have voiced their concerns and appealed both to the government and the people of Nagaland to work towards a clean and green environment in Nagaland.

13.2.7 Sikkim

Sikkim is one of the most environmentally friendly states in the country. However, the state is not without environmental problems. Environmental problems in the state of Sikkim are caused due to population growth, land use patterns, deforestation, mining and industrial development, and hydroelectric projects over the Teesta and Rangeet rivers (Karan, 1989). Dam construction

across the Teesta river was planned during 1990 and 2000 by the state government. Various companies were promoted to join as they were low impact projects. They were run-of-the-river projects and therefore would have caused less submergence vis-à-vis large dams. However, run-of-the-river projects involve large-scale tunnelling, rock blasting. This, in turn, could have a significant social impact on the area and surrounding areas. Teesta Stage III, V & VI are planned in areas home to the indigenous people belonging to the Lepcha and Bhutia communities. Its supporters justify the project that it would provide employment for the unemployed youth in the state. However, there have been mass protests in view of the fact that these dams, if constructed, would result in displacement of the indigenous population and environmental degradation. The villagers of Donzu organised protests against this construction and in the year 2007. The Affected Citizens of Teesta organised one of the most significant movements against these mega hydroelectric projects which were supported by Concerned Lepcha of Sikkim and Sangha of Dongzu (Lepcha, 2018).

13.2.8 Tripura

The state of Tripura suffers from high deforestation rates that are a result of Jhum cultivation and forest degradation. These have resulted in climate change, affected forest productivity, water cycle, biodiversity loss, and forest fires. In addition to this, population growth, industrialisation, mining have resulted in higher anthropogenic stress of different kinds that have had adverse impacts on the environment in Tripura (Government of Tripura: 2017). In Tripura, a local NGO called Arpan has been working on climate change and waste management projects. It has engaged with the Himalayan Cleanup Initiative (Deb, 2019). Students in Agartala are also express concern over the issues of deforestation and felling tree.

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

1) What are the main environmental problems in Meghalaya?

2) What is the impact of shifting cultivation on the environment and soil in Nagaland?

13.3 LET US SUM UP

The environmental movement has its origins in the conservation movement in the 1950s in the USA. After that, it spread across the globe. From the 1960s, different states in Northeast India have witnessed environmental problems, and movement for protection and preservation of the environment. Northeast India is rich in natural resources. With large and small rivers flowing through the region it is rich in forest wealth. It is home to a variety of flora and fauna. Environmental movements seek to address the unique challenges posed by constructing highways and railroads, constructing small and mega-dams, and extracting oil and other natural resources. The problems arising from modern economic development have serious implications for livelihood and sustainable development in the region. Specifically, most states in the region have movements against mega-dam construction, environmental degradation, deforestation, and pollution.

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13.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Some of the environmental concerns in the state of Assam relate to the construction of mega-dams (Lower Subansiri dam), the problem of flooding and soil erosion, coal mining, protection of forest resources and flora and fauna.
- 2) Highway road projects, dam and hydroelectric projects, and oil drilling.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The main environmental problems in Meghalaya are deforestation, fragmentation of forests, soil degradation, biodiversity loss and contamination of water bodies due to silting, unregulated unscientific and illegal mining and logging and the practice of short cycles of Jhum.
- 2) The practice of jhum cultivation in Nagaland has led to tropical deforestation, biodiversity loss, soil erosion, floods and landslides, downstream sedimentation, decreased runoff and soil fertility, and diminishing water resources.

UNIT 14 HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENTS*

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 The Notion of Human Rights
- 14.3 Movements in Northeast India
 - 14.3.1 Assam
 - 14.3.2 Arunachal Pradesh
 - 14.3.3 Manipur
 - 14.3.4 Meghalaya
 - 14.3.5 Nagaland
 - 14.3.6 Tripura
 - 14.3.7 Mizoram
- 14.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.5 References
- 14.6 Answer to Check Your Progress Exercises

14.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit is essentially an attempt to make the learners comprehend the different dynamics and nature of human rights movements in Northeast India. After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Give an overview of the context of human rights;
- Identify the principal issues of human rights in India;
- Describe the nature of state-civil society engagement on human rights issues;
- Discuss violations of human rights of people by both state and non-state actors in northeast India; and
- Explain the nature and operational dimensions of human rights movements in the region.

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14.1 INTRODUCTION

Human rights movements in India have played a vital role in shaping and reshaping the political system and, thereby, the political culture. Over the years, these movements have widened the very contours of democracy and democratic temperament. There are, of course, different debates on this from different corners. Human rights movements have become prominent in the Indian political process since the 1970s. Human rights movements are a coalition of social movements concerned with diverse issues ranging from natural resource management and livelihood, multicultural identities, gender issues, and opposition to ethnic conflicts. This unit deals with the nature and operational dimensions of human rights movements in Northeast India.

14.2 THE NOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights have become a popular term among social and political activist groups and in the discourse on democracy. These are natural rights of a person to which she or he is entitled as a human being. According to the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, these are those inherent in human beings' nature. Human rights are essential for the survival of people as human beings. The state should not violate these rights. Instead, the state is expected to protect and enhance human rights. Human rights are part of 'civil' and 'democratic' rights. These rights have different philosophical roots. They have witnessed changes in different social and political contexts. The evolution of human rights can be broadly grouped into three generations. The first generation of human rights originated in the 18th century in Europe. The American and French revolutions formed the context for the rise of the human rights of the first generation. They aimed to provide liberty to the individual against arbitrary action of the state. These rights protect civil and political rights regarding individual freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of thought and faith, etc. The second generation of human rights emerged in the nineteenth century along with the movements of the working classes on their political and economic issues. As the rights in this generation were related to social, cultural and economic security, they were also "security-oriented" issues. The third generation of human rights has emerged in the context of global interdependence. The rights of this generation are of recent origin. Their main focus is on group rights, not on individual rights. They are largely related right to development, the right to self-determination, etc. (Yasin and Upadhyay 2006).

In India, the human rights movements mainly started to respond to the violation of human rights during the emergency (1975-77). Initially, they focused mainly on civil liberties. However, their scope became broader in due course to include other rights as the right to livelihood, environment, sustainable development, etc. Ajay Gudavarthy (2008) observes that the first phase of the human rights movement of the 1970s was the 'civil liberties phase'. During this phase, the human rights movement worked the framework of state-civil society complementarity. The human rights underlined the need to retain institutions'

autonomy and attempt to recover a 'rights-based civil society'. In the rights-based civil society, all citizens can have access to fundamental rights. The next phase that began in the 1980s was the 'democratic rights phase'. During this phase, the human rights movements operate with a new framework: the state versus civil society framework. During this phase, the Human rights movements constructed the notion of civil society as a pure 'realm of freedom', which functioned outside the state. Such notion of civil society consisted of various militant and radical social movements. The third phase, or the 'human rights phase', started towards the end of the 1990s. In this phase, human rights redefined themselves in the framework of new civil society versus political society. In its final and contemporary phase, the human rights movements strive to move beyond the political dimension and base themselves on an abstract moral dimension.

The human rights movements in India are the responsibility of social and economic inequalities and injustice from one group of people to the other. In this context, both the state and non-state actors violate human rights. Human rights movements generate democratic consciousness in society, and sometimes they impact the policies of the state.

Check Your Progress 1

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

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

1) What are the three generations of rights?

14.3 MOVEMENTS IN NORTHEAST INDIA

The issue of human rights in Northeast India has the following dimensions: complaints of the people in Northeast, especially the indigenous groups, about violation of their human rights by the army; human rights of the people displaced for construction of dams, environmental degradation; and rights of the people injured and displaced in ethnic violence. As you have read in other units of this block, these issues are taken up in the social movements of various groups in the Northeast. Among these, the issue of human rights violation by the security forces, especially in the areas affected by insurgencies, is the subject of discussion in the groups concerned with human rights, academic circles, and the press. In this discourse, various factors are viewed as reasons for human rights violation: outcome of autonomy movements, territorial conflicts, insurgency,

regional movements, presence of paramilitary forces, etc. It is generally argued that the implementation of the Armed Forces Special Power Act, 1958 is the principal cause of the violation of human rights in the insurgency affected areas. The AFSPA is applied to the areas which are declared “disturbed” by the central and state government. The Act provides for the deployment of the armed forces in the “disturbed areas”. The AFSPA is not subject to Judicial Review. It grants armed forces the power to arrest anyone merely on suspicion that a “Cognisable Offence” has already taken place or is likely to occur in the future. The indigenous people and human rights activists argue that the implementation of AFSPA leads to the violation of the right to liberty and security of people. It does not prevent the army from arresting people arbitrarily (Saikia 2014).

Demand for withdrawal of the AFSPA is one of the principal demands of human rights groups in the Northeast. States such as Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland, etc., have experienced human violations stemming from the conflict between the army and the insurgents. It has adversely impacted the life and livelihood of people. The people in the areas affected by the insurgency are caught between insurgency and counter-insurgency operations. Scholars such as Udayon Mishra, Apurba Kumar Baruah, Sanjib Baruah, and Manurama Sharma view the violation of human rights due to the central government’s policies. It is marked by the neglect of the opinions and specific needs of the region. The sub-sections below discuss human rights movements in different states of Northeast India.

14.3.1 Assam

In Assam, the question of human rights is related to the impact of the activities of extremist groups, usage of force by the paramilitary forces, human trafficking impacting the women and children, the effect of the border disputes, insurgency and counter-insurgency moves. There were reports of abuses of human rights in Assam during the 1990s. These included arrests of human rights activists and journalists by police, and bombings, kidnappings, assassinations, targeting dissidents ULFA members and suspecting informers (Baruah 1999). Different organisations have been raising the question of human rights violations in the state. In this context, the role played by the *Asom Mahila Samiti*, now popularly known as *Asom Pradeshik Mahila Samiti*, is relevant. The Samiti led a movement against violence and discrimination against women, women’s literacy etc.

14.3.2 Arunachal Pradesh

The human rights question in Arunachal Pradesh is associated with the deprivation of the indigenous communities, especially those living in the villages along the border between Arunachal Pradesh and China, protection of biodiversity, and displacement due to the construction of dams. These communities living along the international border areas are deprived of basic human needs such as proper roads, health care, food security, drinking water facilities, etc. (Oinam, 2008). In June 2021, underling the significance of human rights in Arunachal Pradesh, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)

issued an order to the Centre and Arunachal Pradesh to ensure that the Centre and the state of Arunachal Pradesh basic human rights to people in 600 villages across the India-China border. The order was passed in response to the petition of human rights activist and Supreme Court lawyer Radhakant Tripathi. The people in the state have been demanding protection and maintenance of biodiversity. Chakma refugees have been asking for granting citizenship, even as the indigenous communities in the state have opposed it.

14.3.3 Manipur

The main feature of the human rights movement in Manipur is related to the insurgency arising out of the demand for autonomy of the state and the revocation of the Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), 1958. In Manipur, there has been general resentment against the merger of the princely state with the Union of India in 1949. A feeling exists among the people in Manipur that the merger of a princely state with the Union of India is illegal and unconstitutional. There has been a demand in the state that the state should have greater autonomy. A large number of underground insurgent groups have been active in demanding autonomy. The central and state governments responded to the activities of the insurgent groups with the implementation of the AFSPA in the state. This has resulted in violence. The people in the state allege that the armed forces have been involved in violating human rights, including killing and misbehaving with women. There has been a demand for the revocation of the AFSPA from Manipur. In 2004, twelve women protested standing nude 2004 against AFSPA. As you have read in unit 12, *Meira Paibi, a woman's organisation*, plays an important role in the women's movement in Manipur. This organisation plays a role in a protest against the AFSPA. Irom Sharmila began fast in November 2000 against the gunning down of 10 persons by the Assam Rifles, to which she was a witness. She demanded revocation of the AFSPA from the state. She was arrested several times under section 309 of the Indian Penal Code for a "suicide attempt."

14.3.4 Meghalaya

In Meghalaya, the principal issues of human rights are related to deprivations of basic needs such as education, and medical facilities, poverty, especially in remote villages, human rights violations due to the mining of coal and uranium environmental degradation and deforestation, human trafficking. Human rights violation by Uranium mining by the Uranium Corporation India Limited (UCIL) at Domiasiat in West Khasi Hill district of Meghalaya posed health hazards to people's health. The mining of uranium was halted due to the protest by civil society organisations in Meghalaya. As you have read in unit 13, people had protested against the mega-dam project plan over the Umngot river and against the illegal rat-hole mining in the state. In Meghalaya, civil society organisations and individuals have raised issues concerning human rights. They have resisted the exploitation of natural resources and deforestation. However, according to

McDuie-Ra (2007), the civil society in Meghalaya is constrained both by the state and society. The constraints on civil society lead to the empowerment of a particular section of people in the society and the marginalisation of others. These constraints add to the insecurities of the people and violation of human rights.

14.3.5 Nagaland

There have been complaints of human right violation in Nagaland by different human rights activists and organisations. Like in Manipur, in Nagaland, the question of human rights is related to the issue of political autonomy of the Nagas. The aspiration in Nagaland for getting political autonomy led to the emergence of insurgency in the Naga Hills. The government's counter-insurgency move led to the imposition of the Disturbed Areas Act, 1956, and the AFSPA in the 1958. Under the provisions of the AFSPA, the army used force resulting in the arrest and killing of the insurgents and others. Restoration of peace became essential for the protection of human rights. As you have read in unit 12, Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) played an important role in restoring peace in Nagaland. They launched "Shed No More Blood" movement. Among their main concerns were the withdrawal of AFSPA and maintenance of peace and security in the state to ensure prevention of human rights violations in Nagaland.

14.3.6 Tripura

Human rights issues in Tripura are largely related to basic human needs such as health, education, means of transportation and employment, disturbance and violence in ethnic conflict and insurgency. Displacement of the people because of fencing the border areas between Tripura and Bangladesh. K.S. Subramanian's study mentions that usage of AFSPA and the activities of the Assam Rifles while fencing the Indo-Bangladesh border involves the violation of human rights in Tripura (Sunramanian 2019: 142). According to Tripura Human Development Report (2007) state of Tripura experienced significant progress in the social, economic and political indicators of human development. However, shortcomings in economic structure, transportation and communication system, public health system etc., continue to exist. Human rights activists also express their grievances against the public health system at different periods, especially during an emergency.

14.3.7 Mizoram

There has been a general complaint in Mizoram that their state did not receive proper attention from the central government and the Assam government, of which Mizoram was a part earlier. Its first example was the Mautam Famine of 1959. The Mizos felt that both the central government and the state government of Assam, of which Mizo hills were then part, neglected them during the famine. This led to the emergence of a two-decade long insurgency led by the Mizo National Front (MNF) under the leadership of Laldenga. The use of violence by

the insurgents and counter-violence by the security forces impacted human rights, including people's lives and livelihood, their freedom and security. Social activists and human rights organisations in Mizoram emphasise that human rights can be protected by maintaining social harmony in society. The debate on human rights in Mizoram focuses both on community rights and individual human rights. In collaboration with police personnel, the local Village Defense Party (VDP) plays an important role in checking crime to create a conducive atmosphere for protecting human rights. The church, the Young Mizo Association and prominent members of civil society play a crucial role in sustaining peace in the state. Women's organisation called Mizo Hmeichhe Insuihkhawm Pawl, under the leadership of Pi Sangkhumi, have been taking up women's rights issues - i.e. violence and discrimination against women in workplaces, 33% of women's reservation in the political system, changes in Mizo Marriage Laws, abolition of Mizo Bride Price in Mizo marriages, etc.

However, ethnic groups such as Chakmas and Brus complain that their rights are not adequately addressed. Their resettlement problem in the state has not been resolved due to the opposition in the Mizos, a majority community, which does not treat the Chakmas and Brus as "Sons of the Soil".

Check Your Progress 2

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

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

1) Identify the factors contributing to human rights violations in the Northeast.

2) Highlight the contributions of the Naga Mothers' Association in promoting human rights.

14.4 LET US SUM UP

Human rights are those rights of human beings that they are entitled to as human beings. They include basic rights such as liberty, equality, dignity, and the right to life. They also include the right to political autonomy, economic opportunities and a healthy environment. It is the duty of the state to ensure human rights without discriminating based on race, colour, sex, language, property, birth and status. Human rights can be ensured in a peaceful social atmosphere. The question of human rights forms an important issue in political and popular discourse in Northeast India. The specific human rights issues concerning the states of Northeast India include complaints of the people from the region, especially the indigenous groups, about violation of their human rights by the army; environmental degradation due to mining, deforestation, displacement due to ethnic violence or development projects. Human rights violation during the insurgency or ethnic violence is reported to be the most common complaint by human rights groups and indigenous people. The areas affected by insurgency have seen the imposition of the AFSPA. The armed forces' arrest and use of force have been criticised by human rights activists and civil society organisations as violations of human rights. The violence by insurgent groups in different states is also viewed as a human rights violation by the human rights groups. Different states of the Northeast have witnessed movements for the protection and preservation of human rights. These movements generally demand the withdrawal of the AFSPA, a ban on mining, better conditions for education, health, infrastructure development, and peace maintenance to ensure the protection of human rights. These movements contribute to the democratisation of society.

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14.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) First generation rights are political and civil rights. While these are negative in nature, that is, restrain the state, the second generation rights are positive in nature and call for state intervention to promote social, economic and cultural security. The third generation rights are concerned with the rights of groups.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Insurgency and counter-insurgency operations, development projects that resulted in displacement, alienation and loss of livelihood are prominent factors contributing to rights violations.
- 2) NMA is working as a peacemaking organisation. It has been working for the withdrawal of AFSPA and ending human rights violations, particularly gendered violence.