

## The Insecure World of the Nation

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In *The Marginal Nation*, which dealt with trans-border migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal, two moods, two mentalities, and two worlds were in description – that of cartographic anxiety and an ironic un-concern. In that description of marginality, where nations, borders, boundaries, communities, and the political societies were enmeshed in making a non-nationalised world, and the citizen-migrant (two animals yet at the same time one) formed the political subject of this universe of transcendence, interconnections and linkages were the priority theme. Clearly, though conflict was an underlying strain throughout the book, the emphasis was on the human condition of the subject - the migrant's capacity to transgress the various boundaries set in place by nation-formation in South Asia. Therefore, responding to the debate on the numbers of illegal migrants I termed it as a “numbers game”. My argument was that in this world of edges, the problem was not what was truth (*about* nationality, identity, and numbers), but truth (*of* nationality, identity, and numbers) itself was the problem.<sup>1</sup> Yet, this was an excessively humanised description, that today on hindsight after the passing of some years since its publication, seems to have downplayed the overwhelming factor of conflict and wars that take place because “communities must be defended” – one can say the “permanent condition” in which communities find themselves. On this re-reading of the problematic the questions, which crop up are: What are the conditions in which migration becomes a matter of insecurity/security? What is that point, the threshold, where these two issues intersect? What are the patterns of collective politics and collective violence that require to be studied if we are to understand the intersecting worlds of population flow and security? In other words, if we are to understand why human migration becomes a matter of contentious politics and therefore has to be governed by law, administrative practices, customs, and failing all other things, by brutal violence, we have to study the historical conditions of the emergence of migration as a matter of nationalised security, marked all over by collective violence and collective politics. These conditions as we shall see not only make modern politics, in some aspects they make modern politics seem exactly like an old one, when racism and brute physicality was the order that governed politics.

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<sup>1</sup> Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation – Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal* (New Delhi: Sage, 1999)

I intend to address these issues in the following essay, because besides other reasons, these have enormous reflections on our patterns of politics. These issues are not only relevant to the principles of justice and rights they throw light also on the insecure world of the nation and other incipient nationhood(s).

## I

It is always good to walk few decades and in some cases few centuries back, when confronted with a wide-ranging intriguing phenomenon in politics. The political present is often a massif of crusts made of past – the problematic of migration in its present form being no exception. By the Treaty of Peace concluded at Yandabo in Ava in 1826, which presented for the first time an overarching authority over the entire northeastern region of South Asia hitherto inhabited by a multitude of communities, kingdoms, and principalities, and simply for the most part unknown to the colonial power, the King of Ava ceded all claims on Assam and its dependencies, and the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jyntea - spelt that way (Article 2). Also by Article 3, “to prevent all dispute respecting the boundary line between the two great nations, the British Government retain(ed) the conquered provinces of Aracan, Ramree, Cheduba, and Sandway”. The “Aracan mountains” were to form henceforth the boundary between “between the two great nations on that side”, and the British conquered provinces of Yeh, Tavoy, Mergui, and Tennasserim, with the lands and dependencies thereunto appertaining, would remain with the British on this side, having the Saluen river as the line of demarcation of the frontier. As historians know, the treaty caused considerable anger and the desire to take revenge in the region. Yet, this Treaty was nothing if it had not the backing of the Anglo-Burmese Commercial Treaty concluded in the same year, plus the expeditions and other commercial arrangements entered in the preceding fifty years.<sup>2</sup>

It all began from Cooch Behar and Goalpara from where the British looked at the valley of the Ahoms and from Sylhet at the Surma Valley, from where they could gaze upwards along the way by which the river Surma had come – that is rising up to the Southern slopes of the mountain ranges of the Naga Hills and flowing through the Manipur Hills to reach Cachar and Sylhet. The Treaty also covered a succession of hill ranges from the northwest of Bengal –

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<sup>2</sup> Texts of the two Treaties cited as Appendix B and C in Anil Chandra Banerjee, The Eastern Frontier of British India (Calcutta: A. Mukherjee and Bros. 1934), pp. 389-402

the most westerly long strip of land called the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Chittagong, bounded on the north by Hill Tippera, on the south by the Arakan Hills, the central strip constituting the Lushai Hills, and the eastern part the Chin Hills linking with upper Burma. This huge area surrounded from almost all sides by mountains and featured by valleys and great rivers represented to the outsiders a mangled mass of hills, ravines, cliffs covered by dense trees, bush, creeper jungles, and valleys criss-crossed by rivers, which to insiders was a land inhabited by hill tribes, gradually by plain tribes, moving populations, also by valley peasants, and traders of all kinds. And all these linked to a country, namely Burma, a vast area covering a superficial area of about 2,37,000 square miles with extreme length of 1,200 miles, extreme width of 500 miles, in its northwest particularly on the lower side marching onto Assam, Manipur, Lushai Hills, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and having great old Burmese capitals like Pagan, Ava, Mandalay - to which the British proceeded in search of safe frontier. With a background of numerous operations the British arrived at the year of 1826 – the year of the Treaty of Yandabo.

Clearly in terms of a history of governance, this was a landmark. For, the boundary agreement, reinforced by commercial accords, was to lead in the coming years to a whole scale rational reorganisation of the administration in the east and the northeast. The Bengal Presidency was shortened in the east with creation of Assam as a separate unit with the addition of parts of erstwhile Bengal, and several administrative units were created in the wake. The upper portion of the Brahmaputra valley went under British administration, the frontier tract, inhabited by the Moamarias, Khamtis and the Singpos were excluded from direct administrative control, and the Assam Light Infantry was posted to protect the frontier, prevent both Assamese and the hill tribes from eating each other and to control both, with the sons of chiefs of the tribes being taken and kept as hostages. In 1842 new areas were annexed – Sadiya and Matak; civil rebellion in North Cachar was suppressed. In the following seventy-five years the Cachar Plains, Khasi Plains, Jaintia Plains, Assam Hills, North Cachar Hills, Garo Hills, NEFA, Lushai Hills, and the Naga Hills were subjugated respectively in 1830, 1833, 1835, 1838, 1858, 1873, 1875, 1890, and 1904, and then administratively reorganised. This required measures one after another such as the Scheduled District Act of 1874, Backward Tracts Act of 1919, and finally the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas Act of 1935. The reorganisation still continues - to name only few of the milestones after 1935, such as the incorporation of Darjeeling and much later Sikkim in India, the second Partition in the East in 1947, the new

international boundaries with Pakistan, Burma, and China, the Indian Constitutional provisions of sixth schedule, the Northeast Reorganisation Act of 1971, the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (and there are more such). Yet, what is remarkable in this nearly two hundred years' history is that, with repeated boundary fixing in this huge region both as internal boundaries between different units of the country and as borders with outside regions/countries, and creation of different administrative-political units, we have in this region the incipient nations and nationalisms, territorialities and ethnicities, peoples and people-hood(s), which cannot live without the links of the past ages, yet cannot digest these links in light of their own emerging claims. They are in many ways therefore the “divided peoples” – divided across international and the various internal political-administrative borders that cut what they consider now to be their nation. In as much as they must now find out who they are in order to claim national status, they must to an equal degree demarcate who they are not in order to reinforce the claim. The point then is that if migration and the consequential presence of the immigrants is an issue related to resources such as land or money, it is an issue related equally to nationalised politics, citizenship, and search for a self-sufficing identity. On one hand, this is linked to a process of collective violence and collective politics in which every nationhood is submerged and which it summons everyday, on the other hand, this requirement of a self-sufficing identity is a gross caricature of what Antonio Gramsci had called the “national-popular”, that can democratise internal relations. The insecurity that immigration raises everywhere is the proof that there is very often a thin difference between democracy and xenophobia; and with little lack of attention a polity can pass on from one to another. In this build up of an “organic mass” – a mentality – immigration is the sign of the closure – at the same time all that effect that closure, namely borders, boundaries, collective violence, insecurity, in short contentious politics.

Yet, if it is true that what we face here is a situation of aporia that is to say, a cycle of production of nativity–linkages–immigration–nationalism–ethnicity–violence–law–linkages-immigration-nativity–nationalism...it is also true that it is contention that prises open the situation again and again. Precisely the collective politics that in its moment of frenzy makes immigration the most contentious issue in the life of a nation, also exhibits factors or aspects that make immigration the occasion for democratisation, justice, and a dialogue over accommodation, or what can be called as “cosmopolitanism”, de-securitisation of issues of life and justice, and therefore a different kind of autonomy. In a situation of closure, contention (by nature a locked situation)

produces the third dimension or the third face of politics. In *The Marginal Nation* what I was narrating was partly this third dimension. I attempted to develop the same argument in *The Politics of Dialogue* where in discussing humanitarianism I showed how only in a dialogic mode society produces politics of accommodation, and that what passes as the world of the humanitarian is often non-dialogic. It is of course difficult to demonstrate how this third dimension appears – partly because the third dimension is not often clear in its emergence, indeed as a condition of its existence it remains submerged in the two other dimensions. Therefore one of the aims of this essay is to investigate how on one hand the world of the incipient nation cannot but be closed, marked by a hyper sense of insecurity with the arrival of and mixing with aliens - alien blood, alien race, and alien culture - and how the collective politics of nationhood and violence opens up that closure.

Alien-hood of course began with conquest. The modern history of immigration, insecurity, nationalism, ethnicity, and attack on the “foreigners” began almost everywhere, as in the Northeast, with conquest. With conquest and annexation of territory and along with it the people inhabiting that territory, the first seeds of racism were sown. Migration as a security problematic began in this way. Conquest, the administrative reorganisation that each conquest required, and the new political-legal-administrative identity of a population made population flow an issue of security. Thus, issues of resource became matters of immigration, that is to say a matter of security, which every conquest underlined. Thus the immigrant became the invader, much in the way in which the “original” invader had appeared as the alien race conquering the native land. Native/immigrant politics is thus a question of resource politics, race politics, and nationalist politics at the same time.

The transition from the imperial form of rule to the national form of rule has only accentuated the political problematic of immigration, because while the imperial form of rule in many ways left the borders – in this case the borders in the northeast – undefined and un-demarcated, the national form of state is much more territorial. The idea of a nation, which was a weapon in the anti-colonial struggle, also implied to the leaders of the national emancipation, the inheritance of the bureaucratic-territorial state, and its re-organisation on the basis of the territorial-national principle of identification of population groups, which cannot be otherwise congruent with each other. The imperial form of rule, at least the colonial rule in India, like the administration of other empires in the past, negotiated the issue of diversity of

the society it was ruling with a graded form of administration, in which divide and conquer was an extremely important principle. Difference was the organising norm of the ruling political form. The national state made a switch over from the norm of difference to that of homogeneity (one nation, one state), which meant among others settlement of the hitherto “unknown” frontier areas into fully politically administered areas of the national state. The constitutional deliberations in the country of the preceding ten years (about twenty years if we take Simon Commission as the starting point) of independence bear out that history of transformation of the principles of organising politics and administration from a “frontier area” to a fully administered part of the country. Yet, it is important to note in this connection what changed and what remained through the transition. If principles of administration changed with the introduction of a people’s, that is national republican rule and the colonial territorial entity had to be ended by drawing ethnic boundaries, the ideologies of conquest, racism, and security proved to be permanent gifts.

The frontier in the northeast became actually important only with the arrival of the war (the Second World War) in that region. China and the dominant Pacific power Japan – the presence of these two countries was felt as immediate, and became matters of concern to the security of the colonial state. Their presence was a notice to the administration in both Delhi and London that the boundary with Burma could not remain fluid; and as soon as the war was over, the Burmese government started its forward march towards boundary demarcation on the western side by claiming the entire eastern side of the Naga Hills. But boundary demarcation in the northeast, which one can say was the silent second partition in that decade, cannot be understood without taking into account the differentiation that was taking place for more than two decades within that region. The colonial administration had introduced in that period the notion of “racial difference” between the plains and the hills. The hill people belonged to the “Mongolian areas”, they belonged “neither historically nor racially” to “India proper” and its “backward area” (that is, plains in the northeast); and therefore as one colonial administrator, R.N. Reid, noted that while power would be soon transferred in the country, these people of the “non-Indian Mongolian areas” should not be made to negotiate with “alien politicians”. Another administrator J.P. Mills noted the “sharp cultural distinctions...(which) needed little re-emphasis”. The “languages of the hills with the exception of the Khasis were all Tibeto-Burman”; the indigenous system of self-government was “vigorously alive” in the hills while it had “disappeared from the plains”, the “hills were clearly different”, “self-sufficiency

was greater, artistic development was higher, squalor and misery rare, and sense of social responsibility...high". And just as Hinduism and Islam covered all aspects of life in the plains, "Christianity or animism" similarly covered the tribal way of life.<sup>3</sup> In the context of what the colonial administration saw as racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills J.H. Hutton recommended the entire hill area between the two countries, India and Burma, to become a crown colony (Singapore and Swaziland) after the transfer of power. The relation of fidelity between the colonial ruler sticking to indirect rule and the semi-autonomous area and people would be thus retained. There was no case for transforming an excluded area into a partially excluded area, and a partially excluded area to full inclusion. The "hillmen" did not want Hindu domination; besides they had given unforgettable service to the army during the war – particularly in the battles of Kohima and Imphal – by constructing roads, fighting, and bringing back the wounded and the stranded from Burma, and the British could not leave them in the lurch.

Yet, as we know, the nationalist pressure was proving too strong for retaining such an indirect and graded system of rule. The 1935 Act with respect to Assam had designated the Northeast Frontier Tracts, the Naga Hills District, the Lushai Hills District, and the North Cachar Sub-division of the Cachar District as excluded areas. The Garo Hills District, the Mikir Hills in Nowgong and Sibsagar Districts, and the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District other than Shillong Municipality and Cantonment became the partially excluded areas. A special cadre for the frontier area was created in Burma, and India followed suit. The only nagging problem remained the issue of slavery. The Government of India adhered to League of Nations' Slavery Convention (1926). Slavery, practised by many hill communities, therefore could not be allowed to continue there indefinitely. However, control over slavery and human sacrifice was only the beginning for the march towards extending full administrative control and settlement of the area. War became the second occasion. And the third occasion was the argument voiced by Gopinath Bardoloi and the Khasi leader Nichols-Roy, which gained ground after the war ended in that area, that with independence the fruits of self-rule and democratic institutions could no longer be denied to the hill people of that region. By the time

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<sup>3</sup> R.N. Reid, A Note on the Future of the Present Excluded, Partially Excluded and Tribal Areas of Assam (confidential), NL, 1941, paragraph 14, and J.P. Mills, A Note on the Future of the Hill Tribes of Assam and the Adjoining Hills in a Self-Governing India (top secret), Shillong, paragraph 6, - both cited in Takeshi Fuji, "Mirrors of the Colonial State – The Frontier Areas between North East India and Burma" (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001), p. 203-205.

the Indian constitution came to be framed, political exclusion of the hill areas (including Manipur and Tripura which had evolved along different historical line) was out of question. The main recommendation of the Constituent Assembly's sub-committee in Northeast Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas was that while the future of these areas did not lie in absorption, it lay in political and social amalgamation. Thus, distinction (read difference) would remain, but political identity with the Union would also become an accompanying reality. As we all know, with nationalist pressure mounted by Nehru and Kripalani in particular, the concept and history of excluded areas were given summary burial. But more than this, the framing of the constitution and subsequent reorganisation of the region reflected three major developments: (a) The boundary demarcation between India and Burma was complete, dividing people like the Nagas and the Mizos who by that time had started to think of themselves as belonging to distinct nation-hoods; (b) The national rule in India had firmly established its toe in these areas, and then hold, ending by and large the graded system of rule (except what came as special political grant in form of the sixth schedule); (c) The restructuring of the political-administrative space by creating settled and (hopefully) stable units of political-administrative units in form of states.

The nature of the contentious politics of migration cannot be understood without this preceding history of Indian nationalism and the mirror history of the borderlands. The reason is that this history will persuade us not to take a generalised view of the relationship between migration and security, which is perched on the dominant phenomenon of political borders. Instead, by taking a critical view of the conflicts within the borderlands, we can know the blocks in the scenario, and understand why migration appears in politics as a theme of security, underwritten by a history of continuities and discontinuities through the colonial past and a nationalist presence.

## II

Consider the following two sets of facts – one dealing with the political economy of resources and the other reflecting a security-oriented thinking - and how they interrelate. The figure of the immigrant, we shall see at the end, emerges as a product of these two sets and their relation.



As we all know, the issue of resources began with colonial trade of tea and timber. Besides the British owned tea estates, gradually other estates came to be owned by various Indian groups and the Assamese groups – in the previous decade about 150 tea estates were owned by about 130 Assamese companies in the Assam valley with the largest tea company having an annual turnover of about Rs. 50 crores. Rest of the Assamese bourgeoisie today consists of contractors, transporters, traders, and people engaged in hotel industry and real estate business, besides engaging in LPG distribution or timber trade. An unofficial estimate puts the number of small tea growers in Assam as 500 of whom 80 per cent are Assamese. In Meghalaya the daily transaction of timber sale outside the state is nearly of the amount of Rs. 20 lakhs. The share of central grant-in-aid to total revenue receipts in Meghalaya in 1990-95 has ranged between 55 and 60 per cent. In Arunachal Pradesh it has been between 64-70 per cent, and in Nagaland as high as 87 per cent. Thus while the revenue generating capacity of states in the northeast has been extremely weak, with the entire region lagging behind the rest of the country in industrial growth, power supply, fertiliser consumption, credit flow, communication facilities, and transport network, the political class survives with central aid with which it makes its nation. Besides public rent seeking activities, private rent seeking continues unabated – be it in tea industry, or in local petty trade, or in a barber's shop, in some cases the percentage of the earning given out as rent payment to private parties being as high as 25 per cent.<sup>4</sup> We have thus an absolutely combustible combination: renter state, a parasite political class, massive mass discontent, weak or nil growth, and the absence of any appropriate policy of local development and resource generation and utilisation – with the immigrants being seen as the cause of all miseries of life.

The region has a population of about 40 million, with 90 per cent of population living in rural areas, agriculture being the primary occupation of 78 per cent of population, of whom 60 per cent are cultivators, 10 per cent agricultural labourers, and 8 per cent engaging in allied farm sector. Shifting cultivation has 2.7 million hectares under it. Irrigated area as proportion of total cropped area ranges between 11 and 25 per cent as against the national average of 35 per cent. About 25 per cent of the total consumed food grain in this region is imported from outside. Agro- sector reform is almost nil, while some of the big public sector enterprises

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<sup>4</sup> These figures are from the various reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) with respect to these states, reproduced in Gurudas Das' "Liberalisation and Internal Periphery – Understanding the Implications for India's Northeast" in Gurudas Das and R.K. Purkayastha, Liberalisation and India's North East (New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1998), pp. 146-49.

marked as promising global players such as the Indian Oil Corporation, Oil Indian Limited, and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation operate in this region. Yet, notwithstanding the presence of some of the richest public sector companies in this region, the region's incapacity to generate revenue is stark – for instance although Assam produces commodities such as tea, plywood, crude oil, and jute, it gets only 5 per cent of Rs. 700 crores worth of plywood per year, and 2 per cent of tea sold through the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre. Even for the basics for flood control, the state has to depend on the centre, while the borrowing capacity of the state decreases day by day. Out of the total cess of Rs. 30,000 crores collected from the oil sector between 1984-91, Rs. 26,000 crores were deposited to the Consolidated Fund of India. Thus, despite a satisfactory credit-deposit ratio (of commercial banks) in states like Tripura (61 per cent), Manipur (71 per cent), and Assam (49 per cent), the credit disbursed can be hardly properly utilised in this context. The indicators relating to small-scale industrial units and manufacturing units present an equally dismal picture.<sup>5</sup> The level of urbanisation in the region is quite low – only 14 per cent of the population of the region lives in towns, while density of population has increased from 57 per square kilometre in 1961 to 123 in 1991. The pressure on land has grown, and the decadal population growth rate in all the states of the region has been higher than the national average, which is 23.50 (1991 census), while non-agricultural productive activity has almost remained at the same level. At the same time, the mode of shifting agriculture has faced crisis. Shifting agriculture was for a typical subsistence economy, and though this did not preclude trading of other products, it meant collective management of forest-land including allotment of the portion for each family, maintenance of village commons, and no accumulation of surplus for “expanded reproduction”. While shifting agriculture has declined, or made impossible in a market set up, settled cultivation too has not improved. Large numbers of communities have practised settled cultivation over the ages in hill areas too, for instance Monpas of Tawang in Kameng district in Arunachal Pradesh, Khamptis of Lohit district, and Apa Tanis in Subansiri district. The Angamis and Chakesangs of Kohima district practise wet rice cultivation in form of terrace farming. In short, the principal issue of sustainability of resource use is now in question in the entire region – from the plains of Assam to the hills of Mizoram, whereas except in Arunachal Pradesh in all states of the northeast the literacy level is higher than the national average (39.42), infant mortality rate is lower than the national average (80), and except in Tripura and marginally Assam, the female participation in

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<sup>5</sup> Sujit Sikdar and Devadas Bhorali, “Resource Mobilisation, Distribution Effect and Economic Development of the Northeastern Region” in Liberalisation and India's North East, pp. 167-72.

the workforce rate is higher than the national average (22.25), and except in Arunachal Pradesh the percentage of women in the organised sector is higher than the national average (14.1). Clearly the issue of sustainability of resources, contrary to the popular notion of depending on controlling immigration is wider and more complicated.<sup>6</sup> It presents a blocked scenario, which is marked by very little formal trade and economic linkages in the east (Burma), south (the Bay), west (Bangladesh), and north (Bhutan and Tibet). Developed basically in recent history as what can be called an economy of “a market along the foothills”, which bears the characteristics of an extraction economy around coal and limestone, and a plantation economy around tea and timber, the entire scenario represents today what Dietmar Rothermund had termed long back “an enclave economy”.

In this context what we witness today as the mood in the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills is symptomatic of the entire region. It is perhaps wrong to say that politics in the northeast is divided in two segments – the modern parliamentary politics with franchise, votes, institutions, financial agencies, education, developmental policies, etc. on one hand, and ethnicity, politics of identity, gun running, gun battles, narcotics, xenophobia, and hatred against outsiders on the other. A more circumspect view would tell us of a combined and closed world (enclave economy) of contentious politics marked by war of resources and attacks against the most immediate “enemy”, the most immediate “invader”, the most proximate “occupier”, and the most immediate “usurper” of land. Security is intensely physical in this milieu, so is its politics, and the by products of such politics as neo-racism.

Enclave economy is partly a product of the differential and contrasting physicality of the region. The hill ranges of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram belong to extra-peninsular mountains and cover approximately 60 per cent of the region. The Meghalaya-Karbi Anglong plateaux sections corresponding to the peninsula account for 12 per cent of the region, and the area enclosed by the Brahmaputra plains, a continuation of Indo-Gangetic plains, and the Barak valley accounts for the rest. Similarly there are pronounced differences between the Himalayan Mountains of Arunachal Pradesh, the eastern hills such as the Naga Hills, North Cachar Hills, and Manipur ranges, and the valleys that

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<sup>6</sup> All figures relating to human development taken from J.B. Ganguly, Sustainable Human Development in the North-Eastern Region of India (New Delhi: Regency Publications, 1996), pp. 29-53; it is noteworthy, Ganguly does not cite immigration as obstructing factor in achieving the goal of sustainable human development in the region.

include the Imphal valley also. The relations between the valleys and the hilly peripheries have been always unstable. Population groups have come through the passes of Arunachal Pradesh from Tibet, Nepal, and Bhutan, through the valleys of Ganga and the Brahmaputra, through the sea and the delta, and through the land routes in the Patkai range. Similarly population groups inhabiting the region have also varied in themselves: the Ahoms, Bodo-Kacheris, and the Aryan elements in the Brahmaputra valley, Meiteis in the Manipur valley, Tibeto-Burman groups in the hill peripheries, the Mon-Khmer groups in the South of the Assam valley, and migrant communities from the Ganga-Brahmaputra delta and the eastern fringes of Central India, and like these many more. Peasants have moved in from East Bengal into Tripura along the Meghna system, indentured coolies came to the upper reaches of the region from Chotanagpur, Bengal, and Orissa, Nepalis moved in as army men and as graziers, and much before that Tais had come into Arakan and then into the Brahmaputra valley, while groups from southern and western Tibet had come to the Arakan and the eastern parts of Manipur and Mizoram. Many of these population groups besides consolidating territorially developed exclusive linkages. And, all in all a peculiar mixture of outright plunder, tribute, feudalism, slavery, several separate trade networks, and an indigenous egalitarianism prevailed, and only with the consolidation of the northern and southern Lushai Hills the region got a universal power to live under – an overarching colonial rule. Yet, this universal power could not just go on in its forward journey of conquest and expansion. It needed to consolidate. Therefore, not only it had to shift in the mid-1860s its headquarters of this area from Rangpur and later Cachar to Cherapunji, Shillong, and Tura, it had to now implement a policy of Inner Line Regulation (1873) which was directly aimed at restricting population movements, stabilising the population groups and the governing units, and at organising and controlling intermediary mountain zones (with the exception of Garo, Khasi, and Jaintia Hills). Gradually administrative centres came to be established in the hills, for instance in Kohima in the Angami country in 1878, so that the entire area could now be converted to something like the status of a British district – thus the Naga Hills area came to be established quickly thereafter in 1881. Mokokchung was established in 1890, and the two parts of the Lushai Hills became a single part of Assam.

With this a definite pattern of territorial arrangements of the population groups of the region emerged: The Garos, Khasis, and Jaintias in their hills south of the Brahmaputra valley; the Assamese in the valley along with immigrants particularly concentrated in Goalpara and

Cachar areas, and the plain tribes concentrated in the lower Brahmaputra valley on the northern side of the river; Mishims, Abors and others in the north-eastern part of the region, now Arunachal Pradesh; Naga groups and sub-groups in the Naga Hills, Meiteis in the Imphal valley and Kuki-Chin groups in the south-western part and Cachar; Mizo groups and sub-groups in the Mizo hills with Kuki-Chin groups in the northern parts and Reangs and others in the south-western parts, Tripuris and Chakmas in the northeastern part of Tripura; and marking the general spatial segmentation of the region and the frontiers between prominent groups were several immigrant communities, who always disturbed the neat differences between valleys and the hills.<sup>7</sup> Distance factor, accessibility pattern, resource endowments such as land, water, and forests, the locative and territorial aspects of different population groups, and colonial plantation economy – all contributed to the growth of “enclave existence”. Lack of access to land and weak transport and communication network reinforced in many cases the enclave pattern. And as happens everywhere in the history of the development of national and homeland politics, it was development that turned segments into enclaves, and nation into homes (homelands).

Enclave economy also produced a distinct politics of security, where the immigrants quickly became the symbols of insecurity. Therefore it should not astonish us that a discourse of security co-habits today with the discourse of retarded economy, internal colonialism, and development. Indeed, political economy (that is the political discourse of economy or politics of economy) and politics of security have always gone hand in hand.

This has been apparent in the way in which the 1,879 km. long border with Bangladesh is considered in this security discourse. Tripura’s border with Bangladesh is 856 km, that of Meghalaya is 443 km., Mizoram 318 km., Assam 262 km., and of course West Bengal’s border with Bangladesh is 2,216 km. long. The border with Burma is similarly treated similarly in this discourse. The border is not a site invoking commonality to share, not an opportunity to link up with others, border is seen as a threatening factor, changing the demographic complexion of these states. Tripura’s indigenous population is a minority today - about 28 per cent of about 3 million population of the state. It has been also pointed out that in the decade between 1991-2001, Nagaland witnessed about 65 per cent population growth. Though it does not have

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion in details on the political geography of the area, R. Gopalakrishnan, Ideology, Autonomy and Integration in the Northeast India (New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1990), pp. 21-31.

any direct border with Bangladesh, it is said to be the major landing point of the illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. In Tripura indigenous guerrilla groups have targeted migrant settlers from the plains, who are said to have claimed and established undue share of resources and employment hitherto due to the natives of the land. The anti-foreigner agitation in Assam from 1979 to 1985, written about since then over and over again, was perhaps one of the largest mass mobilisations in post-independence India. It involved deaths (of about 7000), riots, massacres, forced displacement (of about 2 million), mass boycotts, paralysis of administration, and an upsurge of Assamese nationalism that required the “foreigner” to be identified as the enemy of the surging Assamese nationalism.<sup>8</sup> As the Assam anti-foreigner movement showed, the issue of migration and citizenship is the link between the so-called parliamentary sphere of politics and the dark sphere of identity politics. Identity has little to do with looks, claims, tongues, destitution, resources, and justice, or to put it more appropriately, in the politics of identity these matters of looks, claims, tongues, and resources, appear only as matter of rights – that is to say justice transmogrified in the mirror of rights, so that justice means now the expropriation of *others* and the vindication of the “politics of homeland”. Because it was a matter of *citizenship*, it showed the hierarchical landscape of nationalism – foreigners could be there to keep the wheels of tea industry running (in 1921 about one-sixth of Assam’s population was engaged in tea gardens, they were from the Jharkhand region) for which the London Stock Exchange had gone mad as early as in the late nineteenth century. Similarly, they could be there to reclaim marshy lands and help the food production growing, but citizenship was for the indigenous, ethnic, and the nationals.

Once, the British in order to fill coffers of the Crown had imposed heavy taxes on the peasantry leading to the repeated peasant revolts between 1861 and 1891, and had initiated steps to bring large tracts of wetland under cultivation to boost revenue generation. Waves of peasants arrived from thickly populated districts of East Bengal like Mymensingh, Pabna, Rangpur, and even Dhaka. Migration creates lines; in those days it created the “Line system” in Assam (1920) in order to impose certain restrictions on immigration. The line system was the precursor to the violent politics (of future years) of collective claims – in those very early days the Assamese and the Bodo members of the nine-member Line System Committee had notified to the British authorities that they hoped that the new rulers would not invite “foreigners” in

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<sup>8</sup> These figures are from Monirul Hussain, The Assam Movement – Class, Ideology and Identity (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 1993), p. 10.

large numbers as to make the “indigenous population” a minority.<sup>9</sup> It was the beginning of “population as politics”, *biopolitics* - but miles apart from the way in which Indian disciples of Foucault have conceptualised the issue.

High population growth in Assam was thus soon to become an issue. In fifty years - 1901-51 – the growth was 138 per cent. Crop production had also increased in this period, so had increased the area under cultivation, similarly tea production had increased; but all this compared to labour growth was a minor phenomenon to the besieged mind – be it farm labour, peasant labour, plantation labour, or labour in petty jobs. Typically, the protest of the native did not arise around the demand for jobs, but around issues of election, electoral rolls, franchise, and citizenship rights – it was a war against aliens. The citizens were prepared to rather remain economically impoverished, sick, and infirm, and survive on the doles handed out by the “centre”, which logically along with the tea garden owners and timber merchants should have been an equally alien presence to the natives, but it was time that the citizens had to drive out the aliens, in view of the unnatural population growth in the state – by one count between 1961 and 1991 nearly one hundred per cent growth. Against illegal immigrants in one case, it was said that 64 per cent of the total number of cases of complaints out of a total electorate of 6,00,000 had been upheld. The figure of complaints upheld in this case was 45,000.<sup>10</sup> The bloody anti-immigrant movement continued for five years – not only foreign immigrants were attacked even members of the minority communities, particularly Muslims, were targets at times. Riots, torching of houses, looting, paralysing administration, civil disobedience – the war continued in all forms. War against foreigners became civil war amongst various communities. The State had to combine strong methods and persuasive techniques to administer inter-ethnic relations, and demography became one more area of governmentality, so much so that defining an Assamese – the first task of claiming a nation – became an enterprise beyond cultural articulations, it was bloody, administrative, contentious, exclusive, expelling, and an elect enterprise. From the neat writings of Assam Sahitya Sabha to the killing fields of Nellie was but a short road. On surface it was a question of expelling or killing Muslims, at time Bengali Muslims at times Assamese Muslims, but at the level of the physicality of nationhood, it involved the plain tribes, hill tribes, other linguistic groups such as

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<sup>9</sup> Cited in Sanjib Baruah, *India Against Itself – Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> Sanjay Hazarika, *Strangers in the Mist* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1994), p. 138.

the Nepalese, and people from other states like Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, or West Bengal, and Bihar. Many organisations grew up or gathered strength and momentum in self-defence in this bloody and bloodless war, the most prominent being the United Minorities Front, which bagged 17 out of the state's 126 Assembly seats in the Assembly elections of December 1985. The ceding of Sylhet (in form of referendum) years back in the Great Partition, as could be seen now, had done little to make Assam a pure nation,<sup>11</sup> even after it was cut off its (East) Bengal links, for East Bengal in its different incarnations had sent in, in the words of the top ruler of Assam the Governor, Lt. General S.K. Sinha, hordes of people, in his exact words, "a silent and invidious invasion of Assam" causing the possible loss of the "geo-strategically vital districts of Lower Assam", "which would soon claim merger with Bangladesh", "the driving force of which would be the international Islamic fundamentalism". The spectre was severe – "Loss of Lower Assam will sever the entire land mass of the North East from the rest of India and the rich natural resources of that region will be lost to the nation".<sup>12</sup>

In this war cry, Acts proved to be of little use in expelling immigrants – the Foreigners Act or the Illegal Migrants Determination Tribunals Act. The figures told the story – in fifteen years after the Assam Accord, the total number of inquiries initiated against suspected illegal aliens was 3,02,554, and number of illegal immigrants expelled was 1,461. Because it was a war, all communities had developed strategic tools of linkages and enmities – plains/hills, valleys/hills, Hindus/Muslims, Bengalis/Assamese, Bengali Muslims/Bengali Muslims, Assamese Muslims/ Bengali Muslims, Bodos/Assamese, Bodos/Muslims, Bodos/Santhalis, Assamese/Nagas, Assamese/Kukis, Karbis/Kukis, Karbis/Assamese...It was not a case of sudden ethnic conflict, it reflected rather a condition of generalised war, because the war consisted of several battles and theatres of attrition. Insecurity from migration had created lines of all kinds, and had taken clearly military dimensions. But of that later; first let us see little more how this condition engulfed areas outside Assam too.

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, as historical research into the history of Sylhet referendum of 1947 bears out, the referendum by itself was the reflection of the fault lines within the Assam society. See, for instance, the essay by Bidyut Chakrabarty, "The 'Hut' and the 'Axe' – The 1947 Sylhet Referendum", The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 39 (4), 2002, pp.317-350.

<sup>12</sup> "Report on Illegal Migration into Assam" submitted by the Governor of Assam to the President of India, 1998 – [http://www.satp.org/India/Documents/Assam\\_Illegal.html](http://www.satp.org/India/Documents/Assam_Illegal.html)



In Tripura long back in 1876-77 the indigenous people were more than two thirds of the total population of 91,759. More than hundred years later in 1991, they counted for less than one third of the state's population of 2,757,205. It was again roughly the same story. The Maharaja of Tripura had enacted legislation in 1917 and 1925 to acquire land for tea cultivation, which encouraged migration. Moreover Bengali being the language of administration, immigration from East Bengal increased. Besides peasants, artisans also joined the golden trek driven from native land by recurrent famines, usury, and landlords' oppression. By 1930, the number of migrants had risen remarkably, and now for the first time land had to be reserved by measures decreed in 1931 and 1943 for the Tripuris, Jamatias, Reangs, Noatias, and the Halams. Massive internal displacements took place in the first half of the forties of the last century, when Reangs, the second largest indigenous community in Tripura, revolted against the Maharaja of Tripura and the movement was brutally suppressed. Reangs in large number left Amarapur and Udaipur in South Tripura and emigrated in thousands to the North, also towards the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Lushai Hills. Thus Udaipur's population remained almost stagnant between 1931 (Reang population 2151) and 1961 (Reang population 2374), while in the same thirty years the Reang population of Dharmanagar rose from 735 to 18,834. The population of Belonia similarly increased, while in Kailasahar it decreased from 11,218 to 6283.<sup>13</sup> With the Great Partition began waves of migration in the state, and finally in the eighties Buddhist Chakma refugees entered in sizeable numbers from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in the wake of the conflict there and army operations of the Bangladesh State against the rebellion. The Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS) was formed in 1967, it led in 1978 to the formation of the first militant movement against the immigrants, the Tripura National Volunteers, which soon started attacking settlers and symbols of government authority, including at times security forces. Land question became crucial, and with jhum cultivation being systematically disturbed and finally destroyed, clashes began to erupt. The June riots of 1980 were the first major signal of the troubled time. It caused enormous displacements. The Dinesh Singh Committee Report estimated that nearly 3,72,000 persons had been affected by the riots of whom about 1,50,000 people belonged to indigenous communities. Nearly 2,00,000 people had to be sheltered in camps. The number of total relief camps was 141; nearly 35,000 houses were gutted; and the estimated loss of property was about Rs. 21 crores. About 1300 people died. Again, in the last two years of the last decade an estimated number of 2614

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<sup>13</sup> Census of India, 1991, series 24, Tripura.

families were displaced from severely affected areas such Khowai, Sadar, and Bishalgarh sub-divisions due to clashes. By 2000, the civil-political-military movement of the indigenous people against the settlers or migrants had become so strong, that a ragtag combination of forces under the title of Indigenous People's Front of Tripura won the elections to the 28-member Tripura Tribal Autonomous District Council. The years of the eighties of the preceding century were marked with violence, large-scale settler-native inter killings, army operations, rape of women by security forces and the militants, kidnapping, and increasing communalisation of the scene. Today one estimate says that in the nineties – from 1993 to 1999 a total of 1,018 persons were killed (656 non-tribals and 362 tribals) and 2,001 persons were kidnapped (1,663 non-tribals and 338 tribals). And then in two years, the succeeding years of 2000 and 2001, as many as 692 civilians were killed, plus 47 security forces personnel, and 87 militants also lost their lives.<sup>14</sup> The TUJS demanded from the Government of India more powers to the Autonomous District Council, barbed wire fencing of the entire length of the 856 km long boundary with Bangladesh, push back of immigrants who had arrived after 1971, and the introduction of the inner-line permit system to enter the Tribal Council Area.

Clashes also began in enclaves claimed by Assam and Nagaland where each claimed that people from the other state had come in and inundated the area, in Mizoram Chins were severely discriminated, in Arunachal Pradesh the Chakmas remained non-citizens even after decades of assurance to the effect that they would become citizens, and in Manipur through the years of eighties and the nineties of the last century, something happened akin to what I had described in *The Marginal Nation*, namely the emergence of broken villages along the West-Bengal Bangladesh border (such as pure Muslim or pure Hindu villages) and the decline of mixed settlements. Here too, a silent process of purifying homelands had set in,<sup>15</sup> the hills of Manipur became pure Naga Hills or Kuki Hills. And, the frenzy of development activities in the entire region – construction of dams, roads, pipelines, power generating centres, or reserving forests – threw up new displaced, thus new migrants, new aliens, new ethnicities, and new threats.

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<sup>14</sup> Figures cited from Wasbir Hussain, "Bangladeshi Migrants in India: Towards a Practical Solution – A View from the Northeastern Frontier" in P.R. Chari, Mallika Joseph, and Suba Chandran (eds.), Missing Boundaries – Refugees, Migrants, Stateless and Internally Displaced Persons in South Asia (Delhi: Manohar, 2003), p. 138.

<sup>15</sup> For some details, see Phanjoubam Tarapot, Bleeding Manipur (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 2003).

In the construction of the Umium hydroelectric project a large number of Khasis was displaced without any chance of resettlement. Later on similar projects caused massive displacements in Chandrapur, Namrup, and Bongaigaon in Assam. The Dumbur project displaced 5845 families (an estimated number of 40,000 people) in Tripura. Before that the Kaptai dam construction on the river Karnaphuli in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh had displaced Chakmas and Hajongs and forced them to move to India – and many of them decades later still lead a life of a “stateless community”.<sup>16</sup> Similarly the oil industry did not benefit the ousted population in Duliajan, Noonmati, Bongaigaon, Digboi, and Nazira. Paper mills came up in late seventies of the last century in Nowgaon and Cachar, land pressure increased, and the battle over resource like land became ferocious leading at times to bloodbath as in Nellie (1983). Karbi indigenous people were similarly affected. And the construction of an IIT campus in North Guwahati caused the displacement of 35,000 people. The media (*Amar Asom*, 2 September 2001) reported that out of the central grant of 10.3 crores of rupees to the state government to pay compensation, only 4.3 crores of rupees reached people. If the Tipaimukhi multi-purpose project comes up in Manipur with an estimated cost of Rs. 2899 crores (1995 price level), it will submerge fully 16 villages and partly 51 villages affecting 15,000 people. The entire Tipaimukhi development plan presents in a congealed form the conflicts between the hill and the valley, state administration and the indigenous communities, and the ideology of development and the requirement of survival.<sup>17</sup> Similar development awaits Arunachal Pradesh with the two proposals of Siang dam and the Subansiri hydel project. Similarly in North Bengal, contemporary observers have noted, how dispossession of resources and displacement have played crucial role in the making of a political community and the movement for its claims.<sup>18</sup> The battle of resources has pitted communities against the State, the army against the people, one community against another, and in general has reconstructed relations.

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<sup>16</sup> On this see, Sabyasachi Basu ray Chaudhury, “Uprooted Twice – Refugees in the Chittagong Hill Tracts” in Ranabir Samaddar, *Refugees and the State – Practices of Asylum and care in India, 1947-2000* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), pp. 249-280.

<sup>17</sup> For details on displacement due to development activities, Monirul Hussain, “State Development and Population Displacement in Northeast India” in C.J. Thomas (ed.), *Dimensions of Displaced People in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Regency Publications, 2002), hereafter *DDP*, pp. 282-298; Monirul Hussain, “State, Identity Movements and Internal Displacement in Northeast India”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35 (51), 2000; Hiram A. Ruiz, *Northeast India’s Hidden Displacement*, report of the U.S. Committee for Refugees, Washington D.C., 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Sujata D. Hazarika, “Dispossession and Displacement – The Genesis of a People’s Movement in North Bengal”, *DDP*, pp. 299-315; also Soumen Nag, ...

In such restructured scenario, Manipur presents a grim scenario of the battles for survival; in fact it presents what I have described earlier as the condition of generalised war. In 1891 the Union Jack was hoisted over Imphal, and the era of British paramount power began after the British army defeated stiff Manipuri resistance. Colonial rule began with executing a prince and a commander of the resisting army. Other leaders were sent to Alipur jail in Calcutta. The valley remained under the re-instituted princely rule, which was now severely limited in power, and the hills were to be from now administered by the political agent based in Imphal. The Manipur State Durbar (MSD) formed under the “Rules for the general Administration of the State” (RFGAS) framed by the Government of Assam was to oversee the daily administration, and the MSD had to follow the political agent’s advice. Though the colonial desire of full annexation was not put in practice, by all accounts Manipur as an independent state with its political capacity to negotiate and solve its problems had passed into a myth. Again slavery and forced labour for the royalty became issues for the colonial power to discipline the native administration. However, while the reform to abolish slavery and forced labour were welcomed, protests and resistance against colonial interference and indirect rule continued. The British reserved some area for its direct rule; most of the hill areas though formally ruled by the Maharaja, the president of the MSD, was from now on administered by an ICS officer and other officers belonging to the Assam Civil Service, and thus the political agent of the Assam government was the real administrator. The hills and the British reserve area were placed under different sections of the RFGAS. With administrative reorganisation in the twenties and early thirties in the State, tribal conflicts flared up again. War between Kukis and the Nagas started. Three sub-divisions were created: (a) The sadar sub-division comprising the “hillmen” living in the valley and in the hills bordering valley besides certain other areas, the area to be directly administered by the president of the MSD; (b) the Tamenglong sub-division covered the hills on the western side of the state, and was inhabited mainly by the Kabuis and other Nagas, and Kukis; (c) the Ukhrol sub-division covered the hills on the eastern side of the state, inhabited by mainly the Tangkhuls, Kukis, and others. The colonial power also encouraged Kuki settlements and other settlements in other areas. A new sense of territoriality emerged in the entire area with the British policy of divide and rule, modern administration, indirect rule, court system, and bureaucracy. Inter-community clashes began in 1890s. In 1892, some “286 persons were massacred” (Nagas by Kukis), in 1918 Kukis wiped out “a Kabui village”, in the same year in another incident “76 heads” of Kabuis were taken away by

invading Kukis, and 20 villages were destroyed. Kukis from Burma joined the Kukis of the area in this war between the settlers on the frontier of the hill areas and the indigenous Nagas who lived deep inside the hills. Nagas also ravaged Kuki villages – in 1880 the first attack on the Kukis had taken place, in which “20 men, 7 boys, and 25 women and girls had been killed”, and several others were found missing. Several hundred fled. At time Manipuri outposts were attacked as they were seen to be favouring the Kukis. The Kukis also protested against conscription in the First World War and the British had to mount a pacification campaign, in which about 200 Kuki villages were burnt down. Meanwhile Kukis took away “200 heads” of Nagas in an attempt to settle old scores. About 2000 “hillmen”, principally Kukis, were conscripted for the campaign in France, but Kukis resisted any further conscription and raided villages of those groups/tribes that did not resist the conscription. British military operations began to impose order in the hills. Columns of Assam Rifles marched against rebellious Kukis. One of the eleven Kuki chiefs was killed; ten others were captured and sent away to different jails. The Kuki rebellion had been settled, but only to be replaced now by Kabui rebellion (1930-31). The Kabuis wanted to make war on the British and the Kukis, who symbolised diseases, famines, taxes, and forced labour for the British. A messiah king was to be instituted after the rebellion was successful. Kukis were attacked, Manipuri traders were raided, but the movement failed after the capture of two leaders - Jadonang and then Gaidinliu. Naga-Kuki feud continued; also continued the confrontation with the British.

In the entire period of fifty years before 1947, disturbances in the hills created deaths and displacement, and it is important to remember these early years to understand the nature of the relation between migration and conflict today in Manipur. By the time independence and Manipur’s “merger” with independent India came, the state was ready for a general war. Following Hijam Irabot’s dream, many Manipuris (mainly Meiteis) got organised in their rebellious armies, so got organised the Kukis, and the Nagas firmly cast their lot with the main rebellious Naga organisation. According to one report, by the end of the century, that is with the passage of another fifty years, there were about 12 militant organisations, in all 19,590 warriors, about 10,000 units of small arms, and nearly one lakh active sympathisers to various well-entrenched rebellious causes.<sup>19</sup> As usual army depredations have only worsened the situation. Demands on issues ranging from independent Manipur to separate homelands or to

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<sup>19</sup> The citations are from various state records referred to in [Bleeding Manipur](#), pp. 139-178.

unification with nation have persisted. Army operations have resulted in further killings, torture, violence on women, large scale displacements, and an over all unqualified political disaster as a result of the Indian government's strategy to step in the colonial policy of provoking "tribal feuds", occupy, suppress, and rule. What the British could get away with is not possible today. In this violent situation, humanitarian catastrophe is now permanent. With no dialogue in sight, there is no end to the catastrophe also in sight.

Interests in Manipur thus remain in conflict. The people, mainly Meiteis, do not want that the Sixth Schedule be extended to the hills, giving at least partial autonomy to the hills and the hill communities. On the other hand the move to extend the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act of 1960 has been opposed in the hills because it is seen as an attempt to take away the inalienable rights of the people to their land. Because areas in the state remain mixed, the plan that could have satisfied many – a neat segmentation of the territory according to demographic-cultural lines – remains impossible or at least extremely difficult. In the ten years period of 1956-66, nearly 60 Kuki villages were destroyed in Tamenglong and Ukhrul districts. In the 1990s about an estimated 500 people were killed in Kuki-Paite conflict, about 90 villages were burnt down, and about 2,25,000 people were displaced. Similarly conflict has flared up around the issue of converting the Sadar Hills sub-division into a full-fledged North District, renamed Senapati district. Nagas there do want that this becomes a revenue district, claiming that the area belongs to them, the Kukis are equally insistent on their demand for the district. In the early years of 1990 the United Naga Council served notice on the Kukis to leave the Naga Hills because the Kukis they alleged were being encouraged and supplied with arms by the government. From 1970 to mid 1990s thus clashes continued with intermittent killings, burning of villages, and displacements of people – all in all a persistent humanitarian crisis, of which a full account can be constructed only through a very diligent micro-history of the conflict there. The claim of the Nagas there that they belong to the Naga nation whose people and area are historically spread to parts of other states besides the state of Nagaland has not still not found any ground of reconciliation with other competing claims. Notwithstanding the nature of the ethnic claims, one can note in this context the rough pattern of "ethnic landholdings" in the hills of Manipur: In Churachandrapur district Kukis hold 90 per cent of the landholdings, Nagas 10 per cent; in Chandel Kukis hold 75 per cent, Nagas 25 per cent; in Senapati Kukis hold 25 per cent, Nagas 75 per cent; in Tamenglong Kukis have 30 per cent and Nagas 70 per cent; and in Ukhrul again the division is roughly the same. More than 7,000 Nagas were displaced in the

agitation in the state against the extension of ceasefire with the Nagas there. About 1000 villages burnt in a decade in the multi-dimensional conflict between Nagas, Kukis, Meiteis, Paites, and others. The displaced people do not like to take shelter in the camps set up by the government; they prefer to move about in the hills inhabited by their community members. A correct figure of the total number of the displaced in the state through the preceding three decades is difficult to get today.<sup>20</sup> Old historic grudges, impact of the colonial policy of divide and rule, new nationalism among communities in the east, and the Indian state's policy of administrative reorganisation of the northeast along hard segmented lines and then ensuring security of the new set up with the means of the army, police, and terror – all have combined to create the situation of generalised war.

The situation of a generalised war in the region, exemplified in that of Manipur, finds reflection in not only war rhetoric, but in actual incidents of expulsion also. Thus, in many places the Nepalis have been on the run, in others Bengalees. Expulsion of Nepalis in many places in the North East led to autonomy movement in the Darjeeling Hills. In North Bengal, adjoining the Bodo areas of Assam, a similar process of conflict later began with the killings and expulsion of several North East militant groups from Southern Bhutan. Everywhere, the “immigrant”, known as the settler, faces insecurity in form of the native; likewise everywhere the native, known as the “indigenous”, faces insecurity appearing in form of the settler. And altogether, the State faces insecurity from the spectre of aliens swamping the land, aliens who in league with their soul mates here are conspiring with foreign countries to secede or at least make the region a hotbed of conspiracies, and long drawn out bitter clashes and bloody internal rivalries, with day to day governing becoming a tough business, because an unlikely issue had leapt to the top of the priority list – governing population flow. In this scenario of war, no wonder military discourses flourished wildly. In the combined discourse and ideology of development-security, modernity, economic and technical development, state, and the army stand against ethnicity, backwardness, and the immigrants.

We find a great reflection of this phenomenon in the fact that, army generals as defenders of societies have started taking interest in governing population flows in the region. This interest of course started, as we know, in the colonial period with the introduction of the

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<sup>20</sup> These figures are cited from DDP, pp.

“imperial warrior”, the gorkha (of which we shall have the occasion to refer to at some length later in this essay), to fight through the jungles and the hills of the North east and the formation of the Assam Rifles in order to control the rebellious territories. And then in the post-independence era, came directly the army plan of re-grouping of villages in Mizoram displacing scores and scores of villagers in order to control the insurgency there, and its implementation in 1967-70. The regrouping of villages into larger units as a counter-insurgency measure was modelled after the 1958 regrouping strategy employed by the British in Malay in the fifties, and then copied by the US forces in South Vietnam in the form of “strategic hamlets”. The immediate objective of regrouping was to establish control over the villages in the interior and far flung areas of the then Mizo district of Assam, now the state of Mizoram. The Planning Commission also became an accomplice of the military in this strategy of displacing thousands of peasants, when its study team headed by Tarlok Singh visited the area and recommended regrouping. Shifting of remote hamlets and re-organising them into larger units guarded by the armed sentries so that outsiders could not sneak in became the strategy. In this way almost 75 per cent of the population of the Mizo district was regrouped in four stages – formation of protected villages (PPV), new grouping centres (NGC), voluntary grouping centres (VGC), and extended loop areas (ELA). The security forces undertook each stage of grouping, and later these centres were handed over to civilian administration.

The first phase of grouping into 18 PPV centres was over an approximately 10 miles radius of the mainline of Silchar-Aizawl-Lunglei road, involving a population of about 30,000 of 106 villages. The grouping was carried out under the provision of the Defence of India Rules, 1962. Development programmes were added for these regrouped areas. The second phase involved the shifting of about 55,000 people of 184 villages into 40 NGCs, and this was done under the Assam Maintenance of Public Order Act, 1953. The third stage was carried out under the same Act, and involved 25,000 people from 110 villages for regrouping into 26 centres. The fourth stage again invoked the same Act, and involved a population of 19,000 from 63 villages to be grouped into 17 ELAs. Soldiers, commanders, and bureaucrats joined hands in displacing people in a massive-counter-insurgency operation spread over 6 years and deployed all kinds of people ranging from agricultural extension officers, medical officers, clerks, nurses, and soil conservation staff, to forest guards, midwives, female searchers, and at times teachers for managing them. Yet in the interior, ungrouped villages of about 37,000 people remained occasioning the extension of military operations over wide areas. Sociologist



C. Nunthara recorded the impact of the introduction of grouping of villages, and noted the devastation of community and village life, abandoning under duress jhum cultivation and consequent instability, shattered agricultural work pattern, various attendant social evils, and in an ironic way the advent of several modern “towns and bazaars” with diverse social occupations.<sup>21</sup> As peace returned, Mizoram witnessed the second highest growth rate in the country in the decade 1991-2001 – as against the national average of 21.34 it was 29.18. The Chakma population increased significantly. Nearly 7 per cent of the Mizo population had been born outside the state, and of the immigrant population, 75 per cent was nationals and 25 per cent had come from outside the country. About 80,000 Chins had come from Burma. With the rise of Mizo nationalism both Chins (who had come from across the international border) and the Reangs (who to Mizos were internal immigrants) were considered as enemies of Mizoram. The relation between Mizos and the Reangs worsened considerably; many Reangs fled, others chose to fight and formed a militant organisation. Clashes erupted, Reangs demanded autonomous district council status.

In this context, it is no surprise that security becomes a macro-question, population management becomes a matter of governing from the top, and the army becomes the most accredited institution of such management. Indeed, as population flow is “geopolitics” to the army, as an ex-general put it while writing a book on the North East. As he further put it in the broader context of the region, the situation was quite simply one of “demographic invasion”. As the Mizo experience bore out, the army thought that it could displace thousands in order to ensure security; yet the army was the one institution, which needed to be most vigilant against immigrants’ invasion in order to ensure security of the people. Thus to the general the region was “sensitive and susceptible to foreign influences”, and there was “tribal affinity” across various borders, and alleged “Chinese supply of arms in private ships through Chittagong Port” to ULFA, as he so disingenuously wrote, “A top level ULFA functionary when captured recently, seems to have confessed” to that effect.<sup>22</sup> Population flow in this discourse brings borders, not because that the flow is always across borders, but mobile populations are dangerous in terms of governing and administering, they can mobilise support, and support

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<sup>21</sup> C. Nunthara, Impact of the Introduction of Grouping of Villages in Mizoram (Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1989), pp. 50-60; the figures are from the Assam District Gazetteers, Part 4, cited as appendix to this study, pp. 61-66.

<sup>22</sup> Lt. General N.S. Narahari, PVSM, Security Threats to Northeast India – The Socio-Ethnic Tensions (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2002), preface.

across borders are more difficult to govern. Thus the Indo-Burma border, first settled in 1826 in the Yandabo Treaty, later confirmed in the Nehru-U Nu agreement of 1953, and hitherto left un-administered became militarised. Thus stretching from the Namkia Mountains bordering Arunachal Pradesh, then Patkai Bum bordering Nagaland, to Hamolin bordering Manipur to the Chin Hills bordering Mizoram, administration of borders became important. Kachins, Shans, Eastern Nagas, Chins, Arakanese, plus Burmese communist rebels – all could claim links across the border to this side; hence population flow could not be allowed to negotiated at community level, it was not simply an innocent matter. It can be seen, therefore, how the military discourse, discourse of social insecurity, physical insecurity, and the contentious politics of nationhood all combined in this political exercise of ensuring security against the aliens.

The military discourse to be fair to the army generals sprang not only from their minds, it had roots in the internal discourse of society's security also, on which the military discourse fed. For instance, the Bodo student leader Upendra Brahma, an active member of Assam Agitation, pressed for implementation of Clause 10 of the Assam Accord, which said, "It will be ensured that relevant laws for prevention of encroachment of government lands and lands in tribal belts and blocks are strictly enforced and unauthorised encroachers evicted as laid down under such laws". Upendra Brahma demanded the eviction of the indigenous population from Tamalpur and the "immigrants" from the *char* areas of Brahmaputra. This was certainly the signal for attacks on the Santhal population (not considered as "tribe" in Assam) in Bodo areas. Similarly, the insistence on making Assamese virtually the language of instruction in all parts of the state became a matter of contention with the All Assam Tribal Students Union. The Karbi Autonomous Council Demand Committee complained that the leaders of Assam were taking steps to wipe out other distinct languages and cultures from the state. The two discourses mixed as the ULFA demand of an independent Assam generated violence at an unprecedented level. Those who demanded security of their societies had taken up guns and were acquiring modern small weapons for sabotage, detonation, small level hand to hand combat, and communication equipment, and were killing not only security forces, but all those at some point of time appeared as not belonging to the nation of Assam – be they a manager of a tea factory or a labourer from Bihar. But more significantly, those who realised that now security could be provided only by deployment of army and tin pot rag tag guerrilla forces mobilised the armed forces for full-scale operation in the region. With it began the full-scale security discourse and

“securitisation” of the social mind. Hereafter tea garden owners could feel secure now that the army was there; the people bought security now that they were paying taxes to government and the rebels both; and men of property had bought security with private guards and militias. The true significance of “Operation Bajrang” and “Operation Rhino” lay there. It signified the rejection of any dialogic approach, with casting anyone advocating release of prisoners or protection of human rights as “soft” and compromiser – one who did not care about lives of jawans. These operations signified further making military security the bedrock of governance; military security was physical security at its extreme (confined to the narrowest circles) through physically eliminating those who were creating “anarchy” in society. Men of property demanded reintroduction of army operations. On the other hand, ULFA gradually softened its stand on immigrants from Bangladesh, and tried to broaden its definition of Assamese, thereby widening the scope of Assamese nationalism by an inclusive strategy, though killings of “outsiders” by the nationalists of Assam continued, as it continued in Tripura and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, the collective claims that took on the war path in this over-all scenario of governing by arms forced the governments of the region to reckon with claims of various solidarities for their homeland, by definition a combination of democracy, xenophobia, and intolerance against outsiders. For instance the government of Assam had to concede to Rabhas and the Mishings the principle of autonomy. The Rabhas pressed claim for 862 villages. Mishings claimed 1600 villages. Village council autonomy and apex council system were introduced in combination, but the rulers and the army had neither the patience nor the skill to bear with the messy issue of autonomy. To Delhi, army headquarters, and even to state capital rulers, the local administration was inept in administering autonomous areas and arrangements, and therefore the troubles were continuing. Hence to the political and the military class the policy of rule by arms remained a necessity.

The mess in Karbi Anglong is worth mentioning in this context. Earlier known as the Mikir Hills, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills were before independence partially excluded areas and excluded areas. Karbis and the Dimasas are the main groups in Karbi, whereas Nagas, Kukis, Karbis, and Hmars inhabit the North Cachar Hills. Both areas had District Autonomus Councils under the Sixth Schedule under the Constitution. But the arrangement was not enough; it was both corrupt and insufficient. The demand was for statehood, and agitation began. In the North Cachar Hills, visited by Naga and Meitei rebel

groups, violence flared up even more. The army killed 14 Nagas, The Karbi Nationalist Volunteers murdered non-indigenous people, that is, settlers. To the army, this is a spectre of what one general called Rwanda-Burundi. He said, killing of rebels by the army was justified; walking through Cachar – Haila kandi and Karimganj – is like walking through Bangladesh – and the situation needed strong vigilance by security forces. In his words, which capture perfectly the military discourse of security,

Assam is the hub and logistic base for the Seven Sister states. The lifeline of these states passes through Assam, close to international borders. Assam is essentially a multiethnic and multi-linguistic State, buffeted by Hindu refugees and Muslim illegal immigrants from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. The immigration continues, due to lack of “living space”, economic and political problems in Bangladesh. Let us not forget that in Bangladesh, there is still a sizeable Hindu population, though decreasing steadily due to migration and conversion, which could cause frequent “floods” of refugees after each political turmoil from a Nation State, which is under pressure to become “Islamic”. Deportation, even if detected, of large number of illegal immigrants, seems a wild dream. Softening the blow by a ten-year cooling period, which is over now, is only pushing toward the demographic catastrophe. Assam, which has seen militancy, terrorism and ethnic massacres, could turn into a Burundi-Rwanda type of racial/ethnic conflict zone. Arming and training of illegal immigrants, inspired by the ISI and the Bangladeshi intelligence, is not beyond comprehension. The Muslim fundamentalist organisations could fundamentalise (sic) the Muslim population. What started as “vote bank” politics by national parties and, later picked up by regional parties, can boomerang and cause serious problems to our national integrity and national security.

The Assamese society should move forward from “Agitation Syndrome” to positive action in the sphere of change of work attitudes, development and improvement of skills in agrarian and technical fields. They cannot turn the clock back; neither can they expect large-scale deportation. They should make Assam an unattractive place for illegal immigration by their own hard work and not by employing, and not depending, on the immigrant labour.<sup>23</sup>

We have here all the elements of neo-racism and the wails of an enclave economy. There is no desire to look east and find solutions through new linkages (such as, links with and transit through Bangladesh, so that Assam does not remain the “logistic base”, or with Burma), only the spectre of aliens overwhelming the homeland, and the lament that a soft military policy has not produced result, and the eternal hope that development will cure all ills. Development and tight military security – the permanent pillars of a developmental state appear one more time in social thinking as the governing tool for managing population flow.

We can see here the paradox inherent in “governmentality” that takes development and protection by arms as the combined policy of rule and managing the population. We can also see here the continuity of the discourse of physically disaggregating and segregating population groups – a policy that began with conquest of the area by the colonial rulers. We can see here

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 83-84.

the continuing mission of “society must be defended”, which conceptualises security in the most physical terms – that is, body, locality, property, and resources. In short this is what we can call as *modernity’s mess* in face of population flows that were thrown up in the first place by the advent of modernity, and now refuses to be neatly solved by modern governmental techniques. The fact is at the end of the day, governmental techniques are fundamentally aimed at controlling the bodies; but it is precisely the unruly locations and movements of the bodies that defeat the governmental techniques of achieving stability.

I am not for a moment suggesting that the ethnic rebels and the other liberationist groups and movements in the region and the army generals think along the same lines. But to understand why the discourse of physical security can lodge itself at the heart of security concerns of a community, group, population, or a state, and can be so totalising, we have to study closely, very closely the security practices of solidarities stretching from a group to a State and their interface – indeed the intermix of so many concerns at a material level that has produced the inflammable “politics of security” – where national security, community security, indigenous population’s security, developmental security, resource security, land and food security, and military security have converged. Politics of security, I shall argue, is a field. This is the field of governmentality, where all issues become relations between governors and the governed. In this field, one can notice the presence of legal and civic behaviour, also illegal and war like behaviour; similarly the presence of the policies triggered by claims of the State that security can be provided by an over-all umbrella of arms and development, at the same time the realisation of groups that that they can survive only by exercising their own security options, one of which is to claim nationhood, homeland, and pulling up the drawbridges so that outsiders cannot come in. In short, while popular sovereignty still exercises the imagination of groups below the nation-state, this can become a potent political tool of democratisation only within a group, which is fixed. But where the group is not fixed, and the people refuse to become a population group, the constitutional framework of autonomy there fails. Indeed, not only we witness the decline of the ideal of popular sovereignty, we see at the same time the emergence of a community around the politics of security, by which I mean the practices of security. This is a classic case, I would maintain, of the construction of a symbolic community – a faith community, faith in the sense of faith in a particular identity – that the nation form periodically generates. At the expense of the “alien” we have the emergence of a political society; at the same time, its own legal and para-legal acts confer legitimacy on the community

that these acts have created in the first place. This is then a process of “citizen-massacre” on the basis of which a nation has emerged. To know what Assam is today, we have to know what Assam practised in the eighties in claiming its rights and entitlements. The field of governance and rule, which makes population flow a matter of administration and puts its stamp on the latter with law, administrative measures, violence, and suppression, is then by nature a combination of legality, para-legality, and illegality. If it, as I tried to show, began in the colonial era, it has now become the evidence of the historical construction of modern community in which not so modern phenomena such as conquest, racism, constructing physical distinctions between people and making them thereby different population groups, and the constant requirement of keeping a praetorian guard that like a vigilante keeps the physical existence of a ruler intact, have their place. One’s security in this backdrop of the war and civil wars, struggles and rebellions of the last sixty seven years, becomes another’s insecurity. In this contentious history, politics of security might be described as the meeting point, the hinge, or the moment of articulation, of the political problem of power and the historical question of race: the genealogy of racism, the construction of physical boundaries, the taking of guard against aliens – all these beginning with the historical discourse against migrants and outsiders in the colonial era, the discourse on all “other” groups and races, the mutual narratives of valleys and the hills, plains and the hills, and the settled peasants and the aboriginals in these sixty seven years, and the transformations these discourses underwent in all these years. In this historical transformation of the discourse on the alien we have the re-appearance of the political discourse of war, of race struggle that traverses the field of power, leads to conflicts, decides who is an alien and therefore an enemy to be killed or to be expelled, and generates domination, rebellion, and more important hatred, that will prolong this war.

The large, looming, ill defined, and the confusing figure of the “immigrant”, in which various images such as the Muslim peasant from Mymensingh who had arrived in Assam in the first two decades of the last century, the Santhal peasant and tea garden labourer in Assam, the Nepali milkman, the immigrant worker in Dimapur, the Kuki in the Naga/Manipur Hills, the Hindu Bengali settler in Tripura, the Bengali help hand from Silchar working in various petty jobs in all the towns of the region, the Chin refugee in Mizoram, or the Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh - all are mixed up, is a product of the discursive and institutional practices of security that have been carried on in the region for the last hundred years. The figure of the immigrant not only marks a phase of uncertainty in the growth of the nation form in the region, this figure

is formed in correlation with the development of a set of institutions of control and surveillance developed over the last hundred years (such as the line system, areas of partial and total exclusion, Acts to detect aliens and deport them, census, electoral roll preparation and revision, rules of property in the region, arrangements of autonomy, the deployment of army in the region, organisation of violence against the alien, etc.) with harsh real effects in terms of making this figure an object of lasting fear and hatred.

Historians of Assam for instance emphasise that the total Muslim population of Assam after its reconstitution of 1874 shot up from being 5.9 per cent of the total population to 28.8 calculated on the basis of the census of 1871.<sup>24</sup> Though migration from Sylhet and Cachar ceased by any significant measure by the third quarter of the nineteenth century and tea garden labour influx was the most pronounced of the various migratory movements into Assam, by the end of second decade of the twentieth century the term “Mymensighias” became synonymous with the immigrant, Mymensingh being the most populous of all the Bengal districts nearest to Assam next to Goalpara. In 1874 the population of the district was more than the total population of all the Brahmaputra valley districts. Brahmaputra devastated thousands of acres of land in the Mymensingh district, where by 1900 Muslim population was 67 per cent of the total district population, per capita cultivable land in the district was 16 *kathas*, 95 per cent of agricultural population was landless and only 2 per cent was *talukdars*, and where half of the land was waste and other categories of land.<sup>25</sup> The number of immigrants in Goalpara till 1881 was 49,059. By the next decade the number had increased to 1,18,233 forming 19.7 per cent of the population of Goalpara. From Pabna, Bogra, Rangpur, and Mymensingh the census of 1911 recorded an extra-ordinary influx of peasants. Men came first to secure the land and build houses, families then followed. Of the immigrant population 85 per cent was Muslim, 15 per cent was Hindu. By 1911 the immigrant peasant population spread to the hills, and by the next decade the settlers numbered 3,48,000 in the valley. The immigrants had by now explored the entire wasteland in Goalpara and Nowgong districts and now ventured deep into the valley leaving the riverbanks. Lakhs and lakhs of rupees transacted but remained unaccounted, as most of the land transactions went unrecorded. The immigrants became objects of exploitation of their own headmen, officials, local rich men, *matbars*, landlords, and *dewans*, who in cases

<sup>24</sup> M. Kar, Muslims in Assam Politics (Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1990), p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Administrative Report of Mymensingh, 1873-1874 (Calcutta: Government of Bengal, 1874); also Imperial Gazetteer of India (Mymensingh, Goalpara, Kamrup, and Sylhet), 1874, cited in Muslims in Assam Politics, Chapter 1.

like in Goalpara purchased large blocks of land amounting to as much as five hundred to a thousand bighas, and the landlords converted the peasant population into their tenants. The movement of the immigrant peasant population for life and security led by none else than the redoubtable Maulana Bhasani became one of fight against the landed gentry back *at home* – Mymensigh – and now *here abroad* – in Assam. Immigration was now clearly a contentious issue involving access to land, water, money, and other resources, and was therefore to become soon a political issue. After having greatly contributed to the wealth of the new land, the immigrants had become unwanted. As a class, the attitude of the immigrant peasant population hardened, so also hardened the attitude of the Assamese rich, and the landowners of the valley.

In September 1915 a consolidated set of rules appeared from the Chief Commissioner's office. Settlements were to be made on annual *patta* basis, which conferred on the settlers only the right of users and no right to inheritance and transfer. "After a reasonable time" if the cultivation had taken on a permanent nature, the Deputy Commissioner or an Additional Deputy Commissioner could convert an annual *patta* to a periodic one, and the Deputy Commissioner had the power to eject within three months' notice persons who had not acquired appropriate right on a piece of land.<sup>26</sup> As government measure, it affected Assamese and the immigrants both, and though the Assamese protested loud to the effect that the said rules affected the permanent heritable and transferable character of the tenures, they now conveniently forgot that in order to prevent transfer of land from the Assamese to the immigrants a curtailment of the Assamese right to sell and transfer was now required. Speculation built around periodic *patta* lands; complaints of forcible occupation, harassment, and exploitation, mounted; and the Commissioner of Assam, J. Hazelitt, had to concede that the area transferred from the Assamese was much less than suspected. The Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong, H.M. Prichard also conceded in 1926 that till then the immigrants had occupied unoccupied and fluctuating areas, and had hardly encroached on the settled Assamese areas. Yet in the political discourse the immigration issue flared most, war postures were evident, and it was argued in Assamese political circles that the ejection of "foreigners" (the word had appeared by that time in administrative notes) was within the existing powers of the government. The bureaucracy argued that it could not stop immigration; the Assamese gentry wanted to have the right to sell or transfer land; the immigrants wanted to have land and

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 17.



security; and the colonial rule wanted in the words of the S.N. Mackenzie, the Commissioner of Assam valley Division, “dividing lines for Assamese and immigrants” as the solution – particularly in a situation where annual *pattas* were haphazard, periodic *pattas* were being transferred, and at times one particular community (for instance the Assamese) was encircling the another community (for instance the immigrants in Barpeta) in a ring of periodic *pattas*. The problem was no longer an inter-community one; it had become a *governmental problem*. No one took notice of the fact that in this scenario the “immigrant” was the Muslim from Bengal only, to be precise from Bengal and Surma valley, while other immigrants and the Assamese enjoyed unrestricted right of inter-district migration. A myth had been born. The immigrant was “land-hungry”, he was “invading”, he was more “industrious”, and he must be contained. But if the line system had been introduced, much alike the post-partition history of Bengal, restrictions in form of lines in villages, later mauzas or a block of *mauzas*, tended to disappear. Yet, at the same time, through administrative, cultural, economic, and political contentions, possibilities of a new form of racism had been sown<sup>27</sup> Neo-racism in this sense like many other products was the mark of *governmentality* – the field being continuously defined and redefined by modern electoral politics, whose early strains were to be found in the Sadullah-Bardoloi-Chaudhury agreements of 1941 and 1945, and the election results of 1937 and 1946. The number of Muslims decreased considerably after the partition; with about 19 lakh population the Muslims had 16 members in an Assembly of 71 members in 1947; in 1972 with 36 lakhs they had 20 members in a House of 126 members. Yet as real as these facts was the building up phenomenon of hatred at whose heart lay the conflicting interests of groups and classes.

So solidified was the mutual hatred, that the nation in Assam now securely rested on what Etienne Balibar has called “fictive ethnicities”. Some Muslim politicians demanded in the stormy pre-partition years that the whole of Assam should be included in Pakistan, as Assam was in a zone where Muslims were a majority, also because it was a province where the majority of non-Muslims in Assam were tribal people, as in Surma valley the Muslims were a majority and in the Assam valley the Hindus minus the indigenous people were a minority, and as in Assam the majority of population was Bengali-speaking – by all accounts a strange formulation that left all non-Muslim population except Hindus out of political existence, as if

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<sup>27</sup> In order to understand this process, of enormous significance is the published report, Line System Enquiry Committee Report, Government of Assam, 1938.

Assam belonged to these two communities only. And if the Assamese Muslim political class saw no other course than pitting an undifferentiated Muslim mass (that included both immigrant and the native) against an undifferentiated non-Muslim mass, the Assamese Hindu political class saw in the Grouping Plan that put Assam with Bengal in Section C the possibility of massacre of the linguistic and cultural identity of the Assamese. One result of the two discourses was the partition of Assam in form of Sylhet joining East Pakistan through a referendum. But if the Assamese Hindu thought that this was a clean partition, and Assam would be hereafter a homogenous entity, this was an illusion as the later history of various riots and anti-immigration movement in Assam was to bear out. The dichotomies along communal, linguistic, and valley lines appeared in subsequent decades amounting to what can be called today “neo-racism” in politics.

In making sense of this historical construction of hatred, two points need to be kept in mind. First, what I had pointed out at the beginning of this section, namely that this hated figure of the immigrant is a product of the interrelation of political economy and a macro-discourse of security, which most often is a militarist discourse. Second, the question of method is important in studying hatred. And here I shall argue for the need for three things in terms of method: (a) the rejection of theories and doctrines that are incapable of accounting for the real confrontations, and the relations of power and relations of force within these confrontations; (b) counter-posing the macro-discourse of security with the micro-discourse of insecurity; (c) and the bio-political contrasting of the two phenomena – the phenomenon of rights, civility, legality, and development, and that of illegality, physicality, overwhelming insecurity – molecular insecurity.

### III

Born, educated and married in Kathmandu and employed as a peon in Northeastern Hill University, Shillong in 1977, Netra Prasad was transferred to the Department of Sociology in 1981 and worked there for the next 18 years. He got separated from his first wife after the birth of a son, married a second time in Kathmandu, and had two children from his second wife. He passed Matriculation, Bachelor of Arts, and a certificate course in computers privately. He got married to a Christian tribal lady in late 1980s in Shillong and died at her residence on March 25, 1999. It was his tribal Christian wife, who arranged for his last rites and rituals with late Sharma’s relatives, and Hindu friends in Shillong. She took none of the service benefits provided by his employer after his death, and, in fact she is getting his eldest son educated by providing him food and lodging. Though there was nothing against him on his service records, he was promoted as a Lower Division Clerk after 22 years of

service, for which the order was received after his death. Sharma's life represents a poignant tale of an average Nepamul Bharatiya.<sup>28</sup>

The story of the immigrant in the North East can be thus re-told in another way. In this case, the story begins in the distant hills of the Himalayas, in Nepal. And as will be seen shortly, like all other retellings this story can be re-told in yet another manner. There are two ways in which the story of the Nepali immigrant can be told: one is woven around open borders, and the other is once again built around the fibres of colonialism and post-colonialism. But in both versions open border and its psychology, and the politics around the institution of open border, play a big role.

India and Nepal have open borders. Out of 1808 km. length Indo-Nepal border, 1213 km. consists of river boundary. There are 60 big and small rivers and rivulets, which demarcate the border between Nepal and India. Of them, the most important are the Mechi on the east and Mahakali on the west. The Anglo-Nepal treaty of 1814 and the subsequent Peace Treaty signed in 1816 between Nepal and the Indian colonial power resulted in the delimitation and delineation of Nepal-India border. Nepal lost quite a significant stretch of border with India as a result of the Sugauli treaty – it shrank from 1415 kilometers from east to west to 885 km.<sup>29</sup> But with the Treaty, the Nepal rulers had made up their minds to cast lot with the British colonial rule over India and aid it with its most precious resource – its people. In 1857, Jang Bahadur Rana was in control of power in Nepal. Jang Bahadur sent Gorkhali troops to control the rebels. As a prize, the British decided to return Nepal the plain areas from Kali to Rapti Rivers, which had been taken away by the Sugauli Treaty. This return was formalised through a border agreement between the King of Nepal and the British Resident on 1 November 1860, after the Boundary Commissions of the two governments met in Oudh in February 1860 to survey and demarcate the boundary. The dispute over the river boundary between Mondia Gahat to Bunbasa along the Mahakali (Sharada) river was consequently resolved with the endorsement of the claim of Nepal in 1875. There are other aspects today to the question of Indo-Nepal border, such as the issues of border demarcation, topographical survey, method of actual

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<sup>28</sup> This is dedication piece in A.C. Sinha and T.B. Subba (eds.), The Nepalis in India – A Community in Search of Identity (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Co., 2003).

<sup>29</sup> For detailed discussion on Indo-Nepal border, see Buddhi Narayan Shrestha, Border Management of Nepal (Kathmandu: Bhumichitra, 2003); see also Vidya Bir Singh Kansakar, "Nepal- India Open Border: Prospects, Problems and Challenges" in Nepal-Bharat Khula Simana - Sakaratmak Tatha Nakaratmak Paksharuko Pratibedan (Kathmandu: Institute of Foreign Affairs, 2002).

scientific demarcation, displaced boundary pillars, ill-defined boundary, encroachments, inadequate functioning of the Joint Boundary Commission, common rivers, dispute over the location of Kali, Kalapani, and Mechi Rivers as the boundary, or the issue of Sikkim borders<sup>30</sup>; but here what is relevant is the long history of open border allowing population mobility across the border between the two countries (26 out of 75 districts of Nepal have border linkages with India), for this is the key question for an understanding of the way in which immigration has emerged as a problem for rulers and the political class in both the countries in terms of their capacity to govern the people. Yet when we discuss Indo-Nepal open border to understand the dynamics of Nepali immigration in North East India, it will be wise to remember that boundary and border disputes have cast their long shadow on the issue of immigration.

Open border, reinforced through the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950, has meant in the political discourse of security and development two images, conveniently picked, changed, alternated, and mixed. One image speaks of so-called “positive implications”: convenience in movement and travel, strengthening mutual ties, quick emergency response and assistance, medical service facilities (in the case of epidemic, distribution of polio vaccine, vitamin A etc.), immediate supply of food-grains and daily consumer goods, competitive market, and supply of local labour. The other image speaks of “negative implications”: encroachment of border and the no man’s land, cross-border terrorism, illegal arms transaction, trafficking in women, drugs trafficking, trans-border crime, theft and robbery, smuggling of goods and machinery, kidnapping of individuals, plane hijacking, distortion of historical facts, illegal migration, entry of Bhutanese refugees, deforestation, and even degeneration of political values. In this bizarre list of evils, which apparently would have been much less according to the national security specialists of the two countries, had the border been not open to free human movement. Open border is seen as the root of all negative phenomena existent in Indo-Nepal relations, to the extent that once again the immigrant, in this case the Nepali immigrant in the North East, who remains forever an immigrant despite living here for more than a century, is sacrificed at the

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<sup>30</sup> It is to be noted that Nepal has not yet formally recognised the incorporation / annexation of Sikkim in / by India, and, at the same time, India has not sought recognition from Nepal. However, after the accord between, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Bajpayi and Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala in 2001 to resolve the boundary demarcation and boundary dispute within three years, there have been efforts towards this end by constituting several joint boundary teams. Realizing the absence of a boundary treaty between Nepal and India on the border between Nepal and the adjoining state of Sikkim in India, the Government of India has initiated the proposal to start the review and re-demarcation of Nepal India border from northern most part of Sikkim.

alter of the politics of security. S/he remains the quintessential alien – s/he lives often without citizenship rights; considered a foreigner, forgotten in the suspended homeland and neglected in the homeland of the current time, the Nepali in the North East (or the “Indian-born Nepali” in the Nepal tarai) is a stark reminder of how the nation-form assumes life only at the expense of all those who were found considered to be carrying ambiguous identity, and therefore inconvenient for a nationalist badge of honour, and hence to be disenfranchised, displaced, dispossessed, and at times in the North East expelled. We cannot wonder at the fact that this would lead in time to a strong Nepali demand in North Bengal for a homeland with a separate identity, the Gorkha identity, which would once for ever solve the mystery and the misery of a “double identity” that had been imposed on them. Ridiculed by Bengali, Assamese, and even some Nepali intellectuals, and rejected by cultural anthropologists, philologists, and language experts, the claim that Gorkhas were not Nepalis but Gorkhas, has been a durable claim whose merits can be seen only in the light of collective politics which has to escape the aporia of identity and nationalism only through staking out a path of contention.

The Nepal-India Peace and Friendship Treaty which was signed on July 31, 1950 agreed to grant, on a reciprocal basis, to the nationals of one country in the territory of the other the same privileges on matters of residence, ownership of property, participation in trade and commerce, movement and other privileges of a similar nature. It became a major turning point in the movement of Indians into Nepal and the Nepalese in India. The main transit points along the Nepal India border in the East are: Pashupati Nagar/Sukhia Pokhari, Kakerbhitta/Naxalbari, Bhadrapur/Galgalia, Biratnagar/Jogbani, Setobandhe/Himnagar, Rajbiraj/Kunauli, Siraha/Janakpur, Jaleswar/Birtamod (Sursand), Malangwa/Sonabarsa, Gaur/ Baigania, and Birgunj/Raxaul. The rest are: Bhairahawa/Nautanwa, Taulihawa/Khunwa, Krishnagar/Barhni, Koilabas/Jarwa, Nepalgunj/Nepalgnj Road, Rajapur/Kateniyghat, Prithvipur//Tikononia, Dhangadhi/Gauriphanta, Mahendranagar/Banbasa, Mahakali/Jhulagat (Pithoragarh), and Darchula/Dharchula. Any actual estimate of trends in Indo-Nepal mutual migration is extremely difficult to make because of two reasons: open border, and relatively late development of census methods in Nepal (the first census in Nepal being carried in 1911, the 1952-54 census being considered as the first scientific census in Nepal).

Though with the Treaty of Sugauli, Nepal had given up their occupation of Kumoun, Garhwal and parts of Sikkim, the British rulers immediately with the establishment of their

residency in Kathmandu began recruiting from the Gorkha region soldiers for their army. With this gradually Nepal was to become in the conventional Indian administrator's eyes a "population exporting country" and India was the destination (and the debate over the land hungry Indian peasants' entry into Nepalese tarai region was still far off.). Thus a stream of Nepalese migration to India and other regions began. During the Gorkha rule over Kumaun and Garhwal people from Nepal had already started migrating to these regions, and many families had settled down in Almora, Nanital and Dehradun. However, the number of such Nepalese settlers there was not high, as that region did not provide enough employment opportunities, and comparatively less Nepalese had been attracted to migrate in this region. The other reason was that soldiers were needed for eastward expansion, while the territory of the Bengal Presidency remained relatively stable. Thus began around the same time the early phase of Nepalese emigration to the North Eastern region of India. Also, tea plantation companies were in search of plantation workers. As a result, along with other people, the Nepalese began to migrate to Assam. Many of them cleared the forests and started cultivation. They also joined the armed forces. With the Indo-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1950 providing a framework for cross-border movement of people between the two countries, and the stipulation that same facility would be provided to the immigrants from the other country as was to given to its own citizens, later Nepalese emigration began to be directed towards other regions of India as well, primarily in search of formal and informal employment in industries, agriculture and as security services. The migration soon became markedly seasonal. Harvesting season, construction work, recruitment in army and government and private security services, kin-linkages and marriages, flood, rains, and petty trade, and transport services – all became factors in the cross-border flow. According to the Nepal census of 1952/54, altogether 1,98,120 Nepalese were absent from home for more than six months prior to census taking. The reasons usually provided were: temporary absence for short periods for tourism and pilgrimage, short term absence on business trip, long term absence for studies, or for longer term employment, such as the Gorkha recruitment and other employment in foreign countries, and absence due to permanent migration. Census data however do not provide the figures of absentee population groups by the above classification.<sup>31</sup> Therefore the question troublesome for many a quarter and

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<sup>31</sup> The 1991 census was the first Nepalese census, which tried to provide the distribution of absentee population by reasons such as services, trade/business, dependency, marriage, and agriculture. According to the Nepalese census of 2001, among the total absentees (7,62,181), 6,79,469 were males and 82,712 were females. Among the males 84 percent went abroad for employment. Among the females, 34 percent went abroad for employment and 14 percent were dependents, and many had migrated due to marriage.

now acute is – Who is a Nepalese in India? One who speaks Nepali? One who is from Nepal? One who is a resident from Nepal? Or one who is a Nepalese speaking Indian?

Table 1 presents the numbers of early Nepali emigrants to India. Table 2 provides Nepalese population in India based on censuses of India.

Table 1: Numbers of early Nepalese migrants in India

Province/State	1881	1911	1921	1931	1951
Assam	4,485	45,214	92,519	1,23,788	1,25,320
Bengal	89,855	90,388	92,291	13,31,151	1,74,020
Bihar & Orissa		5,179	4,495	7,411	12,221
United Province		18,266	18,392	3,10,220	53,445
Sikkim		28,078	26,887	38,866	38,542
Total	94,340	1,87,125	2,34,584	3,34,236	4,03,548

[Source: Kaushal Raj Regani, 1987, *Nepalese Immigrations in India: An Analysis of Trends and Patterns (1951-61)*, JNU, New Delhi, 1987: 43 cited in B.C. Upreti, 2002]<sup>32</sup>

Table 2: Nepali population in India

State/Union Territory	1971	1981
Andhra Pradesh	3,860	3,051
Assam	3,53,673	
Bihar	4,59,12	20,197
Gujarat	5,803	4,790
Haryana	1,778	2,643
Himanchal Pradesh	20,229	40,526
Jammu and Kashmir	2,588	2,468
Kerala	1,454	621
Madhya Pradesh	10,923	11,904

<sup>32</sup> B.C. Upreti, The Marginal Migrants (New Delhi: Kalinga Publications, 2002)

Maharashtra	19,828	23,428
Manipur	26,381	37,046
Meghalaya	44,445	61,259
Mysore/Karnatak	1,605	2,543
Nagaland	17,536	24,918
Orissa	5,554	7,775
Punjab	2,576	3,654
Rajasthan	2,534	2,758
Sikkim	1,34,235	1,92,891
Tamil Nadu	2,354	2,585
Tripura	2,107	2,190
Uttar Pradesh	48,877	29,570
West Bengal	6,15,544	7,11,584
Andman and Nicobar Island	250	254
Arunachal Pradesh	30,912	45,508
Chandirarh	252	641
Dadar and Nagar Haveli		32
Delhi	8,126	10,947
Goa, Daman and Din	312	460
Mizoram		5,983
Pondichery	188	198

[Source: Censuses of India, 1971 & 1981, cited in B.C. Upreti, 2002]

Returning to the question, *Who is a Nepali in India*, these figures of course do not tell us much, as there is no thorough study as yet on the distribution and volume of Nepali migrants in India. According to one estimate, about four million Nepalese are said to be living in India. Figures given by the State agencies are not very reliable. For instance, there is a big gap between the official data and non-official figures on Nepali population in Assam, which is said to have attracted a huge number of Nepali immigrants. In Meghalaya, another northeast state to host the Nepalese, migration is said to be on the reverse flow with a large number of Nepalese returning to Nepal due to the intensified “anti-foreigners” movement launched in Assam and



Meghalaya. Among the Nepalese living in various regions, the Assamese Nepalese are said to be relatively more enterprising and industrious. Their jobs vary from cheap labour to cultivation in Darjeeling, Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland. Today however, the picture is changing. Less people are moving to India from the eastern hills compared to the situation two-three decade ago. Along with the indigenous and dalit communities, upper caste people are also moving out. For instance, a case study of Nepali migrants in Pithoragarh noted that majority of the respondents (66.7%) belonged to the Thakur caste, 10.7 percent were Brahmins, and 10.7 percent scheduled caste (Harijans).<sup>33</sup> Table 3 indicates that the volume of absent population has increased in Nepal from 1,98,120 in 1952/54 to 7,62,181 in 2001 - a rise in the share of absentee population to total population from 2.39 percent in 1952/54 to 3.29 percent in 2001. Table 3 gives a picture of the absentee population of Nepal over the years, and Table 4 gives us an idea of the reasons for the absence, also a gender-wise break up.

Table 3: Absent population and their proportion in total population in Nepal, 1961-2001

Census Year	Absent population	Percent of Total Population
1952/54	1,98,120	2.39
1961	3,28,420	3.48
1971	-	-
1981	4,02,917	2.68
1991	6,58,290	3.58
2001	7,62,181	3.29

[Source: CBS, Census Reports of 1952/54, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 Censuses]<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Ramakant & B. C. Upreti, India and Nepal - Aspects of Interdependent Relations (New Delhi: Kalinga Publications, 2001).

<sup>34</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics, Population Censuses Reports (Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics, 1952/54 - 2001)

Table 4: Percentage distribution of absent population in Nepal by reasons and sex, 1991-2001

Reasons for Absence	Male		Female		Total	
	1991	2001	1991	2001	1991	2001
Agriculture	22,495 (4.1)	6,608 (1.0)	5,386 (4.9)	1,155 (1.4)	27,781 (4.2)	7,763 (1.0)
Trade (Business)	8,861 (1.6)	11,140 (1.6)	2,526 (2.3)	910 (1.1)	11,287 (1.7)	12,050 (1.6)
Employment	382,85 5 (69.9)	572,28 5 (84.2)	29,948 (27.2)	28,265 (34.2)	412,80 3 (62.7)	600,55 0 (78.8)
Education/Training	12,156 (2.2)	24,929 (3.7)	2,834 (2.6)	6,818 (8.2)	14,990 (2.3)	31,747 (4.2)
Dependency	80,039 (14.6)	2,157 (0.3)	35,797 (32.5)	11,944 (14.4)	115,83 6 (17.6)	14,101 (1.9)
Others	14,799 (2.7)	62,350 (9.2)	25,134 (22.8)	33,620 (40.6)	39,933 (6.1)	95,970 (12.6)
Not Stated	26,797 (4.9)	-	8,763 (7.9)	-	35,560 (5.4)	-
Total	548,00 2 (100.0)	679,46 9 (100.0)	110,28 8 (100.0)	82,712 (100.0)	658,29 0 (100.0)	762,18 1 (100.0)

[Source: CBS, Census Reports of 1991 & 2001 Censuses]

Table 5 presents the reasons for absence of absentee population to India: about 66 percent went to India for employment, followed by dependency (17 percent), and then agriculture (4.7 percent). Among the male absentees to India, about three-fourth (73.2 percent) went for employment, while only 29.9 percent of female absentees went for employment. Similarly, 31.4 percent of female absentees to India went by dependency, while this proportion for male is only 14.2 percent. According to 2001 census of Nepal, of the total absentee male

population there about 76 per cent has come to India, while this figure with regard to the female migrants went is 83 per cent – of the total absentee population, about little more than 77 per cent has come to India. The higher percentage figure with regard to female population may be due to trafficking, marriage of women, and informal jobs where women can be engaged.

Table 5: Distribution of absent population from Nepal to India by reasons and sex, 1991

Reasons for Absence	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Agriculture	22495	4.6	5286	5.6	27781	4.7
Trade (Business)	7561	1.5	2203	2.3	9719	1.7
Employment	360388	73.2	27781	29.2	388169	66.1
Education/Training	9302	1.9	2084	2.2	11386	1.9
Dependency	70114	14.2	29866	31.4	99980	17.0
Others	10136	2.1	23074	24.2	32210	5.5
Not Stated	12128	2.5	4870	5.1	16998	2.9
Total	492079	100.0	95164	100.0	587243	100.0

[Source: CBS, Census Report of 1991 Census; Note: Information on reasons for absence by country of destination is not available on 2001 census)

We can get an idea of the duration of the stay of the Nepali immigrant in India from Table 6, though the picture may be just indicative. It seems that for a good group of absentee population (about 50 per cent) 1-5 years is the average period of stay. The data on absent population by duration of absence reveals that Nepalese population leaving the country for abroad is increasing steadily. In this process about one fifth of total absentees left home during the year prior to the census. One can also note that as time goes back, the proportion of reported absentees also declines. It appears that during decade of 1981-91, about three fourth (73%) of absentees were away from home and the pattern applied for both sexes.

Table 6: Absent population by duration of absence and sex, 1991

Duration of Absence	Male	Female	Total
Less than 1 Year	20.9	19.0	20.6
1-2 Year	21.4	23.0	21.7
3-5 Year	16.2	17.0	16.3
6-10 Year	14.7	13.6	14.5
11-15 Year	9.0	6.1	8.5
16-20 Year	6.0	3.7	5.6
21-25 Year	3.7	2.1	3.4
26-30 Year	2.3	1.2	2.1
31-39 Year	1.7	1.0	1.6
40+ Year	0.8	0.6	0.8
Not Stated	3.4	12.5	4.9
Total	100.00 (548,002)	100.00 (110,288)	100.00 (658,290)

[Source: CBS, 1993, Population Census 1991, Vol. III, Table 6; Note: Figures in parenthesis are total number.]

We have to remember that the debate over the immigrant, the discrimination, and the attacks against him/her is carried on against the background of mutual complaints about “pushing population into my territory”. Thus, while a country may not care much about its population wandering across borders half-starved, but its grievance against labouring immigrant population in its area is palpable. Thus, whoever discusses Indo-Nepal cross-border population flow, has to know, and as the 1961 census revealed, that 3.6 percent of the total population of Nepal is, as foreign born; of this foreign-born population; a total 96.1 percent are India born population; and the terai has 92.3 percent of the total foreign born population and 98.9 percent of those have been born in India. They are similarly at the receiving end of nation-making politics of the land. The Indian born population in 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991 was 96.01, 95.63, 94.97, and 95.33 percent respectively of the total foreign-born population. About 32 percent of the foreign-born population reported residing in Nepal for more than 10 years, 11.6 percent reported residing in Nepal for 6-10 years.

The problem is then similar: Whom we should consider an Indian migrant in Nepal? There are three categories of Indians in Nepal: (a) Those Indians, who had migrated to Nepal long ago, acquired Nepalese citizenship and became part and parcel of the acquired Nepalese society in course of time; (b) Those Indians who migrated in the recent past and have acquired or are in the process of acquiring Nepalese citizenship; and (c) Seasonal or floating migrants. As we know, for a long time Indian migration to Nepal like Nepali migration in India was free from any acute political problem. It was considered as a natural flow of population across the national boundaries on a reciprocal basis. This situation has, however, undergone a considerable change during the last few decades. And gradually it is also becoming a contentious issue in the relations between India and Nepal as in the case of other South Asian countries. Growth in the number of Indian traders in Nepal and their stronghold over the latter's economy has created conflicts. Also, faced with large-scale unemployment, the younger generation of Nepal has turned to identity politics, and has started criticizing Indian migrants for minimizing their employment opportunities. During the fifties there was no competing class in Nepal. By the 1970's an educated, technically trained and a small entrepreneurial class began to emerge in the kingdom. This emerging class found it difficult to compete with the Indian migrant community. In its eyes, the position that the India-born daily labourer in the valley and the poor peasant have and the privileged position of the Indian traders and industrialists are the same; demands are being now raised for the withdrawal of the rights and privileges granted to the Indians in Nepal under the Peace and Friendship Treaty. The problem of citizenship (The 1964 Citizenship Act had stipulated a 12 year stay in Nepal for persons of non-Nepali origin as an essential qualification for the acquisition of citizenship.), the problems in agriculture (The 1964 Land Reforms Act prohibited the Nepalese to sell, give away or otherwise relinquish their rights on an immovable property to any foreigner. Thus, the immigrants are denied the right to purchase of land and other property, and the surplus land acquired through the implementation of land reform programmes was redistributed to the hill people instead of the tenant farmers of the Tarai region most of whom were Indian migrants), and the problem of business and industries (The Indian businessman can acquire 49 per cent of the stock to start a small or medium scale industry; he needs a "sleeping Nepali partner" in whose name the company can be registered) are now lumped as the same problem – the problem of nationality. That being an intractable problem, the Task Force on Migration was appointed towards the eighties of the last century by the Nepalese government. The Task Force, which submitted its report in 1983, noted that a number of problems had crept up due to immigration from the south, and

recommended regulation of open border with India, introduction of phased visa system, introduction of registration and entry permit system to the Indian migrants and a revision of existing laws concerning citizenship to make them tougher. These recommendations created among the Indian migrants fear and suspicion. These were then followed by a tough work permit system (WPS), which made obtaining permission from the Home Ministry necessary for those who wanted to seek employment. The WPS was actually meant to discourage employment of Indian migrants in the kingdom. The WPS caused many hardships to the Indian-born Nepalese, and was suspended after parliamentary democracy was instituted in the country in 1990.<sup>35</sup>

#### IV

The way in which nation-making has bestowed on this region a distinct politics of security, which has left no country untouched, and has made in all countries of the region large chunks of population insecure, can be gathered from the experience of the expulsion of an entire population from Bhutan. Though this compilation mainly draws on the of the experiences of the North East, the experiences of the expelled Nepali speaking population of Bhutan should be briefly mentioned here, because these form the starkest backdrop of racism and xenophobia against which the “politics of security” continues to strengthen its grip over the region at the expense of the immigrant.

The forced migration of the Lhotshampas (Nepali speaking Bhutanese) and Sharchops (Eastern Bhutanese, Buddhists) from Bhutan started in late 1980’s and late 90’s of the last century. Fearing their growing population, and potential ability to upset the Ngalong political stronghold, the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGB) methodically pursued a process of expulsion, in aims of maintaining unchallenged supremacy. Implementing laws and policies that challenged citizenship rights, the government imposed cultural hegemony by forcing the Lhotshampas and Sharchops to adopt uniform Ngalong cultural practices under the “One Nation One People” policy. Meanwhile a democratic reform movement had started in the south. It led to brutal repression of the Lhotshampas and political dissenters - arrests, forced

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<sup>35</sup> Apart from the Census reports, I have also drawn from other Central Bureau of Statistics Reports, such as Nepal Living Standard Survey 1996, Main Findings, Volume 2 (Kathmandu: NLSS, 1997); Population Monograph of Nepal, Volume 2, (Kathmandu, 2003); and Centre for Development and Population Activities (CEDPA), Facts on Asia and Country Profiles (Mumbai: CEDPA, 1997).

disappearances, widespread torture and harassment. Ultimately, discriminatory legislation and police brutality compelled many Lhotshampas and Sharchops to flee their homeland in search of refuge to India and Nepal. At present there are over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees living in various camps in South East Nepal and around 20,000 in India. The data as to how many eastern Bhutanese have been forcefully evicted from Bhutan is not available but there are few hundreds in Sikkim and around 150 in Kathmandu and eastern part of Nepal. It is ironical to see that the number of these refugees has grown to over 100,000, whereas the total Bhutanese population is only 600,000-700,000. The refugees have been not only denied political rights, but are also branded as criminals. The politics of sympathy by the Bhutan and Nepal governments started with the identification of around 12,000 refugees in the Khudunabari camp. The result was surprising as only 2.5 per cent, that is, only 293 persons were accepted to be Bhutanese citizens who had been forced to migrate. One of the worst humanitarian disasters in this region has so sign of ending. It only evokes occasional words of sympathy, and some humanitarian help from the UNHCR and other international relief agencies. The early Lhotshampas were believed to have lived in Southern Bhutan approximately a hundred years or even more. Although there are frequent references to the migration of Nepali artisans to Bhutan during the reign of Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel in the 17th century, no Lhotshampa family has been able to trace its roots that far. By the turn of the twentieth century Nepali speaking peasants started moving from overfarmed lands to thick jungle that needed to be cleared so that cultivation could begin. In those days, neither the peasant knew that he had crossed border, or had moved to a different country, nor the country where the peasant had moved in had knowledge of its own borders, and any formal immigration procedure. As the story goes everywhere, the farmers here too simply settled down and began to farm the land. The Bhutanese government decided to grant citizenship to all ethnic Nepalese residing in the country effective on December 1, 1958. This was a step that assured the Lhotshampa community's future security in Bhutan. Unfortunately, the grant of citizenship was not backed up with formal certification. The Royal Edict on Lhotshampa citizenship led to enactment of the 1958 Citizenship Act. The Lhotshampas were embraced as fellow-citizens and simultaneously conscripted, along with other ethnic groups to participate in the construction of the national highway.

But happy days were to end soon. A revised Citizenship Act with more stringent requirements was introduced in 1985, and the Government of Bhutan also trimmed the

expatriate work force in the country, which consisted mostly of Indian and Nepali labourers. A census exercise was conducted in 1988 specifically for the southern districts. The Bhutanese Nepalese were asked to show a 30-year-old land tax receipt as proof of nationality. Considering that payment of taxes in cash was mandated throughout the country only in 1964, this was a stiff requirement. Those who were unable to show that they were paying taxes in 1958, the year when the King had granted citizenship to the Lhotshampas, were classified as non-nationals. Thus after the census of 1988, the government declared that at least 1,00,000 illegal immigrants had been detected in Southern Bhutan. The expulsion of the Nepali speaking Bhutanese started. Between 1990-1994 army repression on the remaining Lhotshampas continued, and the rest of the Nepali speaking population was forced to migrate to India and Nepal. The Bhutan government initially denied all allegations of brutality, and indeed, denied the very existence of the Bhutanese refugees. Subsequently, it acknowledged the existence of the refugees, but claimed that the migration had been mostly “voluntary”, because even in cases of direct physical abuse, coercion, threats, harassment and intimidation leading to leaving the country, the government had taken care to secure before their departure a filled in voluntary “migration form” and an agreement between the emigrant and the local administration on court paper, duly stamped and witnessed by the local magistrate – at times a video camera recording the “joyous” scenes with which the “emigrants” were receiving compensation for their property.

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This was being done at a time when all correspondence between the population and the administration in the southern districts was being carried in Nepali, or in rare cases, English. But, the “emigration form” was to be filled in by those “voluntarily” leaving the country in *Dzongkha*, a language that the respondent did not know. According to some refugees from Chirang, some were specifically misled by officials into believing that entering this form indicated the respondent's desire to remain, and that it would thus entitle him to stay; others were coerced into agreeing to fill in the forms after other prominent villagers were tortured into agreeing to leave the country. Today 60 per cent of the Bhutanese refugees in India and Nepal are those who were forced to sign the voluntary migration form. Here are two instances of “voluntary migration” that the Bhutanese refugee movement has brought to world’s attention<sup>37</sup>:

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<sup>36</sup> AMCC, [Depopulation by Design: A Report on how Bhutanese Citizens were Made to Sign Voluntary Migration Forms and Forced into Exile](#) (Kathmandu, 1996); see also, “Myth of Voluntary Immigration” -<http://www.geocities.com/bhutanese-refugees/voluntary.html>.

<sup>37</sup> [Depopulation by Design](#)



### Dirga Singh Gurung from Beldangi – II Ext. Camp

Many people in our village including my second son Prasad Gurung had participated in the peaceful demonstration in 1990 in Samchi. After the administration crushed the Movement, our community rest house was turned in to a detention centre. One day, while I was coming home from my farm with oxen and was passing by the detention centre, a policeman intercepted me. He asked me to tie off the oxen and called me into the detention centre cum police camp and began interrogating me and coercing me to give them details about the 'anti – national activities' going on in the village. I replied that I had no idea on any such activities. As I said so the policeman struck me hard on my head with a long wooden roll and continued to interrogate. As I knew nothing of what he asked, I kept on replying that I didn't know. He continued beating me with all his might until I fell unconscious. When I did gain my consciousness, there were many other policemen looking at me. Finally, one of them told me to go home and report to the office the next day with all the answers.

Accordingly, I reported to the police camp the next day and I was asked the same questions again. I had no answers. They punished me by making me work in the camp. I was asked to cut firewood, sweep the floor, clean the bathrooms, etc. and allowed to go home late in the night. I discovered that I was not alone. Many of our village folks were already there and asked to do this job routinely. Later, we villagers were made to carry cement from Gola to Yaba, which was at least a three-day's journey one way.

One day, there was a meeting called by Dungpa in Gola where all the villagers of Lareney block were asked to attend. The Dungpa announced that all those families who had anyone of their members participating in demonstration against the government must submit applications for leaving the country. He further added that those who do not comply with the order will be punished. After five days, I was called to the Dungpa's office where he inquired about my family and knew about my son's involvement in the peaceful demonstration. He ordered me to write an application stating that I wanted to leave the country. I denied. Then a couple of policemen caught hold of my hair and asked me to sign. When I still refused, one police officer rudely caught hold of my right hand, dipped my thumb into an inkpad and put my thumbprint (signature) at the end of a white paper. After this, the Dungpa ordered me to submit my Citizenship Identity Card and the land tax receipts. He sent two policemen with me to my house to get the said documents. As we returned to the office the Dungpa and the police personnels forced me to sign on four forms. Out of fear, I signed it. Thereafter, a small amount of money was given to me and asked to leave the country within two days. I was the first person to be evicted from my village. Leaving behind my 45 sheep, land and household properties, I along with my family members came down the hills and stayed for some days in the border, but still inside the country. Soon my neighbours and other village folks who were harassed and evicted came to join me. Today our village is barren where no lamps are lit and not even dogs bark.

### Ram Bahadur Wagley from Khudunabari Camp

A general census was conducted in our village (block) in March 1993 and we were asked to produce our Certificate of origin by the origin by the census officials. We were given a very short time to produce the document for which we were required to approach various local village officials and trace our respective family heads, who might be living in quite far places.

I produced the CO in time and I was placed under F1 category, which meant genuine Bhutanese. My father in law was categorized as F7, which means non-national. Because of this reason my wife and children were placed under category F4 (a case of a national marrying a non-national). After this the census team leader told me that my wife and children were to leave the country with immediate effect and if they stayed back they would have to pay a fortnightly fine of Ngultrum (Rs.) five hundred per person. When I pleaded that I could not live separated from my family and that my wife

and the children be allowed to live in Bhutan, I was asked to go to Thimpu and bring an order from the Home Minister. Accordingly, I prepared the necessary documents to meet the minister. But on March 12, 1993 the day that I was to leave for Thimpu, the Dzongrab, District Administrative Office, accompanied by 12 heavily armed soldiers came to our in the meeting that I could not proceed to Thimpu and said that all the villagers who had been placed under the categories other than F1 or the genuine Bhutanese are to either sign an agreement for the fortnightly fine or fill up the voluntary migration form and quit the country. Eighty-six households heads including my mother were forced under threats of intimidation to sign the form. They seized our documents and this harassment continued till 10 PM. Under utter fear of our personal security, we signed the form. My mother was paid a meager compensation. Under strict vigilance of the Bhutan Police we departed from Bhutan on March 25, 1993.

These and many other testimonies tell us the almost completely hopeless situation of the refugees from Bhutan as far as the possibility of their return is concerned. And these tales are not exceptional, though they are the acute ones reminding us the widespread statelessness in the region of South Asia. No amount of international convention on statelessness can alter the fact that almost all states in the region have created stateless persons – large number of plantation Tamils in Sri Lanka, Chakmas in Arunachal Pradesh in India, the India-born Nepalese in the tarai region of Nepal, the Biharis in Bangladesh, the Nepali-speaking Bhutanese population in Nepal, the list is long. The forced migrant from Bhutan is not only a refugee, but a stateless person also. State formation in South Asia has besides creating refugees made large chunks of population stateless, whom no State wants to accept as citizens. Robbed of franchise rights, welfare entitlements, security of life, freedom of movement, and deprived of the right to do politics, the stateless person in South Asia is the ultimate figure of the immigrant. States have entered into several mutual arrangements of friendship and peace, at times have accepted back many of the persons of origin, but they have not cared for any minimum regional arrangement on statelessness, which could have addressed at least partially the issue of humanitarian victims of the process of state formation in the de-colonised region of South Asia.

Speaking of humanitarian crisis, if there is another crisis linking Nepal to South Asia, particularly India - far more acute and far more a reminder to us of a world of borders and boundaries, which has been structured in a particular way by power relations, it is the issue of trafficking in women. Famine and near famine conditions, slavery and semi-bondage, disasters and war like conflicts, bring out in sharper relief what has gone on in society for ages half of the time unnoticed, and in an endemic manner.

Though constitutions guarantee (for instance Article 20(1) of the Nepal constitution) the right against exploitation, which thereby prohibits the trafficking of human beings, slavery, serfdom, and forced labour in any form, the first sign of insecurity is the return of these forms of labour and servitude. And no amount of comprehensive, effective, and human rights-sensitive legislation can completely stop the return of slavery. For instance, while Section 12 of the Nepal Foreign Employment Act, 1985, was enacted to prevent especially such forced female labour, and which said, “Notwithstanding anything mentioned elsewhere in this Act, the license holder shall not provide foreign employment in foreign countries; Nepalese women require approval from their guardians and the government”, the Nepal government in a bid to increase foreign remittance into the country recently lifted the restriction on women going to Gulf countries in organized sector. Similarly though the Nepal Labour Act, 1991, defines an enterprise as “any factory, organization, association, firm, or a group thereof established under the prevailing laws for the purpose of operating any industry, profession, or service where ten or more workers or employees are engaged...” it does not apply to those organizations or enterprises that have less than 10 employees. Similarly, various realities predicate The Children Act, 1991, which stipulates that no one shall engage or use a child in an immoral profession or take photographs of a child for an immoral purpose, or that no child shall be engaged in work that causes adverse impact on its life or health. Trafficking from hill areas to Indian brothels has perpetually existed and possibly at an alarming rate: one has to only ask the social activists of Birgunj, Jhapa, Morang, Sunsari, Ilam, and Dhankutta who would vouchsafe that these have been the origins for trafficking through Kakarvitta in Nepal and thereon to the Indian cities. Sindhupalchowk, Nuwakot, Dolakha. Kavrepalanchowk, Narayaghat (Chitwan), Makawanpur and Dhading are the distant places wherefrom the journey for these trafficked women begins.

The sex market in Calcutta is reported as one of the major destinations of Nepali and Bangladeshi girls due to the close proximity of to West Bengal of these countries. The route from Kathmandu goes via Kakarvitta, eastern border in Nepal and Siliguri in India. September to October, the pre-harvesting and festivals times are the major recruiting period of the year. A single sale has its fractions of shaves in rupees as 200 to 2,000 for families, 1,000 to 2,000 to procurers, so to 200 for police or security forces and 1,000 to 3,000 for traffickers. Thus, it shows that a girl, on an average, is sold at a price of Rs. 2,250 to 7,200.

The entire controversy on the data on trafficking is a bizarre reminder of the government failure to do anything about it. It is said that gathering reliable data on trafficking is difficult due to the clandestine nature of the crime. Also, there is a lack of sufficient and verified data on the number of trafficked women and children, places of origin and destination, and purposes of trafficking. Most of the available documents, which are in the form of articles observation reports and theme papers, discuss trafficking of women and girls from Nepal to India for one purpose - prostitution. The figures cited in various forums and publications vary considerably across the sources, and a recent UNIFEM study on trafficked girls and women for sex work shows, indeed the variation in estimates is a comment on the magnitude of the problem. For instance, an ILO estimate cited by the UNIFEM says that about 12,000 women are annually trafficked for sex work. Two other estimates say that about 2 to 2.5 lakh women have been sold to various centres in India, primarily Mumbai and Kolkata. One estimate made in 1997 for trafficking in 1987 put the figure at 153,000 of whom 20 per cent were below 16 years. There are several other estimates an idea of which can be had from table 7.

Table 7: Estimates of trafficked girls and women for sex work

Sources	No of girls/women	Frequency / Time Frame	Destinations
Acharya 1998 and Koirala 1999	200,000/40000-50000 / /17000		India /Bombay / Calcutta
Pokhrel 1999	250,000		India
SAFAR 1997	70,000-100,000		India
CWIM 1997	153,000 (in 1987) (20 percent children below 16 years) 100,000-200,000 (1996)		India
CWIN 1997	100,000-160,000		India
Times of India 1989	100,000		India

Singh 1999	80,000-100,000		India
Pradhan 1991	27,000/21,000/3,480/ 4,700		Calcutta/Delhi/ Banaras/Gorakhpur
STOP/Maiti 2002	5,000-11,000	Annually	
CAC Nepal 2000	300,000 (globally)		
Ghimire 2002	5,000-7,000	Annually	
PC & TAF 2001	5,000-7,000	Annually	
STOP 2002	50,000		
Population Council, Delhi 2001	200,000		Sex Industry
LHRA & UNESCO 1997	Approximately 160,000		Working in Indian brothels
ILO/IPEC 2001	12,000	Annually	

[Source: UNIFEM, 2004; sources cited - Bidhan Acharya, “A Review of Trafficking Problems with reference to Nepal” in KC, Balkumar (ed.) *Population and Development in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Central Department of Population Studies (CDPS), 2002); Jyotsna Chatterjee, “Genesis of Prostitution: Causes and Magnitude” in *Prostitutes and Their Children* (New Delhi: Central Social Welfare Board, 1990), pp. 24-29; K.C. Bal Kumar, Govind Subedi, Yogendra Bahadur Gurung, and Keshab Prasad Adhikari, *Situation of Trafficking in Children in Nepal with Special Reference to Prostitution*, A Rapid Assessment Submitted to ILO/IPEC (Kathmandu: CDPS/ILO/IPEC, 2001); NPC, *the Tenth Plan (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper) 2002-2007* (Kathmandu: National Planning Commission); and UNIFEM, *Status and Dimensions of Trafficking within Nepalese Context* (Kathmandu: United Nation Development Fund for Women, 2004)].<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Bidhan Acharya, “A Review of Trafficking Problems with reference to Nepal” in K.C, Balkumar (ed.) *Population and Development in Nepal* (Kathmandu: Central Department of Population Studies (CDPS), 2002); Jyotsna Chatterjee, “Genesis of Prostitution: Causes and Magnitude” in *Prostitutes and Their Children* (New Delhi: Central Social Welfare Board, 1990), pp. 24-29; K.C. Bal Kumar, Govind Subedi, Yogendra Bahadur Gurung, and Keshab Prasad Adhikari, *Situation of Trafficking in Children in Nepal with Special Reference to Prostitution*, A Rapid Assessment Submitted to ILO/IPEC (Kathmandu: CDPS/ILO/IPEC, 2001); NPC, *The Tenth Plan (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper) 2002-2007* (Kathmandu: National Planning Commission, 2001); and UNIFEM, *Status and Dimensions of Trafficking within Nepalese Context* (Kathmandu: United Nation Development Fund for Women, 2004).

Quantitative data on the trafficked persons' caste/ethnic group distribution are too little for purposeful compilation and analysis. However, the following is a rough picture emerging from some secondary data, based on three sources: data from print media reviewed by IIDS, data compiled by CWIN on girls rescued from brothels by police in 1996 raid in Mumbai, and a Rapid Assessment (RA) by ILO/IPEC (2001) on trafficking and sexual abuse of street children in Kathmandu, assuming that these children were either already trafficked or were vulnerable to trafficking. Among the trafficked, the hill ethnic groups form the highest (43 percent) proportion, followed by Brahmin and Chhettri (23.8 percent) and occupational castes (22.4 percent). The same study says that about 20,000 minors are probably brought from Nepal to India every year. An estimated number of 5.3 million child sex workers in India with a hundred percent increase in kidnapping from 1990 to 1994 symbolize the vulnerability of Nepali minors to trafficking and prostitution.

Yet, amidst all these figures, one has to ask at some point, what do figures mean in this context? Do they mean at all anything significant? What if one set of figures is right, or the other set is wrong? Who denies that the problem is grave? Yet, with all these international agencies, surveys, and estimates, what is the improvement? The various social, psychological and physical impact of trafficking remains. If, on forward journey they had faced rape, on return too at times they are raped at mukhiya's (the chief of the village) home; in the forward journey they face hitting, burning of private parts with cigarettes, fettering of the feet; beating and gang rape; wage exploitation, forced service to many (up to 20) clients every night; and hard work, on return they become victims of several life-threatening diseases such as tuberculosis, STDs, and AIDS. Returnees are rarely treated normally. In fact they face hatred of society. Once abused, on return they are abused again. In this world of "minima moralia" migration in almost every form sparks anger, hatred, feeling of insecurity, frenzy, and passion, which in their deadly combination create the cauldron that international administrators love to call as "humanitarian crisis". Amidst this crisis, which defies every humanitarian solution, "the a-moralist may now permit him to be...kind, gentle, un-egoistic, and open-hearted..."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, Selections from "Minima Moralia" in Adorno, Can One Live after Auschwitz? – A Philosophical Reader, ed. Rolf Tiedmann and trans. Rodney Livingstone and others (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 54.

The problem of treating a particular aspect of the materiality of life as a humanitarian crisis is deep. At the level of response, the humanitarian one is a minimal and ambiguous response – at one liberal, at once cynic, because it turns the mask of evil upon the normal world by painting it abnormal – “to teach the norm to fear its own perversity”. Trading (in) the body, selling it, persecuting it, savouring it, tormenting it, burning it, controlling it, subduing it, despatching it, and building an empire based on use of flesh is part of that life that goes on normally. It was there, it continued even after the age of free labour dawned, and it is still there when globalisation has marked the victory of the global world of mobile capital. Similarly goes on the discrimination and attack on the immigrants, one more way in which the physical attrition continues. Yet the sense of shock each “humanitarian crisis” reveals speaks of a blank space of consciousness, marked by dread and despair. As if this is the pre-history of modernity, it creates “sensation” in modern mind. This sensation is however less dependent on any basic sense stimulus, it is more a product of a realisation that consumer morality, thought to be clinically clean, can be so destructive and intoxicant, that it can reduce morality to a minimal level. The narcotic extract of building a community through a process of identifying the outsiders sits happily with the consumer morality, for you can be a capitalist and a communitarian (indeed it has always been so); you can employ labour, yet you can mark him/her off. The intoxication of persecution and the horror at the discovery that a free world sustains that narcotic extract are both signs of the modern. Violence on the trafficked woman is the densest form of violence on the immigrant – it symbolises a persecution in which everyone has a hand, in which we have the evidence that delegation of power has gone down to the deepest level, and which leaves in its wake the realisation also that the insecure life of the immigrant is much like that of the trafficked woman, it is the true identity of terror without end... Because, finally it is physical insecurity, the apprehension that the death threat can come any moment produces an insecurity that survives all humanitarian mediations. All attempts to escape the impasse remain in such condition under the magical notion of a clean consumer world.

As I have argued in the initial sections of this essay, the physicality of the phenomena of conquest, race-like demarcations, annexation, geographical, geo-political and geo-economic divides, subjugation of populations, physical control over bodies, and war of resources like food and water, demands our attention in understanding why immigration becomes such a contentious issue for the nation-form. The Nepali immigrant’s life in India also carries the

marks of all these – and yes, also the mark of conquest. And that is where the story actually began. The story of the immigrant Nepali began with the “imperial warriors” in the North East.

Darjeeling was acquired in 1835 by the British, and in an effort to contain Bhutais from the East, the British encouraged Nepali settlements; thus by 1872, Nepalis formed 30 per cent of population of the area, and by 1901 about 50 per cent. In 1981, the figure became more than 90 per cent. In 1817, the Gorkhas had first appeared in the East when 1000 “Hindustanis and Gorkhas” took part in the Sylhet operation as part of the Assam Light Infantry, then known as the Cuttuck Legion. Subedars retiring from the Eighth Gorkha Platoon settled as early as in 1824 in Shillong. The British were happy to find in 1867 that “Gorkhas had served well as irregulars stationed in Jowai as part of the Assam Light Infantry during the 1862 rebellion in the Jaintia Hills”, and “they (were) fond of games like cricket and football”.<sup>40</sup> The history of the Assam Rifles bears out in details the role of the gorkhas in consolidation of the British rule in the east – whether it was Sylhet or the Shillong plateau, Naga Hills or the Lushai Hills, Chittagong Hill Tracts or the Sadiya Frontier Tracts, the Bhutan wars or the Manipur Rebellion. The gorkhas came to constitute half of the Assam Rifles. *Khukri* replaced the short sword, cutting through jungles and wading through hilly tracts – the “imperial gorkha” became the emblem of the security of the region.

L.S.S. O’Malley, the editor of the Bengal District Gazetteers recorded the ultimate ethnic stereotype when he echoed the spirit and said that Nepalis were “capable, loyal, cheerful, alert, and essentially a virile race, (and) though quick tempered and keen to resent an injustice, are remarkably willing, and loyal, if treated with consideration... (and) though small in stature, these Nepalis have big hearts... naturally vigorous, excitable, aggressive, and very law abiding”.<sup>41</sup> In course Assam Rifles settled down gorkha ex-soldiers in as many as forty places in Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland. In all these settlements Nepalis settled down well, took up several local customs, inter-married with local communities, and assimilated in many ways with the environment. They were encouraged to settle down in the foothills and in some strategic points on the frontier. They became pioneer farmers; with peasant background and military training and discipline they cultivated the foothills well, and became prosperous in

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<sup>40</sup> Cited in A.C. Sinha, “The Indian Northeast Frontier and The Nepali Immigrants” in The Nepalis in India – A Community in Search of Identity, p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. pp. 43-44.



some instances with their pensions being invested in agriculture. These compact Nepali settlements often have shown loyalty to order, they respect establishment, and are at times identified with the camps of the armed forces stationed in the area for suppression of the insurgency. As one chronicler tell us, in 1827, 1835-36, 1847, and 1861-62 the Eighth Gorkha Rifles was deployed; in Naga Hills it was deployed in 1839, 1850-51, 1875, 1879-80, 11912-13; in Mizo Hills in 1851, 1869-71, and 1890; in Jaintia Hills in 1861-63; in Garo Hills in 1873; in Manipur in 1891 and 1944, and in Burma and Assam in 1943-45. Such sustained deployment has produced charges made by local rebels of collaboration by the Nepali-speaking population with counter-insurgency operations. Consequently there have been numerous attacks on their lives and property. For instance, in 1967 about 8000 Nepalis were driven out from Mizoram; in 1978 about 200 Nepali houses were burnt down in Nagaland; in 1980 about 2000 Nepalis fled Manipur when local insurgents burned down several Nepali villages; and in Assam in 1979 and Meghalaya in 1987 much larger number of Nepalis have been “deported”.<sup>42</sup> In any case though all these Nepalis have spread to Khasi Hills districts, Karbi-Anglong, to Arunachal Pradesh, and now in the entire region one finds besides ex-soldiers and marginal farmer-graziers semi-skilled professionals and artisans among Nepali population. In 1961 census the Nepali-speaking population of Assam was 1.9 per cent of the whole, in 1971 it increased to 2.3 per cent, and Nepali became the fifth major language of the state. In the hill districts such as Darang, Dibrugarh, Karb-Anglong, and North Cachar Hills, every fifth Assamese is a Nepali – and as some believe, that with episodes of discrimination and violence against Nepali-speaking population in the region, the sentiment become even stronger that Darjeeling is the “home” for the Nepalese, reminding us of the 1940 demand of the All India Gorkha League that there should be an integrated Nepali speaking homeland. Homeland and immigration are thus the two sides of the same phenomenon – indeed one does not appear without the other.

As I had argued in *A Biography of the Indian Nation, 1947-97*, nation produces two subjects: citizens and the aliens, the same process leads the citizens into opting for a “homeland”, because the nation is not enough of a home; also this is the process that shows the aliens that they can become citizens only claiming and achieving a homeland. Therefore

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<sup>42</sup> T.B. Subba, “The Nepalis in Northeast India – Political Aspirations and Ethnicity” in *The Nepalis in India – A Community in Search of Identity*, pp. 63-64. For details accounts on the Nepali speaking population in the Northeast, see other essays of this volume.

nation-politics moves in a bizarre world, where the form at the top is that of the nation, and that at the below is the form of the homeland. The Nepali is an alien in Bodoland, but at home in Darjeeling; the Assamese needs to make Assam a home which s/he finds still not so. Between the nation-form and the form of homeland, and between nation-politics and the homeland politics, democratic politics is fated to play the role of link, the negotiator, and the facilitator of both. Thus, while concluding this section, it will not be out of place to remember that even though the British brought the Nepalis to extend the frontier, garrison the occupied territory, reclaim land and thus increase revenue, and maintain a loyal population amidst a hostile environment, matters did not stop there when the British left. Assam Rifles changed its recruitment policy; the transition from uniform to *mufti* though not easy has had its own consequences; and a huge chunk of the settled Nepali population has remained poor and deprived of any representational right. In this condition, democracy is being invoked on both sides – Nepalis as Indians demand their right to life, livelihood, and security; natives or the indigenous demand the right to their homeland. Elections are played out year after year; charters, memoranda, parleys, negotiations, and mobilisations – all mark the scene.

Today in the context of the widespread anti-immigration politics in the entire region – a context where more than the Nepali the Muslim is the most ubiquitous immigrant – when we speak of the survival of racism, we must not look for its existence outside democratic politics. Precisely it is the democratic form that reinvents racist differences, which become the most congealed form of physical and material differences deeply inscribed into democratic politics. It is for all these reasons that the figure of the immigrant appears today as one of the biggest interrogators of democratic politics. Democratic security wards off the alien in order to preserve the “demos” whose security is seen threatened, while it is democratic politics that must become non-traditional in order to ensure the security of the immigrant – non-traditional, in the sense of escaping the aporia that the traditional conjugality of nation-form and the homeland-form has presented for us. And at this point I take leave of all those who pin their hope on a “civil society” which in their judgement can in a reconstructed form bridge the gap between state and ethnicity. Not only, as the anti-foreigner agitation in Assam showed, the civil society was willing to be instrumental in producing the conjugality of nation form and the homeland form, subsequent politics in Assam ruthlessly made it clear that it was the future of the political society that was at stake in the extreme contentions unfolding in that politics, and that the discourse(s) of civil society was but one of the various dimensions of security being

played out as part of that contentious politics. Security, indeed, as the figure of the immigrant shows, is the link – the *copula* – that effects and legitimises the co-existence of the nation form and the form of homeland.<sup>43</sup>

## V

The position I am taking has some troubling consequences in terms of a desirable vision of politics and security. I shall mention here briefly ten such:

- Contradictions among the people are real, and cannot be glossed over by a synthetic version of politics;
- These contradictions display themselves in form of conflicts which are often marked by collective violence;
- The discourse of security can be seen only *to a very limited extent* as a metaphorical one; and *to a very large extent* security functions as the link between the two types of politics that co-exist: the nation form and the homeland form;
- The way in which these two types of politics co-exist and are perched on the plank of security suggests also the way in which borders and boundaries are reproduced, and the external borders and internal boundaries are linked in a sort of concentric circle which catches every aspect of the politics of the nation in its universe;
- The figure of the immigrant is critical in understanding the nature and the dynamics of contentious politics of the nation;
- This is because, immigration is linked to racism of one type or another, which can be described as “neo-racism”, meaning thereby that historical, economic, political, and other material differences become congealed in some cultural form to such an extent that they start appearing as irreducible physical differences which cannot be accommodated in one living space; and violence becomes the attribute of this process;
- The female immigrant though working in different occupations is finally the beast to be trafficked, repeatedly beaten, abused, and violated by a consumer society – the most acute reminder of “a humanitarian crisis”; the trafficked woman is the ultimate immigrant;
- State and statelessness, for all these reasons, go together;
- Exactly for the same reasons border and borderless existence go together, as are to be found together the physical mobility of the migrant and the migrant’s political immobility, that is his/her political powerlessness;
- Finally, overall security reinforces “molecular insecurity” – hence the question, how to build a model of “molecular security”?

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<sup>43</sup> One can read in this context the various views on the emergent civil society institutions in the North east; see for instance, Samir Kumar Das, *Ethnicity, Nation and Security – Essays on North eastern India* (New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 2003), in particular, pp. 7-8.

The last implication in the context of our discussion is obviously the most significant one, and therefore the resultant question demands some reflection before we close off. The question suggests a problematic, which actually emerges through the above formulations, and the problematic calls for some more thinking.

When we speak of overall security – an overarching security umbrella or framework – we are first of all recognising the need and the practice of a juridical structure of security that acknowledges the special claims for security, but reconciles at the same time the differential claims for security in its structure. Such a structure becomes *overall* by displaying three features – by being legal, by acknowledging special claims, and by reconciling differing claims for security. In case of India, the constitution has recognised the presence and certain rights of the indigenous people, has made room for specific provisions for those rights, has provided for special security arrangements in an area such as the North east, has tried to settle legally the international borders and boundaries as much as possible, and has done away with old hierarchies in terms of political-administrative units of the Union, and has made all units equal as states. Yet, as the preceding history indicates, this overall security has reinforced molecular insecurity. Assam is again the most telling case, where its international boundary, inter-state boundaries, and internal boundaries – all have combined to make each fragment of the state of Assam insecure. In that region, probably like many others, no one can provide security at the grassroots – the rebels, the army, the ethnic home guards, the civil society, frankly no one. The special provisions only display their own inadequacy; the reconciliation mechanisms prove to be mere governmental exercises of rule; the army and the paramilitary forces prove oppressive; and the international boundaries become the negotiating space for kin groups, kin political formations, the immigrant army of labour, and people fleeing from torture, threats of persecution, and fear. The overall security is reinforced by an “overall” political economy of the region too, some of whose features we had the occasion to glimpse in the earlier sections of this essay. Such a security framework cannot acknowledge fully the figure of the immigrant except in the sense of denying or ousting the immigrant from the political universe. Unable to provide enough economic resources and development where the migrant is not needed, or to put matter correctly, unable to de-link development and the influx of migrant labour, and unable to cleanse the nation of aliens, the only way remains for the indigene then to ensure molecular security is to claim homeland. The fly in the ointment is that, this path of overall security leading to molecular security is also the path to molecular insecurity. It is like a place

*degree zero*, where constitution has stopped bearing relevance, only pragmatism rules, and daily negotiations order the day. It is a hard case, harder than all juridical security arrangements, harder than constitutional provisions; it is a terra incognita where history rather than law has the capacity to play the grand jury. In fact history calls law into question here, and whatever may be the outcome of the security/property question in the present juncture, we must recognise the hardness of the case, if we are to claim that we are making serious intellectual effort towards revising our notion of security, if the phrase “non-traditional security” suggests some such need.

In different parts of the world, imperial nations are trying to readjust their border security regimes in the wake of two important developments – free trade agreements and the event of 9/11. One effect has been trying to secure neighbouring countries’ consent in tightening the borders, also “flexibilising” border management in a way so that immigrant labour can come only a legally sanctioned way, suspected terrorists cannot come, and illegal immigrant labour cannot sneak in. In this dawning regime of “flexible security” system, immigrant labour is the hardest element to be persuaded to fall in line.<sup>44</sup>

The reason is simple - they upset the private property system, in whatever form it exists – group property, nations’ property, individual property, or a cartel’s property. This is so because, while private property requires as its political security a citizenry based on universal suffrage, a participatory system to a lesser or greater extent, a transactional mode of politics, and some sort of preferential arrangements in politics and (at times) economy based on positive discrimination, immigration breaks this framework, makes the contradiction between economics and politics acute, pitches conflict at the most fundamental levels of society, making liberal rule very, very difficult by provoking collective claims, violence, and politics to an ungovernable extent. To all these, the response of the regime of private property is to make “security” a flexible issue, which means security too has become today a theme of *governmentality* – a field of politics, negotiation, government, and rule.

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<sup>44</sup> Read in this context, Deborah Walter Meyers’ article on “smart” border management by the US, “Does ‘Smarter’ Lead to Safer? An Assessment of the Border Accords with Canada and Mexico”, *Insight* (Washington D.C., Migration Policy Institute), June 2003, No. 2; see also on this theme, Christopher Rudolph, “Security and the Political Economy of International Migration”, *American Political Science Review*, 97 (4), November 2003, pp. 603-620.

Governing population groups, as this essay tries to demonstrate, calls for stabilising them, and regulating and controlling their flows. This is how security becomes one of the essential aspects of population management. I have tried to show in this essay the threefold component of security in relation to population management, namely: the overarching sovereignty of the State (which calls for a centralised authority guarding the borders and frontiers, and maintaining police, army, administration, and laws to rule the population), the disciplinary powers at all levels (which decide friend/foe distinction, make possible an economy of society, implement rules and customs, and orients mentalities), and the governmental power (which regulates and controls population groups physically) that make up the triangle of security architecture – a triangle that has in the words of Michel Foucault “as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatus of security”. Indeed, what needs to be added is that it is the concern for security that binds its three aspects, namely, sovereignty, disciplinary powers, and governmental functions, and brings upon the people a fearsome force of classification, pacification, and domestication.

In such a situation how can we displace the discourse of security? This is a vast exercise. But re-orienting our ways and attitudes would mean at least at an intellectual level finding out the fault lines in that architecture, understanding the complexities in the phenomena of population flows, and trying to discover the broad contours of the practices of negotiating with others – practices perched on those fault lines, whose traces I made a feeble attempt to describe in *The Marginal Nation*. Some significant historical studies have shown how different population groups have created for themselves what can be called as “borderland existence”, how borders have produced borderless and borderland people, how the mainstream perception of an immigrant may not necessarily be the same held by the groups being called immigrants but who do not necessarily think of themselves as so, and how we need to develop for all these new geographies of knowing.<sup>45</sup> Clearly contemporary law, administrative practices, and mainstream economy, are against such borderland existence. Their flux is a threat to security, which is built around the idea of stable population groups. To inquire into those borderland

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<sup>45</sup> Foremost among such studies on South Asia are the inquiries led by Willem Van Schendel, “Working through Partition – Making a Living in the Bengal Borderlands”, *International Review of Social History*, 46, 2000, pp. 393-421; Md. Mahbubar Rahman and Willem Van Schendel, “‘I am not a Refugee’ – Rethinking Partition Migration”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 37 (3), 2003, pp. 551-584; and Willem Van Schendel, “Stateless in South Asia – The Making of India-Bangladesh Enclaves”, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 61 (1), 2002, pp. 115-147.

existences means also avoiding the stereotypes of the binaries of exchange, which we easily associate with those negotiations - the creditor and the debtor, gratitude and resentment, killing and pity, respect and mercy – and investigating in stead the histories of “living together but separately”, and “trusting but not getting intimate” with the neighbour, not to copy these histories but to see what political history precedes today’s various alternative notions of security that try to avoid acute hostility and rupture.<sup>46</sup> A political history of friendship between communities, of the way in which communities choose to welcome or expel the newcomers, or who they perceive to be stranger communities, will also show the moral standards that inform at a particular moment the decision of a community to welcome or to expel or kill. That morality, which we can take to be an ensemble of moral standards, exists in three concentric domains. The central core contains those judgements of right or wrong that people hold reasonably everywhere – thus, even with all the existing discriminations, a community may hold the judgement that it is wrong to kill or expel simply on the ground that it does not like the group to which its members do not belong. Beyond this are the judgements of right or wrong, or, acceptance or rejection, made under specific social conditions, on the basis of values the members of a community share internally, and political choice. Thus communities in the pursuit of national legitimacy may accept killing and expulsion of others, and participate. Judgements in the third domain differ from the preceding two in a significant way, since these judgements are based on the idea of what we owe to others. As seems plausible therefore, there is a plurality of values within the range of morality, and these values may support mutually incompatible standards of conduct. It is important to remember in the context of the varying moral practices that a community may have internal cleavages and what seems to be a community’s moral choice is simply the choice of the powerful few within the group, later on accepted by the rest with persuasion and under duress. A history of these varying moral practices will throw light on the way security perceptions evolve, the way in which our “traditional” security choices are made, and the significant measure to which the moral practices influence these security choices. More than a disagreement about right or wrong, and traditional and non-traditional, it is a matter of understanding through deep historical studies the varying, discriminating, and differential world of friendship and enmity. Such historical

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<sup>46</sup> Example of such an inquiry can be found in the perceptive essay by Samir K. Das on the recent political history of a community of trying to live together but separately in the Northeast, “In Search of a Community – The Immigrant Muslims of Contemporary Assam” in *DDP*, pp. 347-363. However, while Das sees this history in terms of a community’s own practices, the inquiry needs to be framed in broader terms of finding out newer ways of making a plural political society, which his own historical material suggests.

studies will also bring out the basis, or the varying bases, on which reconciling of claims is achieved, and thereby communities live together. The basis, as indicated already, may be on moral grounds, on ideas of friendship, on practices of accommodation, on accepting as “normal” the borderland existences in societies and polities, and finally on the rules of what I have called elsewhere *minimal justice*.

Minimal justice is minimal because it accepts the idea of historical limits, it accepts that there can be other ideas of justice, that there are greater possible extents to which justice ought to be fought for; but against all these and without denying all these, the idea of minimal justice stresses the idea of the minimum, of the necessity and the reality of a consensus on what is just, and enunciates the rules that govern the standard of justice based on rights and the quality of reconciling of claims. In this case, (a) recognition of past injustices towards immigrant communities, (b) compensating the victims of xenophobia, (c) the supervision of accommodating arrangements, (d) joint custodianship of common resources and legally ensuring that common resources is not treated as private property of a group, and finally (e) instituting mechanisms that encourage improvements of our polities towards accommodating non-national existences – these five principles seem to be the rules of minimal justice in this case. These rules do not deny the historic basis of conflicts, but they stress the historic basis of the possibilities of reconciliation. The task of studying the way in which the idea of justice evolves, studying reconciling practices, and designing new ones is obviously a continuing task, in fact a perpetual one. A relational view of politics suggests that if friendship among communities is not permanent, so is not enmity. What is important is not to lose sight of the new forms of politics that spring up from the dynamics of those relations – forms, which are in fact new ways of making our political societies.