

# Low Intensity Conflicts in India

An Analysis



Lt Col Vivek Chadha

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United Service Institution of India



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To my parents





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# Foreword

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I take great pleasure in writing this Foreword to Maj Vivek Chadha's book *Low Intensity Conflicts in India*.<sup>\*</sup> Many books have been written on the subject by political analysts, as well as military commanders who were either interested in analysing or involved in countering this phenomenon.

This book, however, is undoubtedly different and unique both in analysis and sweep in terms of description, nuances and prognosis.

In 18 chapters running to over 400 pages, the author has covered the definitional and historical facets of the phenomenon of low intensity conflicts. He has touched upon the relevance of the study and the role of the Armed Forces in dealing with low intensity conflicts with precision and sensitivity.

Six chapters are rightly devoted to low intensity conflicts in Jammu and Kashmir, beginning from the pre-partition period right upto Kargil and post-Kargil developments.

Ten chapters deal with the phenomenon of low intensity conflicts in Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Gorkhaland Movement and the Naxalite Movements. Chapter 18 presents the author's concluding observations, his assessment and the factors leading to the phenomenon of such conflicts and a prognosis of future prospects.

The book is not only rich in factual information, but also in giving insights into political, social and economic causes of the threat posed by these insurgencies against the stability and unity of India. Maj Chadha has also analysed the political cross-currents influencing the manner in which the Government of India dealt with these conflicts and the manner in which people affected by these conflicts have reacted to this critical phenomenon. Importantly, he has given an insightful analysis of the role of the Indian Armed Forces and Security Forces in coping with these threats.

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<sup>\*</sup> Maj Vivek Chadha has been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, with effect from January 2005.

The book is also remarkable in its scholarly rigour as well as the precision in research. The book contains valuable information on the political impulses which animated the violent separatist groups as well as information about the organisational structure and command and control systems of the separatist movements. The book is enriched by reference notes, bibliography and comprehensive Appendices which the author has added.

India has been subjected to low intensity conflicts rooted in internal frustrations amongst our citizens as well as in external encouragement by other countries aiming to weaken and diminish India.

Maj Chadha's analysis also looks at low intensity conflicts through the prism of tensions and contradictions which a plural civil society faces while consolidating its national identity.

Maj Chadha has brought a scholar's analytical abilities and a soldier's operational experience in writing this book. It is a valuable addition to serious literature dealing with this highly critical and important phenomenon of Low Intensity Conflict and India's point of view. What is equally significant and relevant is the fact that the analyses and assessments in the book can provide a key to larger audiences in other parts of the world which are also subject to low intensity conflicts of one category or the other.

Maj Chadha has done commendable work for which he merits congratulations. The book merits a place on the shelf of scholars, soldiers, administrators and political leaders.

February 2004

J.N. DIXIT



# Preface

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The history of low intensity conflict (LIC) is limited to outlining the history of all LICs in the country commencing from the time the country gained freedom, till September 2003. The study will, however, pick up strands of dissatisfaction from the early twentieth century as the roots of many conflicts lie in this period and in some cases further in the closet of history of the region. The pre-independence period under British rule itself represents a period of LIC fought against imperialism by both violent and non-violent means. An attempt at briefly analysing this period will also be made in some cases where it is relevant to the study. The study does not encompass in its ambit tactical analysis of conflicts nor are detailed solutions being suggested to resolve outstanding issues.

The study is being carried out to document and create a single source, which encompasses all conflicts under the classification of LICs. It is felt that this holistic analysis will enable logical observations to be drawn, which will facilitate easier grasp of the struggles and LIC as a whole. It will also assist in looking for solutions for this kind of warfare without being overly influenced by any single struggle.

The book aims at going into the reasons for each conflict, tracing the historical background of the region and its demographic, religious, social, ethnic, political and economic structure which led to the conflict. It will also trace the timeline to discuss important and relevant events in the region which influenced the course of LIC towards resolution or its continuance.

It further aims at providing an objective view of conflicts with facts providing the basis for reasoning rather than biased and subjective analysis. The aim of the study is not to appreciate one side of the story and to castigate the other for its 'divisive' and disintegrating tendencies. The aim, rather, is to narrate the history of LICs in India with the ultimate objective of learning lessons both from the follies committed and successful policies adopted which helped resolve conflicts to the satisfaction of both parties. These lessons will be learnt through observations from the narrative at relevant stages of the study.

What is the requirement to study the history of LICs in India? Why is there a need to classify them as LICs at all? They could be studied in isolation as they generally have been in the past. The following factors prompted undertaking the study. It was felt that LICs are often misunderstood as law and order problems, which can be tackled as a routine role performed by the police. On the other extreme

conflicts are seen as full-fledged conventional wars best left to the army to resolve. The reality is somewhere between these two extremes. LICs represent an amalgam of low intensity simmering fires, which have the potential to climb the intensity ladder both within the classification and outside it, into Middle Intensity Conflicts (MICs) or worse still into High Intensity Conflicts (HICs). Like many other endowments, India also has the unenviable distinction of playing host to all forms of LICs in the course of its history. These conflicts have erupted both within and outside the country evolving into protracted struggles. These very conflicts when read with a holistic and open mind in their entirety send the reader repeated and urgent reminders. These reminders if heeded to, when seen from the perspective of all the conflicts on a single canvas, do highlight weaknesses and lessons that we need to learn. The study when read, as a whole suddenly seems to fit all pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The same study in isolation throws up region centric lessons, which may not be as relevant in other areas affected by LICs. In the Indian perspective, the problem of ULFA (pronounced ALFA locally) in Assam and of the other plain tribes within the state vary from the problems of Nagas. When put together these again vary from the conflicts in Kashmir and Punjab. One tends to classify the generic reasons for emergence of a LIC, however the causes in each area do have their very own peculiarity which needs individual sensitivities differing from conflict to conflict, an understanding which has been lacking in the process of conflict management. This study aims at making this understanding easier. While tracing history it aims at highlighting the sensitivity of protesting groups. At the same time the study also highlights unjustified demands and uprisings which over the passage of time have become means of exploitation of the people for personal gain rather than for achievement of aims outlined for the consumption of people. The study also highlights perceived injustice vis-à-vis other more prosperous areas in the country. These comparisons are at times neither factually correct nor relevant.

The study will enable students of military history and military science to read the history of LIC in India in a complete, consolidated and homogenous study thereby giving a springboard to carry out research on any of the specific conflict given in the book. It will help clarify the relation of various conflicts fought in the country and the classification of LIC making the study simpler in any future endeavour. It will be relevant to research students, personnel of armed forces and to officials involved in conflicts in the country. It will also be of interest to any organisation or individual keen on reading about the multifarious problems of LICs in India. These interested bystanders may be within the country or outside it having a healthy quest for knowledge about Indian LICs.

The last section will highlight in detail observations on the study. These will assist the reader in successfully drawing conclusions keeping in view the entire historical narrative. This section is fully supported with relevant facts and figures to support the conclusions drawn. It also aims at analysing the causes of various struggles, thereby deriving primary and subsidiary causes for each struggle. An analysis of struggles also assists in understanding the difference between inherited and graduated struggles based on the understanding of causes.

# Acknowledgements

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At the outset, I would like to extend my gratitude to USI, its Director, Lt Gen Satish Nambiar, PVSM, AVSM, VrC and the Centre for Armed Forces Historical Research (CAFHR) for giving me this opportunity to undertake a research fellowship on this subject of vital importance. Undoubtedly the study would not have been possible without the support of the Director, the Chairman of CAFHR, Lt Gen Mathew Thomas, PVSM, AVSM, VSM and Secretary CAFHR, Sqn Ldr R.T.S. Chinna.

I also take this opportunity to thank Lt Gen J.J. Singh, GOC-in-C, Army Training Command for the encouragement given at all stages of the project and his unstinting support. I am also grateful to Lt Gen V.K. Nayar, PVSM, SM for giving me invaluable guidance on the subject and providing an insight on vital issues on more occasions than one.

I would like to thank Late Shri J.N. Dixit for sparing his invaluable time for an exhaustive interview and writing the foreword to the book. His recent demise is an irreparable loss. Shri Dixit's encouragement and blessings remain with me even though he is no more.

I also thank Shri K.P.S. Gill, Lt Gen Mathew Thomas, Prof Rakesh Gupta of JNU for having given me an opportunity to interact with them. I also acknowledge the valuable suggestions of Dr Kalyanaraman and Dr Udai Bhanu Singh of IDSA, Brig Umong Sethi, Col Vivek Sohal and Shri Ajay Sahani of the Institute of Conflict Management.

I am especially thankful to Col S. Raman and the officers of 8 MARATHA LI for giving me the opportunity and atmosphere to continue with my research work while on duty in the unit.

Last but not the least I wish to acknowledge the support and encouragement of my father Mr B.D. Chadha and my father-in-law Mr Pran Nath for having painstakingly refined the text. I also wish to thank my wife and friend Monica for all her selfless support and encouragement. During the long hours of work, she stood by me and sacrificed countless hours of togetherness only to see me complete the project.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Challenges to the authority of a state often emerge from perceptible and distinct threats, which can be contested with the full might of a nation. However, it is often the asymmetric and formless nature of more subtle uprisings which have an indelible impact on the geo-political environment, primarily because of neglect and underestimation of their colossal strength. This seemingly asynchronous form of warfare has challenged political boundaries much more than conventional warfare, especially in the last century.<sup>1</sup> These challenges have been mounted by seemingly weak and insignificant organisations—organisations which in their initial stages of emergence preferred to remain on the sidelines, dormant and innocuous, till their mass appeal and instruments of terror brought the mightily state machinery to the negotiating table.

*A contrasting and conflicting ideology is the seed of any conflict.* This is probably better acknowledged and understood in the boardrooms of the corporate world. However, it can not be better illustrated than through the crescendo hidden within the confines of a silent storm in a people-centric LIC. The value of ideas is often a very important factor in the successful conduct of LICs. It is the amalgam of an idea and the clash of arms which dictates the final result of any conflict. In conventional wars it is the importance and relative reliance on arms that tilts the scale in favour of the victor. However, in LICs, more often than not it is the idea around which hinges the result of a conflict. This is because most LICs are people-centric where an idea can convert a group of dissatisfied people into a revolution. A number of examples of how an idea gave rise to a conflict can be seen in the country. In Nagaland and Kashmir, the idea of independence/autonomy has been a major basis for struggles to take root. Similarly, language became a rallying point for the people in Assam and Darjeeling. In pre-independence India, Gandhi's slogan for 'swaraj' or independence worked to carry an entire nation for its achievement. It has appropriately been brought out that 'guerrilla war is a kind of war waged by a few who are dependent on the support of the many.'<sup>2</sup> This can be achieved by varying means in the form of a medium for the carriage of the revolution. It could

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<sup>1</sup> Van Cleveled 1991: 221–24.

<sup>2</sup> Liddell Hart et al. 1962: xv.

be religion which 'when militant, provides a far more coherent body of ideas and sharpens the edge of struggle'.<sup>3</sup> Another example of ideas forming the basis of LICs is the Marxist ideology. In fact the ideology is a derivative of the word idea. Though communism has not played a very important role in the Indian context in terms of giving rise to LICs, the world over it has had a very major impact. In India, communism is seen as the basis of Naxalite struggles. However, despite the fact that it has its roots in the pre-independence period, its influence has remained limited to a few states and even there its ability to build struggles around the ideology remains limited.<sup>4</sup> Ideas can also germinate from other factors which have a direct and intense impact on the common people. Ideas can also be made to germinate artificially for political advantage by igniting the flames of separatism in an ethnically distinct society like India. This was seen in the state of Punjab where the idea of separatism was enflamed purely for political profit.

It is probably because of the fluid and seamless nature of LICs that the history of warfare has often been partial to conventional wars<sup>5</sup> which, given their distinct period and their violent and visible impact, were easier and probably more profitable to follow and relate. In contrast LICs have been waged over protracted durations with declining degrees of interest in their rollercoaster journey. The Naga insurgency has been waged since independence and despite short periods of peace it has continued to simmer in the North-east. Similarly, the churning in Kashmir continue to challenge authority and have often burst on the national scene draped in gore. It also needs to be understood that at times it is in the interest of the state to keep LICs off the radar screen of the media, public and the international audience as visibility of a struggle is considered synonymous with its acceptance and progressive success.

LICs have reared their head as instruments of the weak against the strong. This form of warfare has always been a cost-effective option with the disillusioned against the State. The examples of Vietnam and Afghanistan immediately come to mind in context of Asia where recognised and respected powers have repeatedly seen the ugly face of defeat and humiliation. In the Indian context, even after five decades of independence, LICs are being waged in Nagaland much to the discomfort of the Government. LICs have not only been employed by the weak in an attempt to overthrow the power of a state, they have also been employed increasingly by major powers in world politics to establish governments of their choice in states which became pawns in their ideological and geo-political strategy.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Charters and Tugwell 1985: 11.

<sup>4</sup> This when compared with the spreading contagion of communist revolutionary warfare from China and the erstwhile USSR remains limited. Even in the context of these two countries, communism as an ideology is undoubtedly on the wane.

<sup>5</sup> The exploits of Shivaji and of Chanakya before him are well known. However, their invaluable contribution to the history of LICs is often not fully appreciated. Both these examples are one of the most striking and well-developed forms of LICs in the country.

<sup>6</sup> The beginning of the Cold War also saw the beginning of proxy war between the two super powers through sympathetic groups supporting either the American cause of democracy or the

Though LICs are often called ‘limited wars’ they are considered to be the most effective instrument of state policy. Captain B.H. Liddell Hart in a foreword to the twin translation of *Guerrilla Warfare*, one of the most significant books on LIC in the twentieth century writes, “Thirty years ago, in the Foreword to one of my books, I coined the maxim, “If you wish for peace, understand war”. It seemed to me a necessary and more fitting replacement for the antique and over-simple dictum, “If you wish for peace, prepare for war”.... Today in the nuclear age, the revised maxim might well be amplified.... So now the necessary amplification of the maxim is: “If you wish for peace, understand war—particularly the guerrilla and subversive forms of war.””<sup>7</sup> This significant observation about the shift in importance of LICs, particularly after the nuclearisation of major powers, can be seen as a perceptible change in the relevance of this form of warfare. This thought process gained increasing acceptance with most strategic thinkers after the nuclearisation of major world powers. ‘... To the extent that H-bomb reduces the likelihood of full scale war, it increases the possibilities of limited war pursued by widespread local aggression....’<sup>8</sup> The relevance of LICs have also gained importance for nascent nuclear states like Pakistan, which often flexes its nuclear muscles to ward off perceived dangers of conventional war against India.

Doctrines, strategies and tactics for conventional warfare have evolved over the years to give it reasonable degree of formalisation. These were cemented over a period of time through well-defined scientific rules and procedures. However, LICs are still evolving because of local requirements, situations, terrain, nature of opposition and organisational capability of the users of this form of warfare. Its success and strength lies in its flexibility of employment and lack of rigid form. Its successful employment has been more in the form of a silent formless flow of water enveloping the biggest mass of land in its ever-increasing volume and intensity, rather than as a ravaging, engulfing fire threatening to devastate everything in its fury.<sup>9</sup> LICs have generally remained a people-centric method of fighting rather than through the professionally trained use of firepower, technology and regular soldiers.

## Connotation of LIC

Before dealing with LICs in India, it will be pertinent and appropriate to get on a common platform of understanding in relation to the connotation of LIC. This

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Soviet communist model. Probably the most prominent amongst these was the struggle for supremacy in Afghanistan, which finally saw the end of the Soviet era.

<sup>7</sup> Liddell Hart et al. 1962: ix-x.

<sup>8</sup> Liddell Hart 1960: 99. See also Swaran Singh (1995) for a detailed analysis of the growing importance of limited wars.

<sup>9</sup> It is this characteristic of LICs, which has been exploited by its proponents employing population as a strength and weapon. Its ability to engulf even the most powerful governments has been seen most prominently through Mao’s employment of ‘Communist Revolutionary Warfare’.

form of conflict is often misunderstood when used in military terms by social scientists and the people at large. One tends to replace a variety of forms of LIC like insurgency, terrorism, revolutionary warfare, partisan warfare and civil war with LIC. LIC is one of the classifications of warfare with the others being Middle Intensity Conflict (MIC) and High Intensity Conflict (HIC).<sup>10</sup> LIC by itself does not signify any form of operation in particular.

This division is a result of American attempts at classification of warfare and is often criticised for further confusing the reader of military history who has been grappling with numerous existing definitions. It must nevertheless be seen merely in the perspective of classification of warfare, rather than as another definition, in an attempt to define a specific nature of warfare. This classification is all the more pertinent to students and observers of social, political and military science and history in India, as the country has witnessed and continues to witness almost all forms of warfare under the classification of LIC.

Before understanding different forms of conflicts which fall under the classification of LIC, there is a requirement to understand the reasoning behind this classification and make an attempt at defining LIC. The classification of warfare is based on the degree of intensity of wars. This can be gauged from a variety of factors like means employed, percentage of armed forces deployed, nature of weapon systems used, record of formal declaration of war and employment of nuclear weapons. One of the models which can be used to make this classification, has been discussed in the study<sup>11</sup> (see Figure 1.1). The model has been shown to illustrate the basis for defining conflicts and thereby classifying them.

The classification is likely to fire a debate based on individual experiences, differing perceptions and views on the line delineating the threshold of low, middle and high intensity operations. This research is based on one such model in consonance with the author's perception of the classification of warfare. At this stage it will also be pertinent to discuss certain factors which tend to colour our judgement while we attempt to make this classification. The first is our own involvement with an operation. This involvement could be in terms of physical involvement in the conflict, or in course of an avid study of the conflict as a student of military history. It could also be in terms of psychological and emotional involvement being party to one of the sides involved in the conflict. This involvement can further be augmented by the role of the media, which in today's high technology environment is capable of bringing conflicts into our living rooms. This was experienced during the Kargil conflict.

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<sup>10</sup> LIC, MIC and HIC are classifications based on the intensity index of warfare. While LIC signifies conflicts other than conventional wars between two countries, MIC is a description for conventional war between two countries and HIC includes world wars and nuclear wars. A detailed understanding will be facilitated through the description of spectrum of warfare given in Figure 1.1.

<sup>11</sup> A detailed discussion on classification of wars is available in an excellent analysis of warfare in Van Cleveland (1991).

Figure 1.1  
Classification of Wars Based on Intensity

Low Intensity Non Violent	Conflict Violent	Medium Intensity	High Intensity Non Nuclear	Conflict Nuclear
	Revolutionary War	Two Nation War	Two Nation War	Two Nation War
Subversion	Terrorism	e.g.: Yom Kippur War	Multiple Nation War	Multiple Nation War
Show of Force	Counter Insurgency		e.g.: First World War	e.g.: Second World War
	Civil War			
	Partisan Warfare			
	Limited Conflicts, e.g.: On Line of Control			
Peace Keeping	Peace Keeping			

During the course of this conflict and in its aftermath, it has irrefutably been proved that Pakistan occupied important heights on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC). While there are a number of facts to prove that the intrusion was carried out by Pakistani regulars supported by militants, Pakistan asserted that it was the handiwork of 'freedom fighters' who were involved in an 'indigenous freedom struggle'. In either case the conflict can only be classified as low intensity. This is based on the fact just mentioned and repeated assertions by Pakistan time and again. In an endeavour to demonstrate the conflict as an indigenous struggle, Pakistan could never accept the involvement of its troops on the Indian side of the border. It could never employ its war resources optimally despite the limited area of conflict. The air force and navy, though mobilised, played a very limited role in the conflict, especially on the Pakistani side. Incursions across the LoC were not allowed from the Indian side. There was no declaration of hostilities on either side. Even in terms of casualties, the figures were by no means comparable even with protracted insurgencies. What did affect our perception of the conflict was its deep impact on our psyche as the media successfully changed it to an all out war fought in our very own sphere of sensibilities.

The initial phase of 1947–48 J&K Conflict though fought with a higher intensity may draw less violent objections when described as a LIC keeping in view the factors just discussed because of its relative distance from contemporary history. The similarity between the two is, however, striking though the conflict in 1947–48 saw more casualties and a higher intensity over a longer period of time. The fact remains



that in both cases open hostilities were never declared and Pakistan never really employed its military machine as a nation as it did in 1965 and 1971. Even if for the sake of discussion one was to term the Kargil conflict as a MIC, then in which category does the 1971 Indo-Pak War find a place? Which category does the 1973 Yom Kippur War or the prolonged Iran-Iraq War locate itself? Does the America-led allied war against Iraq also fall in the same category as the Kargil conflict? On the other hand, the Kargil conflict has more than one similarity, albeit a limited one, with Operation Pawan (Indian counter-insurgency involvement in Sri Lanka). Indian involvement in Sri Lanka saw limited employment of the air force and the navy. In fact, physical involvement of the Indian navy was more during Operation Pawan, if one discounts mobilisation as a yardstick. Similarly the casualty ratio during both the conflicts was similar despite the fact that after the initial assault and capture of LTTE strongholds, pitched battles with deployed cadres became a rare phenomenon. The reason for terming conflicts as conventional wars by some of the military historians and students of military history is probably with a view to grant greater recognition to the conflict. It may be an intention to highlight the difficulties and hardships faced by the men who fought during the course of the conflict. However, it must be borne in mind that conventional wars are by no means a guarantee to greater recognition nor are they a certificate to incomparable valour and bravery. Over the years it has been recognised that fighting an unconventional war against an unknown enemy is much more difficult than fighting a conventional war. This realisation must help us give LICs the place that they deserve in the annals of history without the need to push them up the intensity ladder.

Having discussed the classification of warfare, LIC itself needs to be defined with a view to further understand its facets. Since the term has originated from the US defence department, it will be pertinent to analyse their definition. It has been defined as, 'Limited politico military struggle to achieve political, social, economic or psychological objectives. It is often protracted and ranges from diplomatic, economic and psychological pressure through terrorism and insurgency. Low Intensity Conflict is generally confined to a geographical area and is often characterised by constraints on weaponry, tactics and level of violence.'<sup>12</sup>

The common guidelines that emerge from the definition are:

- The nature of the struggle is both political and military in its constitution.
- The struggle can be for the achievement of political, social, economic or psychological objectives.
- The struggle is often protracted.
- The struggle is generally restricted to a specific geographical area.
- There are constraints on the use of weapons.
- The struggle is below the level of conventional war.

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<sup>12</sup> Gallagher 1991: 3.

There are, however, certain lacunae in the definition. It does not consider conflicts between two countries which are short of an all out war. The example of the Indo-Pak Line of Control (LoC) environment is a case that can prove this point. Second, the range of conflict can vary from a case where no force is required to be used to excessive violence just short of a conventional war. Third, LICs qualify to be called as such till the time an open declaration of war has not taken place. Keeping in view these aspects an appropriate definition of LIC would be: LIC is defined as a politico-military struggle, often protracted in nature and in a restricted geographical area. The struggle is for the achievement of a political, ideological, economic, social or psychological aim. The struggle is waged by means ranging from absolute non-violence to a large-scale use of means of mass destruction, short of declaration of open war. The struggle could be within the geographical confines of a country or outside it between groups wronged or perceived to be wronged, and the legal governing authority or between two countries.

## Forms of LIC

Having discussed the basis for classification of wars, various forms of LICs need to be elaborated upon to further clarify the nature of conflicts which have been discussed in the book.

The spectrum of LICs is probably most wide and varied in its scope. The form of conflicts that can take place under this category can vary from absolute non-violent struggles like subversion to bloody conflicts like limited wars short of an all out war, civil wars and revolutionary wars. Therefore, this category can first be divided into violent and non-violent conflicts. Thereafter, the violent conflicts can further be sub-divided depending on the nature and degree of support by the local population, means employed for conducting the struggle, the target of the conflict, which can vary from a legally elected to foreign imperial government. Keeping in view these adversaries, the conflict can be an insurgency, terrorism, revolution, partisan war or a civil war. All these forms of conflict signify a specific form of warfare. While an insurgency denotes a popular uprising against the legal governing authority, with demands varying from autonomy to independence, a terrorist movement varies in terms of limited popular support with violent and sensational means employed to garner the support of influential nations and the media. Terrorist movements are generally based in urban areas unlike insurgencies, which establish their base in rural areas and then graduate to urban centres. Revolutionary warfare aims at overthrowing the governing body of a country and replacing it with a government as proposed by revolutionaries. A similar movement is partisan warfare which aims at overthrowing a government or regime established by a force from outside the country. Examples of revolutionary warfare can be the communist struggle in China and of partisan warfare that of Vietnamese struggle against the Americans. Another form of LIC can be based on a secessionist struggle with the aim of breaking away from the parent country. This is presently being waged in

Sri Lanka by the LTTE.<sup>13</sup> Civil wars are another form of LIC which may be fought as culmination of any form of insurgency or revolutionary war.<sup>14</sup> A peculiar form of LIC, which is all the more relevant in the Indian context—a form, which required a change in the definition of LIC, is low intensity skirmishes on the border or line of control as the case may be. This is evident in the ‘no war no peace’ scenario on the Indo-Pak border along the LoC and beyond it in the Siachen Glacier area. These areas are seen as volatile regions which are ‘sometimes on sometimes off’ or as some analysts describe them as areas of an ‘ugly stability’<sup>15</sup> environment. Limited use of force punctuated with raids, artillery duels and sniper actions have characterised these kinds of situations in a prolonged battle of attrition.

The aspect of proxy war has gained significance over a period of time, with nations preferring to employ this form of LIC rather than taking the risk of increasing the threshold level of violence through conventional conflicts. Proxy wars employ one or more forms of LIC in pursuance of their aim—usually ideological, strategic or geo-political. An appropriate example is Pakistan’s ongoing effort to keep Kashmir on the boil through this form of warfare. In this case an internal dissatisfaction-derived insurgency campaign has been strategically merged with the export of terror from within Pakistan through foreign terrorists to produce a lethal combination.

It also needs to be brought out that any form of conflict under a classification will not necessarily remain permanently within the ambit of that conflict. LIC in the form of an insurgency may snowball into a full-fledged conventional war turning into a MIC, if any one of the nations is not able to control the tempo and threshold level of the struggle. This could have very well happened during the Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan. Similarly, a conventional war can peter out and turn into a long protracted struggle resulting in an insurgency. The chance of a LIC turning into a HIC with employment of ‘weapons of mass destruction’ (WMD) is also a distinct possibility. In the present Indo-Pak scenario it has been seen in the recent past during Operation Parakram that Pakistan resorted to nuclear blackmail more than once during the impasse.

## LIC Operations in India

India gained independence under the shadow of one long LIC against British imperialism. This conflict was probably the most significant LIC in the history

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<sup>13</sup> There has been a perceptible shift in the stand of LTTE, which has agreed to look for a solution to the problem keeping the sovereignty of the country intact.

<sup>14</sup> A detailed analysis of classification of wars and the forms of LIC is available in a forthcoming book by the author titled *Art of LIC*.

<sup>15</sup> This form of conflict is best described by Tellis (2000: 7; 2001). He has brilliantly argued the employment of nuclear option keeping in view Pakistan’s strategy to bleed India through a state of ‘ugly stability’ which as per him is likely to continue in the subcontinent. He attributes this to the relative parity in terms of conventional strength and the unlikely scenario of use of the nuclear option.

of the twentieth century. It gave freedom to the most important dominion under the British Crown. At the stroke of midnight as the world slept, India woke to its freedom and a tryst with destiny; however, India was destined to celebrate its nascent freedom with a bloody conflict in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Soon reverberations of LICs could be felt in all corners of the country forcing it to fight the dangers and threat of dismemberment. More than five decades have passed, yet the country continues its tryst with destiny—a tryst with ongoing LICs.

Almost every conflict in Indian history has resulted or threatened to result in the alteration of the borders of the country within or along its frontiers. India's freedom struggle finally resulted in its independence after more than two centuries of British rule. The struggle was characterised by a mix of violent and non-violent means, which gained momentum after the revolt of 1857. Even this was limited in its cohesive and homogenous form.<sup>16</sup> The conflict became unique in its form and nature as through a relatively violence free environment Indian freedom fighters led by Mahatma Gandhi were able to gain independence. There were a few examples of the use of force<sup>17</sup> but these were grossly overwhelmed by the non-violent nature of the struggle.

India's freedom struggle was immediately followed by a bloody conflict.<sup>18</sup> The conflict took place between the Indian forces and tribals who were supported, led and in numerous cases accompanied by regular forces of Pakistan Army.<sup>19</sup> The entire conflict would have qualified as a conventional war had it not been for some relevant and irrefutable factors. There was no declaration of war by any of the sides involved. Indian forces moved into Kashmir on 27 October 1947 to fight the invading tribal raiders after the Instrument of Accession was signed by the Maharaja of Kashmir. During the initial stages of the campaign Pakistan denied its involvement in the raids and refrained from employing its forces openly including its air force. It was only in May 1948 that there was open acceptance of involvement of Pakistani regulars. Thus the conflict gets divided into a LIC phase followed by a conventional war. Operations in 1947–48 were followed by a period of relative calm after which

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<sup>16</sup> The revolt is often referred to as a mutiny by foreign authors led by the British who have argued that its seeds and its expanse was mainly limited to Indian Battalions under the East India Company prior to India coming directly under the British Crown. Irrespective of its description, the uprising acted as a catalyst for amalgamation of Indian sentiment against British rule, which was to later result in the freedom struggle taking deep root across the length and breadth of the country.

<sup>17</sup> Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose who formed the Azad Hind Fauj in an attempt to try and force the British to withdraw from India through violent means employed the most significant and organised form of violent conflict. His collusion with the Japanese during the Second World War was with this aim in mind—an aim that did not succeed due to the Japanese defeat at the hands of the British. The other famous cases were of individual stories of heroism including those of Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru.

<sup>18</sup> The campaign is thought to have resulted in 6,000 casualties as per Praval (1987: 76) as against the 20,000 of the adversary.

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed account of a first hand Pakistani point of view read Khan (n.d.).

internal rivalries and a slow denudation in the autonomy of the state led to an opportunity to instigate dissatisfaction amongst the people. Pakistan attempted to take advantage of this situation in 1965, but failed. A variety of factors again led to increasing dissatisfaction and open insurgency broke out in 1989. However, this was preceded by Indo-Pak rivalries taking a more overt shape in Siachen. Kargil can be seen as the culmination of an increasingly frustrated and desperate enemy.

These campaigns were followed by insurgency campaigns against the Indian Union with a characteristic 'domino effect'. It started with the Naga insurgency. Strong historical factors accompanied by a distinct ethnic mix and political inexperience led to a situation which commenced as a struggle for self determination and slowly changed course to become an instrument of opportunism. The campaign in Nagaland was characterised by nascent experiments of security forces, which were not always successful, and in certain cases proved to be detrimental to the resolution of the conflict. The early 1980s also saw the emergence of the NSCN and its steady rise as the most dominant insurgent group in the entire North-east. The group not only changed the intensity of conflict, it also began an era of coalitions across the frontiers of states and the country to give insurgency in the region a more dynamic and cohesive form. It was only the path-breaking ceasefire of 1997 which came as a glimmer of hope for the weary region in search for peace.

Unlike Nagaland, struggles that came in quick succession in other states such as Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Assam, Punjab and West Bengal (with regard to the demands for Gorkhaland) did give an opportunity to the country to resolve its differences. However, the warnings and forebodings of bloody conflicts were not understood with requisite seriousness and worse, in some cases were exploited for petty political gains to fan the fires of dissatisfaction.

In Mizoram, the politics of opportunism continued with the formation of the Mizo National Famine Front and its gradual transformation to an extremist organisation. The beginning of the struggle was characterised by what was seen as one of the most audacious attempts at taking over control of a state by force. However, the full might of the armed forces very soon brought the struggle under control and it was a matter of time before the problem was resolved. The Mizo insurgency became a test case for the army, which tried the successful methods of British experiments in Malaya, though this time with limited gains. However, Mizoram stands out as an example of mature handling and a lesson in success through the devolution of powers and autonomy—an example that was successfully replicated in other regions.

In contrast Manipur provided an explosive ethnic mix that has torn apart the State over the decades more because of conflicting interests rather than discontentment. An ideological divide that exploits the sentiments of the people has further aggravated the situation. Even as other states in the region slowly yet resolutely inch towards normalcy and peace, Manipur continues to simmer with militancy taking the shape of an instrument of politics. It is also partially held hostage by the NSCN(IM), which dreams of seeing the northern hill districts of the State as part of Greater Nagaland.

Assam and Tripura are cases of legitimate interests being sacrificed for narrow short-term political gains. Both the states have been the victim of internal as well as external migration, which was overlooked and at times encouraged to reinforce a perceived vote bank. This was worsened by an ethnic divide and conflicting interests that became more important for individual groups than progress and peace in the states. The clash between the haves and have-nots continues to hold peace hostage to their interests.

Punjab is a peculiar example where the dissent and dissatisfaction of a few was exploited by political groups for narrow parochial interests. The state was a shining example for others to emulate till political opportunism, fundamentalism and the lack of statesmanship brought down the edifice of progress and secularism, all because of a few hardliners looking for gains through the prism of religious opportunism. Religion became a vehicle to ride piggyback on and instil the fear of amalgamation into the majority religion. Unfortunately the reaction by the powers that be lacked maturity and what developed was an avoidable state of terrorism fuelled by an opportunistic enemy. Punjab also comes out as an example of the explosive danger of mixing religion with politics.

All these conflicts have the potential of changing the political boundaries of the country either because of forces from outside the country or from within. These conflicts were accompanied by overt and covert support coming from across the border.

India is also facing emerging conflicts, which are still in the nascent stages in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh. These are still in their first stage of emergence and if not controlled, have the potential of snowballing into full-fledged LICs.

All these conflicts have played a major role in the country's history and threaten to change the borders of the country. In some cases the borders of the country were threatened and unilaterally infringed upon, as in the case of the 1947-48 J&K conflict. There are other LICs which are still simmering and present the threat of the break up of the country or change of state boundaries. These include the conflicts in J&K, the states of Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Assam.

## Factors Influencing LICs

While the research is a study in historical analysis of the various LIC struggles in the country, it cannot be complete unless an in-depth study of the causes accompanies it. Very often there is a tendency to study the causes of a particular conflict and thereafter superimpose these onto every struggle. There are common stereotypes relating to the causes of a conflict and there is a tendency to employ these as a common yardstick. One of the reasons for undertaking a study, which encompassed within its ambit all struggles in the country, was to objectively analyse them independently and thereafter get the advantage and opportunity to compare them. This comparison has brought out revealing observations and deductions that will contest and challenge some of the beliefs that have been cemented in the minds of

students of social science. The study will also reveal that there normally are primary and secondary causes for any conflict. While primary causes act as the seed for the conflict to take root, secondary causes reinforce this through a congenial atmosphere where the seed can grow into a tree that bears fruits of violence and suffering.

There is a concerted attempt to analyse the causes of conflicts in light of the history of an area and the relevance of deep-rooted factors, which have slowly yet continuously simmered on the backburners of history. These become especially relevant in the case of J&K, Punjab and Nagaland. In each of these regions, relations between religious groups, pulls and pressures of politics and sub-regional aspirations have played a very important role. At times there is a tendency to discount this history and pick up the threads of a conflict from the time it overtly bursts on the scene. However, in any LIC, the years of slow and painful churning prior to this are as important, if not more, than the visible and perceptible period. In the course of this analysis, the role of the erstwhile British government, the period immediately after Independence and the method in which amalgamation of regions took place with the Union becomes very important and relevant. All the struggles are like long meandering rivers where every turn has its specific importance and influence on the course of events.

The causes of all conflicts have been spelt out in detail, and wherever relevant, these have been debated to analyse the factors in an objective fashion. Some aspects like the launch of Operation Blue Star in Punjab have often been discussed at length. Similarly, the success and failure of the operation has been commented upon. The study attempts to debate the issue to present a picture to the reader based on which conclusions can be drawn. Similarly, the factors leading to the Kargil conflict and the possible reasons for the miscalculation by Pakistan have also been analysed in an attempt to understand the psyche of the powers that be in Pakistan.

## Role of the Armed Forces

The armed forces in general and the army in particular play an inescapable and undeniably important role in most LICs. This is despite the fact that soldiers do not take to any stage or level other than an all out war with ease. 'For some, the very idea of limited objectives is unsoldierly and improper.'<sup>20</sup> In the present day context in the country the role of the army in LICs at times overshadows its conventional role against a potential adversary. This oft-described 'secondary' role has gained primary dimensions and threatens to change the rules governing combat in the country.

It is with this reality in mind, which can neither be wished away nor played down that a detailed study of LICs in the country is inescapable. It is also essential for the armed forces to understand, appreciate and comprehend the relevance and importance of these conflicts, which will indeed play a leading role in influencing

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<sup>20</sup> Charters and Tugwell 1985: 9.

the geo-political environment in the subcontinent. This directly affects the operational preparedness, training and psychological conditioning of the armed forces. The study will adequately illustrate the importance of the role of armed forces in the past five decades. It serves as more than a perceptible indicator of the future role of the armed forces as well. Martin Van Cleverd in his book *On Future War* says, 'As war between states exits through one side of history's revolving door, low intensity conflict among different organisations will enter through the other.'<sup>21</sup> If this is the likely scenario expected by experts of military science, India is predictably going to be at the forefront of this ongoing struggle. The past five decades in India in the post-independence period and the century before that have not only proved the relevance of this in our context, it also has forebodings for the future as well.

It needs to be understood, keeping our limited context in mind, that South Asia is undergoing a social, economic and political transformation after breaking off the chains of imperialism just about five decades ago. It is a period of socio-economic and socio-political upheaval where states which were ruled by monarchies suddenly find themselves with their boundaries redrawn. The states find a volatile mix of tribes, religions and races. The pangs of rebirth are up against economic deprivation, corruption, poor governance and hastily redrawn boundaries by invading powers. Nations are still in the process of restoring their bruised egos after centuries of foreign rule. New found independence brought the hope of prosperity and well being which has taken more time for realisation than the impatience of nations possibly allowed. Their armed forces too found themselves struggling to keep their countries together as pulls and pressures from all corners threatened to tear them apart. The role of the forces oscillated between policing duties to pitched battles as the challenge of LICs encompassed within their ambit a vast variety of conflicts. The armed forces in India faced the biggest challenge amongst the countries of South Asia, with diversity of all kinds throwing up new challenges immediately after independence. This challenge has been answered with resolute will and professional acumen in the past. The history of LICs will bring out the same in detail. However, a nascent army did make mistakes in its formative years—mistakes that proved costly in terms of the loss of manpower and initiative in conflicts. It becomes imperative to understand these realities of continuing conflict and prepare for the same. The history of these conflicts also produces a revealing study for the armed forces to learn and imbibe lessons from.

The geo-political shift from a bi-polar world embroiled in cold war to a multi-polar world is likely to throw up LICs because of near parity and equilibrium. 'In the past guerrilla war has been a weapon of the weaker side, and thus primarily defensive, but in the atomic age it may be increasingly developed as a form of aggression suited to exploit a situation of nuclear stalemate. Thus the concept of "cold war" is now out of date, and should be superseded by that of "camouflaged war".'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Van Cleverd 1991: 224.

<sup>22</sup> Liddell Hart et al. 1962: xvi.





PART I

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JAMMU AND KASHMIR



## Chapter 2

# Kashmir—The Beginning

*Gar firdaus bar rue zamin ast  
Hamin ast, hamin ast, hamin ast!*<sup>1</sup>

### Background

When mention is made of the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) what is often implied is the Kashmir valley, forgetting the regions of Ladakh and Jammu. Whether because of the bewitching beauty of the Kashmir valley or, more recently, because of the unrest that has plagued it, and which shows every sign of continuing into the future, Kashmir never fails to hit the headlines.

For centuries travellers and marauding conquerors have come to the valley and have been captivated by its beauty. However, the region has a past that is laced with trouble, unrest and misfortune. From the time of the *Mahabharata*, when the forces of the Pandavas vanquished the mighty Kauravas with divine assistance from Lord Krishna, Kashmir's documented history is one of struggles between competing powers for supremacy. The region has witnessed unparalleled rigours in the past that have, unfortunately, continued into the present. In succession various outside rulers have swooped down on Kashmir, intent on seizing it as a prized possession and ruthless in their treatment of its people.

Unlike numerous other regions in the country, Kashmir has a well-documented history. This is primarily due to the efforts of historians like Kalhana who wrote the *Rajatarangini* (The River of Kings).<sup>2</sup> The book was written between 1148–50 A.D. and is quite literally an ocean of information about the lives and times of the

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<sup>1</sup> These famous words of the Emperor Jahangir pay the most appropriate tribute to the beauty of Kashmir. These oft quoted lines mean:

'If there is a paradise on earth,  
It is this, it is this, it is this!'

<sup>2</sup> The *Rajatarangini*, written between 1148 and 1150 A.D., documents Kashmiri history between the eighth century A.D. and 1150 A.D. It remains one of the most invaluable sources of the history of this region.

kings and people of this eventful period. There are other invaluable books like the *Nilamata Purana* which also throw light on the period preceding that covered by *Rajatarangini*, however, the descriptions in it are based more on mythology than on fact. Books like this may give valuable insights into the beliefs and the way of life of the people, but they cannot however be regarded as authoritative works of factual history.

Delving into the chronology of events in the ancient and medieval history of Kashmir may seem an unnecessary exercise. It may also appear more logical to restrict the scope of historical research to the period of immediate relevance, the growth and actual beginning of low intensity conflicts (LICs) in Kashmir. However, it must be borne in mind that first, all struggles have their roots. Second, the roots of all struggles owe their growth to ethnic, religious, linguistic, social, demographic and political compulsions or a mix and match of any of these factors. It is the study of the history of Kashmir, as in the case of most regions witnessing LICs, which helps us see a clearer picture of the background of the struggle.

It is in this light that a brief and cursive look at Kashmir's history becomes necessary. It is also the intention of this study to derive peculiarities specific to Kashmir during the years immediately preceding Independence and the ones immediately after it, so as to pick up strands of factual data with which to weave the history of LIC in Kashmir.

## Historical Study

The first factual reference in Kashmir's chequered history is to King Gonanda. For the sake of correlation, it may be mentioned that this period in ancient Indian history corresponds to that of the great battle described in the *Mahabharata*.<sup>3</sup>

The next period which merits attention is that of the reign of King Ashoka (273–232 B.C.). Prior to Ashoka's reign, Kashmir was under Hindu rule. However, it is worth mentioning that in all probability Ashoka was the first outsider to rule over Kashmir. It is also worth noting that this was the first voluntary phase of religious upheaval and transformation in Kashmir, when numerous people converted from Hinduism to Buddhism. This peaceful transformation with people attempting self-improvement and self-purification was to set a standard of cultural and religious tolerance and homogeneity which finally took the shape of a distinct cultural ethos of the region that came to be better known as *Kashmiriyat*.<sup>4</sup>

In the period immediately following Ashoka's demise, religious intolerance was visible for the first time in Kashmir's documented history. Ashoka's son Jaluka went

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<sup>3</sup> Gonanda participated in the great battle described in the *Mahabharata*. He attempted to help Jarasandha the King of Magadha but was killed by Sri Krishna. Gonanda II was also placed on the throne of Kashmir with the help of Sri Krishna.

<sup>4</sup> Ashoka's reign is not only characterised by the rise of Buddhism, he is also known to have given Hindu culture and religion due importance in Kashmir. See Jagmohan 1992: 40.

about destroying Buddhist religious edifices and building Shiva temples in their stead. Unfortunately for the region, this reversal of fortunes and religious intolerance was repeated many times during its history.

During the reign of the Kushan king Kanishka (78–123 A.D.), whose dominions extended from the mountains of Central Asia and encompassed areas of India including Kashmir, there was a re-emergence of Buddhism in the region. However, this did not continue for long, and Hinduism again became the dominant religion in Kashmir.

The next period in Kashmir's history, which the historian Kalhana documents as being particularly tragic and bloody, encompasses the reign of King Mihira-Kula, a Hun (515–550 A.D.). This period was characterised by murders, sadistic and cruel killings and anarchy. Kashmir's tale of horror and woe had begun in earnest with history documenting it in ugly and graphic detail.

The next important ruler was King Lalitaditya of the Karkota dynasty. He ruled over Kashmir from 724 to 761 A.D. His prowess on the battlefield has been described in the *Rajatarangini*, which documents his military conquests spreading far into the western, eastern and southern parts of the country.<sup>5</sup> His adept and efficient administrative machinery matched his military prowess. Added to this was the rare quality of religious tolerance. Despite being a staunch Hindu he was not a fanatic. He encouraged the propagation of Buddhism and is known to have used state resources to finance the setting up of Buddhist *viharas*. Rulers like Lalitaditya strengthened Kashmir's liberal ethos. Kashmir's liberal traditions are also evident in that two women played an important role in shaping its destiny. The first was Jayadevi, who despite being a commoner rose to become queen of Kashmir. After the death of her husband her son ascended the throne, her influence continued and her brothers became very powerful, eventually paving the way for Avantivarman, the grandson of one of her brothers, to become king. He succeeded Jayadevi's son on the throne and ruled from 855 to 883 A.D. Avantivarman encouraged development schemes and was instrumental in the establishment of a number of towns that exist to this day, including Avantipura, Hurpur and Sopore. During Avantivarman's rule, Hinduism once again became the predominant religion; there was, however, no persecution of those belonging to other religions.

The second woman to leave an indelible mark in Kashmir's history was Didda. Her period of influence lasted for 50 years after her marriage to King Ksema Gupta, who ruled from 950 to 958 A.D. Highly intelligent and extremely beautiful, she used these assets to buy over, break and win over all her detractors. She was a great survivor, using intrigue and guile to retain control over the kingdom till her death in 1003 A.D., but she also set the kingdom on the course of irretrievable decay.

The reigns of Harsa (1089–1101 A.D.) and that of Jaya Simha after him (1128–1155 A.D.) are studies in contrasts. Religious intolerance was the characteristic feature of Harsa's reign. It was he who had many temples defaced and religious

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.: 42.

idols destroyed.<sup>6</sup> Harsa's reign was followed by that of Jaya Simha's who ruled in the liberal tradition of Avantivarman and Lalitaditya. His reign was thus a period of all-round development in which Kashmir prospered both economically and socially. The first major foreign invasion or sacking of Kashmir took place at the hands of Dulacha in 1320 A.D.<sup>7</sup> He rode into the valley bringing savagery and death in his wake. King Suhadeva who was at that time the ruler of Kashmir fled in the face of Dulacha's invasion. After a brief period of plunder and looting, a Ladakhi Buddhist named Rinchina seized the throne of Kashmir.

Rinchina wanted to embrace Hinduism and married the daughter of Suhadeva's chief minister, who had succeeded Suhadeva on the throne after having him killed. However the Hindu priests refused to accept his proposal and this led to him converting to Islam. Thus, the long Muslim rule over Kashmir commenced more by default than by design with this unforeseen and unexpected turn of events.

Muslim rule in Kashmir has also had its fair share of benevolent and malevolent rulers. While Shihab-ud-Din (1354–1373 A.D.) and Qutub-ud-Din (1373–1389 A.D.) were both moderate rulers who enlarged the kingdom through conquest, in their religious tolerance they remained true to the Kashmiri ethos. However fanaticism was soon to engulf Kashmir in the reign of Sultan Sikandar (1389–1413 A.D.), also known as 'But-Shikan' or 'Destroyer of Idols'. He was responsible for forced conversions to Islam and imposition of taxes on non-Muslims.

Kashmir was however to witness another period of religious tolerance and just rule in the reign of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin (1420–1470 A.D.). 'In the sphere of religion, he was a precursor of Akbar; in the field of construction, he proved to be the Shah Jahan of Kashmir.'<sup>8</sup> In addition to these qualities, he also conquered vast areas and encouraged traditional Kashmiri arts and crafts.

Mughal rule in Kashmir was introduced by one of Humayun's generals Mirza Haider Dughlat in 1540. However, it was Humayun's son Akbar who succeeded him to the throne, who visited Kashmir in 1589 bringing it under the direct control of the Mughal Empire. Kashmir benefited from Mughal rule, receiving assistance during natural calamities for the first time in its history. It was also during this period that the Shalimar and Nishat gardens were developed and many famous mosques were constructed. It must however be kept in mind that beneficial though Mughal rule was for Kashmir, it was during the reign of the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb that Kashmir again experienced religious intolerance and fanaticism. Hindus were discriminated against and taxes were imposed on them.

After the death of Aurangzeb the Mughal Empire went into a slow decline. The Afghan ruler Ahmed Shah Abdali took advantage of the power vacuum thus created and sent one of his generals Abdul Khan Isk Aquasi to attack Kashmir in

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<sup>6</sup> Stein's English translation of the *Rajatarangini* says that Harsa started this in order to loot the temples of their wealth, which included idols, because of his 'elaborate fashions in dress and ornaments and his multifarious extravagances'.

<sup>7</sup> Dulacha was a Mongol warrior from Turkistan.

<sup>8</sup> Jagmohan 1992: 52.

1753. Abdul Khan was successful in defeating the local ruler and establishing his sway over the area, beginning a phase of Afghan rule. This phase was one of despotic rule and the sole aim was to squeeze the people of whatever they could part with. The 67 years of Afghan rule saw the worst plight of the Kashmiri people as they suffered every possible kind of humiliation, torture and deprivation; Hindus were persecuted and killed and religious intolerance was at its worst.

Afghan rule ended with the victory of the Sikh forces of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, when one of his generals Misser Dewan Chand defeated the last Afghan ruler Jabbar Khan in 1819. Thus commenced 27 years of Sikh rule, which saw 10 Sikh governors of Kashmir. The Sikhs, however, proved no better than the Afghans, their sole aim being the collection of the highest possible taxes from the region. A part of the taxes collected was sent to the Sikh Maharaja and the remainder squandered by the governors on luxurious living and merry making. During this period in Kashmir's history the Hindus were somewhat luckier than the Muslims who now suffered religious persecution at the hands of the Sikhs. However, irrespective of their religion the main interest of Kashmir's rulers always remained the maximum possible extraction of wealth from the region.

The Dogras were the last to rule Kashmir before the state acceded to India. This change of rulers was the result of an act of valour and service to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, rather than due to the overthrow of the Sikhs in Kashmir. Gulab Singh, a Dogra general in Ranjit Singh's service, won important and difficult victories in 1819 when he defeated the Yusufzai tribes which resulted in the capture of Peshawar. As a reward for this successful military campaign Gulab Singh was granted Jammu as part of his estate. Ranjit Singh also granted Gulab Singh the title of Raja. This enabled him to commence securing neighbouring regions into his domain. The conquests finally climaxed when one of his generals Zorawar Singh led a courageous expedition into Ladakh with a view to capturing it.

After the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the British Empire set its sights on the Sikh territories. In the ensuing battle, in which the opposing sides seemed equally poised, Gulab Singh deviously sided with the British, fully realising their imminent ascent on the Indian political scene. The resultant defeat of the Sikhs culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Amritsar on 16 March 1846. In accordance with the treaty, Kashmir was ceded to Gulab Singh for a petty sum of Rs 75 lakhs in return for his acceptance of British suzerainty. A relevant extract of the treaty reads as follows:

The British Government transfers and makes over, for ever, in independent possession, to Maharaja Gulab Singh, and heirs male of his body, all the hilly and mountainous country, with its dependencies, situated to the eastward of the river Indus, and westward of the river Ravi, including Chamba and excluding Lahul, being part of the territory ceded to the British Government by the Lahore State, according to the provisions of Article IV of the Treaty of Lahore dated March 9, 1846 A.D.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Extract from the Treaty of Amritsar, 16 March 1846.



Thus commenced the rule of a Dogra dynasty over Kashmir till it acceded to India on 26 October 1947. It also commenced the period of overriding British influence; influence which not only had its impact during the early years of Dogra rule but which is also responsible for the imbroglio in which India and Pakistan find themselves over Kashmir.

### *Kashmiryat*

Before analysing the period of Dogra rule under British influence, it is important to trace some of the highlights of the period covered in the course of history.

The culture and ethos of Kashmir are summed up in the tradition of *Kashmiryat*. This tradition stems from Kashmir's rich heritage of moderate scholars and religious philosophers, who were a voice of reason in contrast to the inflexibility, corrupt customs and practices and the exploitation of the common man that was a feature of orthodox Brahmanism and Islam. It was these voices of moderation that helped in the spread of the Islamic faith as they influenced both the common people and the rulers. It was also for this reason that, barring a few instances of forced conversion, conversions to Islam in Kashmir were generally not through the sword or scimitar. Kashmir is also an exception in that it witnessed a more moderate form of Islam influenced by the Sufi movements rather than the more common and orthodox forms prevalent elsewhere in the world.

Another aspect of religion peculiar to this region was the vast mixed denominational following that many Hindu and Muslim saints had among the common people, a feature that was the result of the secular teachings of these saints. It is also important to note that it was the common man who was initially most influenced by these sects. It is because of this aspect that secularism and moderation were ingrained qualities in Kashmir till the early twentieth century, when political forces engendered feelings of parochialism that they then exploited for their own gain. Of the moderate Islamic thinkers that influenced Kashmir, Saiyyid Ali Hamadani, whose Sufi order preached the universality of all religions and equality before God, was the most famous. He came to India from Iran in the fourteenth century during the reign of Qutub-ud-Din. Another Sufi saint Saiyyid Bilal Shah, also known as Abdur Rahman Turkistani, who came to India from Turkistan (present day Turkey) in 1320 A.D., also left an indelible mark on Kashmir and was responsible for the conversion to Islam of its then ruler, Rinchina. Of all these saints however, Lalla, or Lal Ded as she was better known, was the most popular. Born into a Brahmin family in 1355 A.D., she renounced the world to preach a belief that was a mixture of Hinduism and Islam. Her philosophy was heavily influenced by the teachings of Saiyyid Ali Hamadani and Sidh Bayu's philosophy of Trikha. Another famous saint was Sheikh Noor-ud-Din, better known as Nund Rishi. He was a Sufi and started the order of Rishi's under the influence of Lal Ded. Both were and still are revered by Hindus and Muslims alike in Kashmir.

Commenting on conversions Prithvi Nath Kaul Bamzai says,

Islam entered the Valley not as a result of foreign invasion, but by a coup d'état from within the country. Its influence and teachings had penetrated into the Valley long before a Muslim king ascended the throne, being carried thither by Muslim missionaries and military adventurers. Happily for the new religion, it found fertile ground there to grow and expand in. The people had been groaning under the misrule of the later Hindu rulers, when trade languished and agriculture was at a standstill. To add to their miseries, there were crushing burdens of rites and rituals, which the dominating Brahmins had laid upon the common man. The shackles of caste had already been broken by the teachings of Buddhism and the general mass of people did not, therefore, find it difficult to embrace the new faith as prescribed by the Sufi dervishes who projected its social and religious humanism.<sup>10</sup>

This is an important aspect of Kashmir, with the exception of Ladakh and Jammu, which will be discussed later in detail. Suffice to note at this juncture that this peaceful coexistence of all religious denominations in Kashmir was a result of centuries of moderate, secular and tolerant religious thought. The sufferings that the Kashmiri people had in common bound them closer together and led them to evolve the philosophy of *Kashmiriyat*. It is also for this reason that at times Kashmiri Pandits are accused of thinking of the interest of Kashmir ahead of every other consideration.

The concept of a 'two-nation theory' is least applicable to Kashmir. In fact, before politics and vested interests changed Kashmir, it was an example worthy of emulation.

## Dogra Rule and British Influence

Dogra rule did not bring succour and respite to the people of Kashmir. Autocratic, selfish and self-serving policies characterised the years that followed the advent of Dogra rule. Kashmiri Pandits dominated the bureaucracy and working class, whereas the vast majority of Muslims remained uneducated and unemployed. The state machinery under the Dogra kings was inept at handling crises and natural calamities and the influence of the British increased, as they were able to handle the same. One of the measures adopted by the British was the appointment of a Settlement Commission in 1889 for the purpose of promulgation of a uniform basis for payment of land revenue by the people. There was obvious resistance from rich landlords who were used to disproportionate favours from the King.

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<sup>10</sup> Bamzai 1966: 422. As quoted from Ajit Bhattacharjea's (1994: 35–36).

The Dogra rulers were staunch Hindus and there was a perceptible bias in their dealings with their predominantly Muslim subjects of the Kashmir valley vis-à-vis the Hindus of the Jammu region. Ajit Bhattacharjea writes,

... its residents (the valley) continued to be discriminated against in comparison to those of Jammu. This began to take a communal complexion because the Maharaja was an orthodox Hindu, as were most of the people of Jammu, whereas Kashmir was almost entirely Muslim.<sup>11</sup>

It was not only the religious bias of the rulers which was a cause of worry for the people, it was also the rulers' feeling of being outsiders in the valley and considering it a conquered land meant for their exploitation and pleasure. There were limited attempts, if any, to effect the amalgamation of the valley with Jammu, and this resulted in the alienation of the valley from the Maharaja and subsequently, due to the machinations of selfish politicians, from the Hindu populace at large. This divide was not a result of any animosity or differences between the people of both these faiths.

As P.N. Bazaz writes:

The Dogras have always considered Jammu as their home and Kashmir as their conquered country. As we shall presently see they established a sort of Dogra imperialism in the State in which all non-Dogra communities and classes were given the humble places of inferiors.<sup>12</sup>

Thus it is clearly evident that the fruits of centuries of symbiotic existence and religious tolerance were negated by the partisan attitude of the Dogra rulers. It is also evident that the seeds of religious discrimination were sown in this phase of Kashmir's history, prior to end of British rule. It was these seeds that subsequently sprouted giving rise to increasing communalism in Kashmir.<sup>13</sup>

In its 100 years under Dogra rule Kashmir had four maharajas, Gulab Singh (1846–57), Ranbir Singh (1857–85), Pratap Singh (1885–1925) and Hari Singh (1925–47/52). In the case of Hari Singh, for all practical purposes his rule ended with the accession of Kashmir to India although he continued as Kashmir's maharaja till hereditary rule was abolished in 1952. It is the rule of Hari Singh which witnessed the most turmoil and political activity. It is this period, therefore, that we will concentrate on.

## The Last Years of British Rule

Hari Singh's reign was characterised by a dogged continuance with his semi-independent brand of rule, despite the changing realities of the political scene in

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<sup>11</sup> Bhattacharjea 1994: 57.

<sup>12</sup> Bazaz 1954: 129.

<sup>13</sup> Some authors have a view contrary to this contention, '...that Maharaja Hari Singh's "Dogra" rule of Kashmir was not tyrannical, any more than British rule in India could be described as such, and was most certainly not communal.' Jha 1996: 11.

India. This period was characterised by the resentment of the common people, in particular the Muslims, towards their Dogra rulers because of the oppression they had suffered over the past 75 years. In addition, the British government interfered in and tried to influence the local administration. These factors brought about a new awakening in the state, which was further accentuated and encouraged by the ongoing freedom struggle. It was also during this period that there arose a credible Muslim leadership in the form of Sheikh Abdullah. What was also to prove significant was the special relationship that later developed between Sheikh Abdullah and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru based on the interests and secular ideals that they shared in common.

The last years of the 1920s saw the decisive emergence of both Indian and Kashmiri nationalism. Under pressure from both the British government and his people, Maharaja Hari Singh was forced to institute limited reforms through the Constitution Acts of 1924 and 1927. However, it is 1932 that can be regarded as a watershed year in Kashmir's history. It was in this year that the J&K Muslim Conference was formed and Sheikh Abdullah was elected its first President. Still struggling under the absolute rule of the Maharaja its initial aims were, '...to work for social, economic and cultural betterment of Muslims and to secure for them a larger share in civil services and army jobs'.<sup>14</sup>

The turning point in the relations between the two communities (the Hindus and the Muslims) in Kashmir was the arrest of Abdul Qadir, a non-Kashmiri from the North-West Frontier Province. He was arrested on 25 June 1931 for making a speech that allegedly inflamed communal passions. During his trial on 13 July 1931 a huge crowd of Muslim protesters gathered, and they were baton charged and subsequently fired upon by the police resulting in the deaths of 21 people. This was in continuation of protests against the Maharaja's government for curbing the right to worship in Jammu. This day is known in Kashmiri history as 'Martyrs Day'. The Muslims saw this as the handiwork of an oppressive 'Hindu government' and this led to communal rioting in which three Hindus were killed. It was in this way that communal forces that had been attempting to divide the people of the region ultimately achieved their aim.<sup>15</sup>

At this juncture, it will be pertinent to elaborate on the major forces that were influential on the J&K political scene at the time. First among these was the Indian National Congress, which at this stage stood for a unified India and for principles of secularism. The second was the Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference, which was subsequently renamed the All Jammu and Kashmir National Conference (NC) on 11 June 1939, led by Sheikh Abdullah. The NC inclined towards India, after realising that Kashmir's independence was not

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<sup>14</sup> Jagmohan 1992: 77.

<sup>15</sup> The early 1930s saw the emergence of political activism throughout the country. The First World War; the reforms of 1919; visit of the Simon Commission in 1929; and finally the political reforms of 1935, led to a more than perceptible phase of political awakening in the country. Kashmir too was influenced by these events.

possible.<sup>16</sup> The third was the Muslim League, which became a staunch advocate of the 'two nation theory', led by Mohammed Ali Jinnah and supported by the Muslim Conference (which remained a splinter group) led by Ghulam Abbas. Fourth was Maharaja Hari Singh and his aides who wanted to retain control over the state without having to democratise it and allow it its independence. Finally there was the colonial British government, whose role and aims will be analysed in a later section.

In this manoeuvring it was the innocent and ill-informed people of the State who became pawns in a larger political game between vested interests both internal and external to Kashmir.

The realities of communal politics became apparent in 1937, when elections to the provincial assemblies brought the Congress into power with a large majority. What concerned Jinnah at this stage was that the Congress had swept the polls even in Muslim majority provinces. This contradicted Jinnah's claim that the Muslim League was the sole representative of Muslims in India, and it subsequently led him to adopt a hard line approach and further attempt to drive a deep wedge between the two communities to polarise their votes. The idea of Pakistan was finally born with the passing of the Pakistan Resolution by the Muslim League in 1940.

The movement for enhanced powers for the people of Kashmir gained momentum and Maharaja Hari Singh was forced to announce the formation of a legislative assembly with 75 members. While Sheikh Abdullah and Nehru continued to fight for secularism in the state, communal forces led by the Muslim League did their best to influence Sheikh Abdullah to side with them along religious lines. Sheikh Abdullah's thinking is best illustrated by one of the clauses in the proceedings of the Anantnag Conference of the NC held in 1939, as formulated by him. In reference to election to the legislature, it read:

The election of the Legislature shall be made on the basis of joint electorates; seats should be reserved for the minorities and all safeguards and weightages should be guaranteed to them in the Constitution for the protection of their linguistic, religious, cultural, political and economic rights according to the principles enunciated, accepted or acted upon by the Indian National Congress from time to time.<sup>17</sup>

This not only proves Sheikh Abdullah's secular credentials at this stage in Kashmir's history; it also displays his acceptance of the Indian National Congress as the de facto convening authority for guiding India to its independence. Jinnah however

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<sup>16</sup> This dream that both Maharaja Hari Singh and Sheikh Abdullah secretly nursed was effectively shattered despite their best attempts after the signing of the Standstill Agreement when Pakistani tribals fully supported and led by Pakistani regulars raided the region on 22 October 1947. Details of the same will be covered in Chapter 3 of this book.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted from Bhattacharjea (1994: 74).

felt differently. Along with his aim of a separate Pakistan he had plans for Kashmir as well. These were amply displayed when he said,

When I, after careful consideration, suggested that the Mussalmans should organise themselves under one flag and on one platform, not only was my advice not acceptable to Sheikh Abdullah, but, as is his habit, which has become a second nature to him, he indulged in all sorts of language of a most offensive and vituperative character in attacking me.<sup>18</sup>

This difference of opinion and mutual animosity is also apparent when Sheikh Abdullah says of Jinnah in his book *Atish-e-Chinar*: ‘He emerged as the undisputed leader of fundamentalist Muslims, who were campaigning for a separate homeland for themselves, although his background and upbringing had nothing in common with the people he was supporting.’<sup>19</sup>

It is also interesting to note that though at this juncture Sheikh Abdullah certainly stood for secularism, he also stood to gain politically from Kashmir not merging with Pakistan and his not joining hands with Jinnah. He had probably realised that he would certainly become head of state in an independent Kashmir, and in the eventuality of its having to merge with India he would continue as the dominant force on Kashmir’s political scene. Also his influence beyond the borders of Kashmir was questionable. It was therefore in his interest to side with an accommodating Nehru rather than with a stubborn Jinnah. Sheikh Abdullah’s opponents of course interpreted Nehru’s role as being one that served both his as well as Sheikh Abdullah’s interests, as the latter held the key to the Valley.

... Muslim Conference interpreted it as follows: ‘Pandit Nehru is supporting the National Conference simply because he thinks that Sheikh Abdullah affords him an opportunity of using Kashmir as a jumping off ground, making the State another pocket for sabotaging the Pakistan movement and incidentally getting six more seats in the Constituent Assembly.’<sup>20</sup>

Prominent among the factors that influenced the rise of the Muslim League and the forces advocating partition of the country was the Indian National Congress’s decision not to support the British and Allied Forces during the Second World War. The Muslim League, showing a better understanding of the political ramifications of the situation, lent its full support, even as the major Congress leaders were jailed for launching the Quit India Movement in 1942. This gave the League time to carry out, over the intervening years, the groundwork needed to obtain the support of the British government for their plan for Pakistan. It will subsequently be shown

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<sup>18</sup> Bazaz 1954: 212.

<sup>19</sup> Sheikh Abdullah 1993: 151.

<sup>20</sup> Gupta 1966: 63.

how this support was further exploited to gain an upper hand in negotiations with India.<sup>21</sup>

After the end of the Second World War, as it became evident that independence was imminent, the pace of events started to pick up. The leaders of the Muslim League, the Congress and of the third force in Kashmir represented by a number of pressure groups, as already mentioned, were now desperate to gain an upper hand. The arrival of the Cripps Mission in 1946 saw the final realignment of forces. Sheikh Abdullah giving vent to his true feelings and desire wrote to the Mission:

... we wish to submit that for us in Kashmir re-examination of this relationship is vital matter because hundred years ago in 1846 land and people of Kashmir were sold away to servitude of Dogra House by British for seventy-five lakhs of Sikh rupees equivalent to fifty lakhs of British Indian rupees. As such case of Kashmir stands on equal footing and people of Kashmir press on Mission their unchallengeable claims to freedom on withdrawal of British power from India.<sup>22</sup>

This was immediately followed by the Quit Kashmir Movement launched by the NC on 10 May 1946 against the Dogra rulers of the state.

Whereas Nehru and Gandhi were firm believers in the concept of one people and one nation Jinnah's view was quite the opposite:

They are not religions in the strict sense of the word, but are, in fact, different and distinct social orders, and it is a dream that both Hindus and Muslims can ever evolve a common nationality, and this misconception of one Indian nation has gone far beyond the limits and is the cause of most of your troubles and will lead India to destruction if we fail to revise our notions in time.<sup>23</sup>

This major difference in thinking persists between the Indian and the Pakistani leadership even today, and as it was at the root of Partition in 1947, so it continues to be at the root of the LIC in J&K even today.

On the other hand, 'To Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru "one Indian nation in one united India" was the great ideal.... What was to Nehru "unity in diversity" was to Jinnah "conflicting ideas"; and even more aggravating to him was the idea of political unity.'<sup>24</sup>

From 1946-47 till Partition finally became a reality, Kashmir's Maharaja Hari Singh dithered over the question of accession to either India or Pakistan. The

<sup>21</sup> Thus, Indian foreign policy inherited idealism as illustrated by this incident and subsequently proved by India's decision to go to the United Nations after the invasion of Kashmir by tribals supported by Pakistan. On the other hand the opportunism of the Muslim League's courting of the British is reflected in present day turnaround of President Musharraf in case of Afghanistan.

<sup>22</sup> Telegram sent by Sheikh Abdullah to the Cripps Mission in 1946.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad 1947: 153.

<sup>24</sup> Korbel 2002: 27.

passage of the Indian Independence Act on 18 July 1947 was a final acceptance of the idea of Partition and the Independence of India and Pakistan. However the future of the princely states, which together accounted for 45.3 per cent of the total land area of the country and a population of 17 million, remained uncertain.<sup>25</sup> The British flirted with the idea of the non-transfer of their paramountcy over the princely states, with Prime Minister Atlee saying, ‘His Majesty’s Government do not intend to hand over their powers and obligations under the paramountcy to any Government of British India.’<sup>26</sup> However, this position underwent a change after protests, and Atlee remarked in his speech during a discussion of the Independence of India Bill in British Parliament, ‘It is the hope of His Majesty’s Government that all the States in due course find their appropriate place with one or the other Dominion within the British Commonwealth.’<sup>27</sup>

There is an impression perpetuated in certain circles within Pakistan that the Indian leaders had worked out an agreement with Maharaja Hari Singh in the days preceding Kashmir’s accession to India. As proof of this, they cite the visits of Indian leaders such as Acharya Kripalani in May 1947 and subsequently Gandhi.

Another outstanding personality came to visit the hesitant Maharaja, namely Gandhi himself. These visits to Kashmir by Indian politicians have later been presented by Pakistan as a significant indication of the pressure put on the Maharaja by India to accede to the Union.<sup>28</sup>

Elaborating on this Lars Blinkenberg quoting other authorities on the subject says:

Most outside authors have disbelieved this plot or pressure theory. Thus Hodson writes that, ‘in the light of later events it is hard to credit that at this stage (summer 1947) Indian leaders seemed indifferent to the accession.... But so it was....’ Horace Alexander writes in his *Kashmir*, ‘One story that Gandhi fixed it all with the Maharaja... must be dismissed as the idlest tittle tattle.’<sup>29</sup>

The opinion of Gandhi himself on the subject is worth quoting to further amplify the issue. ‘Kashmir after the end of British paramountcy, would have to join either India or Pakistan. He was of the opinion that the will of the Kashmiris was the supreme law between the two dominions and the Maharaja.’<sup>30</sup>

While the other princely states made their choice prior to 15 August 1947, the states of Junagarh, Hyderabad and J&K still remained. Maharaja Hari Singh, still nurturing dreams of the independence of his kingdom, signed a Standstill Agreement with Pakistan with effect from 15 August 1947. India asked for more

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.: 46.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Chandra 2000: 72.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.: 72.

<sup>28</sup> Blinkenberg 1998: 64.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Kripalani 1970.



time to consider the offer. The stage had been set for a confrontation between Hari Singh's greed and dreams on the one hand and an impatient India and a downright ruthless Pakistan on the other, for Kashmir that had been the most prized possession of British India.

The accession of the princely states to India was in part a display of their patriotism, but it was also due to the support of the population of these states for the idea and also due to coercion by Sardar Patel, who had been made responsible for these states. However, despite the successful completion of this task, which finally saw all princely states in question resolving their differences with India, it remains to be seen what the role of Britain and British interest was in this entire process. This is a very important aspect of the history of J&K and subsequently of the emergence of LICs in the region. It is both interesting and relevant to analyse British interests in the region, which in all probability influenced their actions prior to India's Independence.

### The Role of the British

Britain was not pleased with the response of the leaders of the Indian National Congress during the War, and their refusal to support the British effort. This infuriated them and remained a reason for much animosity for a long time.

Britain fully realised South Asia's geo-strategic importance, especially since the seeds of the Cold War had already been sown and fears of communist expansion and influence were becoming more and more real.

It was through Kashmir that British political officers had in the past made trips to Sinkiang to keep a watchful eye on Russia.... Important trade routes to Central Asia passed through Kashmir. Such an important listening post so close to the soft belly of the Soviet Union would be lost if the Indian case would be accepted; for India talked about keeping away from military blocs and pursuing a policy of nonalignment. Kashmir, if included in Pakistan, would be a different matter, for a large number of British civil and military officers had already opted for Pakistan which still offered a willing and valuable base for protecting British oil and other interests in West Asia.<sup>31</sup>

Under these circumstances, Britain wanted to retain its influence over the region. It wanted to achieve this through a weak India that had a number of independent princely states in its midst, keeping the region in a state of constant friction. As J.N. Dixit, a noted foreign policy analyst, author, and previously India's ambassador to Pakistan as well as India's foreign secretary, says, 'I think they wanted Jammu and Kashmir to be a major independent state.'<sup>32</sup> The British premise was based

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<sup>31</sup> Sharma 1967: 22.

<sup>32</sup> J.N. Dixit in a personal interview with the author.

on years of experience of Indian kings vying for British patronage to subdue their enemies. It was hoped that the policy of 'Divide and Rule' rule would continue to maintain British influence in the region as independent states like J&K would look to Britain to avoid dominance by India. In contrast to this, a united Pakistan with religion as a strong unifying factor and British support was regarded as a foil to external influences in the region. Again, as per J.N. Dixit:

The strategic scenario envisaged was that India would be a fragmented polity with British Provinces constituting the Dominion of India, but with the princely states making a patchwork of political entities retaining their linkages with British Government, eroding the territorial and geo-strategic cohesion of India. In contrast, it was hoped that the Dominion of Pakistan would emerge as a united, cohesive territorial state rooted in Islamic unity, retaining a close relationship with the former colonial power in the context of the support, which the British Government had given to the Muslim League for the creation of Pakistan.<sup>33</sup>

The British wanted to sow the seeds of future fragmentation and constant friction through LICs. The Indian leaders were convinced of their aims to employ Divide and Rule as a policy. 'He (Nehru) was convinced that the dispute was created and cultivated by the "third party", the British, who ruled over India by the method of *divide et impera*. This opinion was shared by Mahatma Gandhi.'<sup>34</sup> The British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, in an interview given to the BBC on 16 November 2002 acknowledged British mistakes when he accepted their questionable record on the resolution of disputes concerning Palestine–Israel, Iraq–Kuwait and India–Pakistan during Partition.

The USA played a similar role in order to serve its own strategic interests. It saw Pakistan as being in a position wherein it was likely to be more malleable and 'understanding' of the security concerns of the USA in the region. Pakistan was probably given a *quid pro quo* deal of support over Kashmir in exchange for its support against the communist bloc, which was important to the USA given its (Pakistan's) geo-strategic location. Analysing the issue, Ajit Bhattacharjea writes:

...Nehru saw Washington as also keen to support Pakistan for its own strategic objectives. As early as 17 January 1948, he cabled Gopalaswami Ayyangar, who was leading India's delegation to the UN, that diplomatic reports suggested that if Pakistan was willing to co-operate with the US in providing military facilities against the Soviet Union, Washington might support it on Kashmir. This came true when Pakistan became a member of both the CENTO and SEATO Anglo-American military pacts.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Dixit 2002: 110–11.

<sup>34</sup> Korbelt 2002: 26.

<sup>35</sup> Bhattacharjea 1994: 156.

Another aspect which fuelled resentment, and which continues to do so till date, was the manner in which territories were partitioned. Sir Radcliffe was sent to India as head of a Mission which had five weeks to complete this delicate and potentially explosive task.<sup>36</sup> After controversies and accusations of partiality, Sir Radcliffe left the subcontinent on 15 August 1947 with Partition as decided by him having become a reality. As time later proved, it was and remains a painful mistake which lit a match that spread the fire of hatred and animosity that continue to trouble the region even today. Whether Partition was a conscious ploy on the part of the British or whether it was a rare act of ineptitude remains an unanswered question which is bound to haunt all parties in the region. Today these concerned parties include Britain as the tentacles of fundamentalism and cross-border terrorism threaten to enter the preserve of such imperialistic societies.

One of the major decisions of Partition that caused Pakistan much heartburn was the award of the Gurdaspur district to India. Pakistan was of the opinion that Gurdaspur gave India the only road link to Kashmir and thus a claim to it equal to that of Pakistan's. They also felt that Lord Mountbatten had influenced Radcliffe in this respect. 'Loss of Gurdaspur district was not merely a *territorial murder of Pakistan*, it meant something much more.... Without Gurdaspur, India had no claim whatsoever to Kashmir.'<sup>37</sup> This suspicion on the part of Pakistan was probably a sign of Pakistan's growing frustration,<sup>38</sup> especially since the award and the impartiality of Radcliffe has been upheld by many international writers.

We must bear in mind that both Indian and Pakistani leaders had undertaken beforehand to respect the *Award* and that Radcliffe was allowed to take other factors (than religious majority areas) into consideration. In the Punjab the complicated water-canal system seems to have been the justification for this particular *Award*. Even with a different judicial decision, India had still contiguous areas with Kashmir where new road communications could have been made.<sup>39</sup>

There is yet another factor which is likely to have been kept in mind prior to making the award. This was the sensitivity of the Sikhs on the issue of what they considered to be areas under their influence.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The Boundary Commission had four members; two nominated by Pakistan and two by India. Sir Radcliffe was nominated as the Chairman. He arrived to carry out the task of partitioning India on 8 July 1947.

<sup>37</sup> Choudhury 1968: 54.

<sup>38</sup> Khan n.d.: 5.

<sup>39</sup> Blinkenberg 1998: 66-67.

<sup>40</sup> Schofield 2000: 35-36. This view is shared by many other authors, prominent amongst them being Robert G. Wirsing (1994: 29-30) who writes:

Credible evidence of any kind that Mountbatten himself gave the factor of India's access via Gurdaspur exceptionally high priority, or that he actually sought to bring pressure to bear directly on Radcliffe in order to assure that the Indian wish in that regard was satisfied, simply does not exist.

The circumstances surrounding Partition were best described by a stupefied Sir Radcliffe, who after completing the task said:

Amazing people. They had absolutely no conception. They asked me to come in and do this sticky job for them, and when I had done it they hated it. But what could they expect in the circumstances? Surely, they must have realised what was coming to them once they had decided on partition. But they had made absolutely no plans for coping with the situation. Strange chaps. Just didn't do their homework.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Bhattacharjea (1994: 113), from Mosley (1961: 200).

## Chapter 3

# 1947–48 Indo-Pak Conflict

### Background

Josef Korbel describing the difference between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir issue says:

The real cause of all the bitterness and bloodshed, all the venomous speech, the recalcitrance and the suspicion that have characterised the Kashmir dispute is the uncompromising and perhaps uncompromisable struggle of two ways of life, two concepts of political organisation, two scales of values, two spiritual attitudes, that find themselves in deadly conflict in which Kashmir has become both symbol and battleground.<sup>1</sup>

The difference of opinion between the two countries is further described as:

This is not, in fact, the real cause of the divide. This is rather an extension of, and perpetuates, the real divide. When Pakistan terms Kashmir the ‘core issue’ or ‘unfinished agenda of partition’, and India terms it as the ‘core of its nationhood’ or an ‘integral part’, they reveal their ideological fixation.<sup>2</sup>

The conditions in Kashmir in the post-Independence period are characterised by two major phases.<sup>3</sup> The first relates primarily to a struggle between India and Pakistan because of the disagreement over Kashmir’s accession to India. This period, which lasted till the emergence of a people’s struggle in 1989, was bereft of popular support in Kashmir for either Kashmiri independence or a will to merge with Pakistan, contrary to Pakistan’s perception and the manner in which it projected the issue for the consumption of the outside world. During most of this period

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<sup>1</sup> Korbel 2002: 25.

<sup>2</sup> Imtiaz Alam, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 18 May 2003. Imtiaz Alam is Current Affairs Editor, *The News*, Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup> See Ganguly (1997: 3).

conditions of what is termed an ‘ugly stability’<sup>4</sup> prevailed on the Ceasefire Line (CFL) between Indian and Pakistani occupied Kashmir that resulted from the 1947–48 conflict, and the Line of Control (LoC) demarcated after 1972. Crests and troughs have occurred in the cross-border rhetoric, and the low intensity conflict (LIC) that continues in Kashmir has twice culminated in a full-scale conventional war, once in 1947–48, and again in 1965.

On the other hand the conditions after 1989, while remaining more or less unchanged on the LoC, have worsened within the state, especially in the Valley. This has been due to a sudden upsurge of popular sentiment against the Indian government, creating the conditions necessary for Pakistan to step up terrorism based on cross-border infiltration, which has resulted in a proxy war between the two countries. Thus commenced a strategy of ‘bleeding India by a thousand cuts’. Pakistan ultimately understood the value and efficacy of a LIC vis-à-vis a conventional war. This is probably due in part to its failures in conventional operations in 1947–48, 1965 and 1971.

After an initial setback in the 1947–48 conflict, India managed to partially salvage the situation. This included a swift counter offensive, after the signing of the Instrument of Accession, that drove out the invaders from areas under the political influence of Sheikh Abdullah. Even though India had to contend with Pakistani control of one-third of Kashmir (referred to as Pakistan Occupied Kashmir), Pakistan’s resentment over the perceived loss of its rightful share after Partition was even greater given Kashmir’s political, economic and geo-political importance.<sup>5</sup>

The thinking in both India and Pakistan after Partition describes the degree of passion both had for Kashmir. ‘For Indian nationalists such as Nehru, the integration of Kashmir into India was critical because it would demonstrate that all faiths could live under the aegis of a secular state.’<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, ‘For Jinnah, Pakistan would be “incomplete” without Kashmir. In essence, Pakistan’s claim to Kashmir was and remains irredentist.’<sup>7</sup> Yet another explanation of the dispute reads as follows:

To India the Subcontinent is inescapably one nation. To Pakistan it is, just as inescapably, two. The examination of these two beliefs, their nature, their origins, and the events that were and remain the expression of their conflict is essential to the full understanding of this conflict’s present-day symbol, Kashmir.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The term ‘ugly stability’ has been used by Tellis (1997: 7), where he describes the ‘no war no peace condition’ between the two countries. He writes:

... in contrast to the widespread belief that the South Asian region represents an arena where deterrence breakdown is either probable or likely, this research concludes that the Indian subcontinent is likely to enjoy a period of ‘ugly stability’ that will probably last for at least a decade and possibly longer.

<sup>5</sup> Khan n.d.: 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ganguly 1997: 8.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Korbelt 2002: 25.

There are some in Pakistan who felt that the letter 'K' in Pakistan stood for Kashmir, and thus its inclusion into Pakistan was a mere formality.<sup>9</sup>

Jinnah's 'two-nation theory' was put into effect with the birth of Pakistan on 14 August 1947. But the 'theory' had failed even before it had a chance of proving its credentials to the world at large. A large number of Muslims had preferred to stay on in India after Partition and Pakistani claims to the necessity of its existence on grounds of religion as a homeland for the subcontinent's Muslims had thus been proved wrong. There were many 'strategists' and 'thinkers' who predicted the break-up of India, given its diversity. However, despite a religious affinity, it was Pakistan which split into two countries (Pakistan and Bangladesh) in 1971. A split caused by internal power politics and disillusionment.

No less problematic is Pakistan's inability to overcome its ideological schizophrenia between umma and nation state. The insistence on being a part of umma excludes the imperatives of nation state and extends its mission not just to Kashmir but to everywhere else, including Indian Muslims. But it can't explain the separation of East Pakistan, nor find justification for Muslim integration into India.<sup>10</sup>

To this day *mohajirs*, the term used to describe migrant Indian Muslims in Pakistan, do not occupy the same place in Pakistani society and politics as does the ruling elite from Punjab.

Pakistan's claim of its being a homeland for the subcontinent's Muslims is negated by the fact that Pakistani Muslims have never accepted Kashmiris on an equal ethnic footing. A fact that was proved when marauding tribal raiders who entered Kashmir from Pakistan on 22 October 1947 resorted to acts of looting, rape and murder, in stark contrast to their trumpeted claim of coming as the liberators of the Kashmiri people suffering at the hands of Maharaja Hari Singh. Pakistani atrocities in Kashmir were abominable displays of people giving free rein to their basest instincts. Interestingly, the atrocities were committed against a people who the perpetrators had designated as 'their own people'. Similar or probably worse human rights violations occurred in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1971, when Tikka Khan unleashed his fury on an 'inferior' people, leading to the creation of Bangladesh. The Hamudoor Rehman Commission set up in Pakistan in December 1971, and charged with the duty of inquiring into the circumstances in which the Commander, Eastern Command, surrendered and the members of the armed forces of Pakistan under his command laid down their arms and a ceasefire was ordered along the borders of West Pakistan and India and along the ceasefire line in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, in an indictment of the Pakistani army stated the following in its report:

Due to corruption arising out of performance of martial law duties, lust for wine and women, and greed for land and houses, a large number of senior army

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<sup>9</sup> Khan n.d.: 4.

<sup>10</sup> Imtiaz Alam, *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, 18 May 2003.

officers, particularly those occupying the highest positions had not only lost the will to fight but also the professional competence necessary for taking the vital and critical decisions demanded of them for the successful prosecution of war.<sup>11</sup>

The root of Pakistan's fixation with Kashmir can be understood. After Partition had established the sovereign states of India and Pakistan, Junagarh, Hyderabad and Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) were three princely states which remained undecided, more by design than due to any other valid difficulty or compulsion. It will be pertinent to understand at this stage the criteria to be followed for accession to either nation by the princely states.

The first criterion was that the rulers of Muslim majority states should accede to Pakistan and those of Hindu majority states to India. The second criterion was that the rulers of Muslim majority states should only accede to Pakistan if their boundary was contiguous with that of Pakistan. However, there was a difference of opinion between the Indian and Pakistani governments as to whether the accession should follow the will of the people or that of the ruler. While India supported the former condition, Pakistan supported the latter. The cases of Junagarh and J&K will be examined to get a better understanding of the paradoxical situation which developed, and which accentuated the problem to such proportions that it remains unresolved to this day.

The Nizam of Junagarh ruled a Hindu majority state, no boundary of which was contiguous with that of Pakistan. Despite this, the Nizam having failed to convince Britain, India and Pakistan of his desire to remain independent, acceded to Pakistan on 15 August 1947. There was widespread resentment, representations were made against the accession in the state, and popular sentiment threatened to engulf the area. On its part, Pakistan despite its understanding of the impracticality of this decision accepted the accession. Their strategy was not to gain Junagarh, but J&K. They were willing to lose the battle for Junagarh, as long as this enabled them to win the war for J&K.

What followed was a period of acrimony and mounting tensions, with Pakistan going to the extent of indicating that it was considering the eventuality of a war with India. As far as India was concerned, Junagarh's rightful ruler had acceded to Pakistan. India thus resorted to the application of 'administrative' and 'military' pressure, and used local sentiments to bring about a disintegration of the state administration in Junagarh. Finally, the Nawab realising the futility of further resistance fled the scene. India, under pressure from the international community, Pakistan and self-imposed ideals of righteousness<sup>12</sup> declared its commitment to respecting the will of the people on the issue of merger. The only way this could

<sup>11</sup> Hamoodur Rehman Commission, quoted in *India Today*, 21 August 2000.

<sup>12</sup> A vast majority of India's policies at the time of Partition were guided more by idealism than by realism, which is the cause of some of the problems India has inherited from Partition. The high moral values of the majority of the Indian leaders are regarded as being 'naïve' by some, in terms of the principles to be adopted when pursuing a path of diplomacy. India's stand on the issue of Kashmir, referred to the UN in 1948, was again a result of its naivety.



be ascertained was through a referendum, and the Indian Prime Minister Nehru had little option but to accept this in October 1947. In a meeting between Jinnah and Nehru chaired by Lord Mountbatten, this principle was finally accepted, as illustrated by Mountbatten's report on the subject. Quoting this report, Ajit Bhattacharjea says,

... [Nehru] said that India would always be willing to abide by a decision obtained by a general election, a plebiscite or a referendum, provided it was conducted in a fair and impartial manner. I emphasised the importance of Pandit Nehru's statement to Mr Liaquat Ali Khan, and assured him that India would abide by it, and that Pandit Nehru would agree that this policy would apply to any other State, since India would never be a party to trying to force a State to join their Dominion against the wishes of the majority of the people. Pandit Nehru nodded his head sadly. Liaquat Ali Khan's eyes sparkled. There is no doubt both of them were thinking of Kashmir.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, a referendum was held in Junagarh on 20 February 1948, with 90 people of the 190,870 who had voted voting for a merger with Pakistan.

Thus India, Pakistan and Kashmir became enmeshed in the tangle of events in Junagarh. It is interesting to understand why Pakistan was willing to sacrifice Junagarh in order to gain Kashmir. It is, therefore, relevant to analyse the imperatives guiding Pakistan's Kashmir policy at this stage.

First, like India, which saw Kashmir as a 'test case' of its secular credentials at the time of Partition and in fact does so till date, Pakistan saw Kashmir as a test of its 'two-nation theory'. Pakistan viewed the loss of a Muslim majority state on its very border (through a merger with the predominantly Hindu majority country of India), as a terrible loss of prestige. It also realised that this would undermine the very argument that Jinnah and the Muslim League had advanced for the creation of Pakistan as a homeland for the Muslims of the subcontinent. 'It is thus no accident that early in 1947 the Pir, a key member of the NWFP Muslim League, openly threatened a jihad to conquer Kashmir for Islam...'<sup>14</sup>

Second, Pakistan had realised that whereas holding on to Junagarh was untenable, Kashmir would be of geo-strategic importance providing it with a much needed buffer zone against India. It felt that Kashmir's accession to India would leave India positioned on its north-eastern frontiers which it (India) would then exploit to its advantage. 'One glance at the map was enough to show that Pakistan's military security would be seriously jeopardised if Indian troops came to be stationed along Kashmir's western border.'<sup>15</sup> Whereas if Kashmir acceded to Pakistan,

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<sup>13</sup> As quoted by Bhattacharjea (1994) from Hodson (1969). Hodson had access to the Mountbatten papers, which are the source of this first person account.

<sup>14</sup> Jha 1996: 31.

<sup>15</sup> Khan n.d.: 9. In his book, Khan dwells on the subject at length discussing the strategic significance of the state of Kashmir for Pakistan.

a potential alliance would be possible with the Chinese, which could be used to counter Indian influence in the region. Moreover, it would cut India off in the north, thereby also cutting it off from potential alliances with Afghanistan and, through it, the USSR. Third, Pakistan also felt that Kashmir held the key to its water requirements, as every one of its major rivers first flowed through the state.

Our agricultural economy was dependent particularly upon the rivers coming out of Kashmir. The Mangla Headworks were actually in Kashmir and the Marala Headworks were within a mile or so of the border. What then would be our position if Kashmir was to be in Indian hands.<sup>16</sup>

It had a nagging fear that India would use this water as the sword of Damocles over Pakistan's head to blackmail it should hostilities arise.<sup>17</sup>

The water of six rivers—the Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas and Sutlej—with their elaborate systems of irrigation canals had been indispensable to the agriculture of the Subcontinent. The partition brought the river Beas under complete control of India. The Ravi and Sutlej flow through both India and Pakistan, but their headwaters are in India. The Indus begins in Tibet and flows through Kashmir; the Jhelum and Chenab headwaters are in Kashmir.... The occupation of these rivers and their dams by the Indian army and the eventual diversion of their waters through canals would have meant Pakistan's quick economic death.<sup>18</sup>

Fourth, and last, the Pakistani leaders had already suffered a loss of face after the Junagarh debacle and they knew that losing Hyderabad for similar reasons was inevitable. Thus, for them, the only face-saving formula was acquiring Kashmir.

The stage had thus been set for the first LIC in Kashmir's history, a conflict that was destined to continue into the twenty-first century.

## Preceding Events

Kashmir's ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, was at the time desperately hoping for his state's independence. However, the signals he received from Pakistan became increasingly threatening. There were veiled threats from its leaders and the signs

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*: 10.

<sup>17</sup> Pakistan has voiced its fears with respect to the waters of the river Indus yet again, during the stand-off between the two countries after the attack on India's Parliament on 13 December 2001. Abrogation of the Indus Water Treaty came up as one of the possible options available to India to put pressure on Pakistan to stop aiding cross-border terrorism. However, this issue was finally not taken up by the Indian government, probably much to Pakistan's relief.

<sup>18</sup> Korbelt 2002: 139.

of growing impatience were becoming increasingly ominous. Pakistan backed up these threats with measures such as an 'economic blockade' of Kashmir,<sup>19</sup> and it also went to the extent of instigating riots against the Maharaja's government in the Poonch area of the state.

In the face of these threats Maharaja Hari Singh continued dithering, still hoping for Kashmiri independence and for the possibility of striking a balance between the two opposing powers, India and Pakistan. This he did by indicating to Pakistan that he might exercise his option of merging Kashmir with India, should he be driven against the wall. These acrimonious exchanges were still in progress when reports of Pakistani tribal raiders invading Kashmir were received on 22 October 1947. It was then that Maharaja Hari Singh finally realised the full gravity of the situation.

Information of the Pakistani incursion reached New Delhi on 24 October 1947 and immediately after that the Defence Committee of the Indian Cabinet met to review the situation. In the meantime the Maharaja had also asked for assistance. The following day, 25 October 1947, India decided to start airlifting its troops into Kashmir, rather than sending help by road. However, the legal problem of accession was still a stumbling block, as Mountbatten intervened to remind Pandit Nehru that legally assistance could not be given unless J&K formally acceded to India. Ensuing discussions came up with a formula, which required the Maharaja to accede to India temporarily, *till the wishes of the people of the state* on the subject could be ascertained. V.P. Menon flew to Srinagar to convey this to the Maharaja.

After negotiations with the J&K Prime Minister Mehr Chand Mahajan,<sup>20</sup> V.P. Menon returned with him to New Delhi. There acrimonious exchanges took place between him (Mahajan) and Pandit Nehru on the subject of Kashmir's accession to India, till finally Sheikh Abdullah was required to intervene, giving Pandit Nehru his assurance of the National Conference's (NC's) willingness to accept the accession of J&K to India.

On 26 October 1947 Menon and Mahajan flew back to Srinagar and finally returned with the Instrument of Accession duly signed by Maharaja Hari Singh (see Appendix A for the detailed text of the Instrument of Accession, along with the Maharaja's letter outlining the circumstances which led to him signing it and Lord Mountbatten's reply accepting the same). Besides the Instrument of Accession proper, it is the Maharaja's letter sent along with it which summarises his predicament, his original wish for the independence of his state, and the circumstances under which he was forced to abandon this wish and allow Kashmir's accession to India. The letter said:

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<sup>19</sup> While the Maharaja described the poor and inadequate supply of essentials as an 'economic blockade', Pakistan saw it as administrative difficulties of arranging the supplies. However, a likely 'motive' points towards a concerted squeeze to 'assist' the Maharaja to 'make up his mind on accession'.

<sup>20</sup> Mehr Chand Mahajan was the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir during the last years of the rule of Maharaja Hari Singh.

...I wanted to take time to decide to which Dominion I should accede or whether it is not in the best interests of both the Dominions and of my State to stand independent, of course with friendly and cordial relations with both.... Though we have got a standstill agreement with the Pakistan Government, the Government permitted a steady and increasing strangulation of supplies like food, salt and petrol to my State.

Afridis, soldiers in plain clothes, and desperadoes with modern weapons have been allowed to infiltrate into the State, at first in the Poonch area, then from Sialkot and finally in a mass in the area adjoining Hazara district on the Ramkote side.... The mass infiltration of tribesmen drawn from distant areas of the North-West Frontier Province, coming regularly in motor trucks, using the Manwehra–Muzaffarabad road and fully armed with up-to-date weapons, cannot possibly be done without the knowledge of the Provincial Government of the North-West Frontier Province and the Government of Pakistan.

With the conditions obtaining at present in my State and the great emergency of the situation as it exists, I have no option but to ask for help from the Indian Dominion. Naturally they cannot send the help asked for by me without my State acceding to the Dominion of India. I have accordingly decided to do so, and I attach the instrument of accession for acceptance by your Government.<sup>21</sup>

This letter is a frank statement of Maharaja Hari Singh's distress and helplessness at that critical moment. He makes it abundantly clear that his intention was for J&K to remain independent, but that circumstances did not permit the realisation of this ambition, and that he was being forced to accede to India given the Pakistani violation of the Standstill Agreement and the illegal invasion of his state. He also described the brutal and inhuman treatment of his subjects at the hands of invaders and his apparent helplessness in preventing it. He again gives an impression of wanting help without acceding to India, but of realising the futility of this wish. Finally, in his agreement to accede to India his tone is one of resignation at the turn events had taken.

Though this letter necessarily engenders feelings of sympathy for the Maharaja and his predicament, it must be kept in mind that he was responsible for the position in which he found himself. He was sufficiently misguided to believe that Kashmir's independence was a distinct possibility, this despite the British authorities making it abundantly clear that he would have to choose between India or Pakistan. Even if independence had been feasible, the people of the state were in a pitiable condition, primarily because of the corrupt, inefficient, self-serving, communal and dictatorial style of functioning of the Maharajah's administration. Given the sweeping changes taking place in the subcontinent in terms of people achieving self-determination, this would have been sufficient for his people to rise up in revolt

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<sup>21</sup> Extracts of letter forwarded by Maharaja Hari Singh along with Instrument of Accession on 26 October 1947.

against him and seize power. The tormented people of the state having endured centuries of exploitation were in no mood to accept autocratic rule any longer.

Another relevant factor is the aspect of *the will of the people* of Kashmir at the time of its accession to India. There is a misconception, perpetuated by Pakistan, that India suppressed the will of the people to take the state using deceitful means in connivance with Lord Mountbatten, who happened to be a friend of Pandit Nehru's. This is a falsehood that Pakistan perpetuates as a smokescreen not only to hide the weaknesses and failures of its government but also for the consumption of the world community. Pakistan wanted to sidetrack the fact that Kashmir had acceded to India in a legal, transparent and fair manner based on the criteria that had been agreed upon by both India and Pakistan. It also fails to recognise the fact that Sheikh Abdullah was a party to the accession and had supported it, and that at the time he undoubtedly represented the feelings of the largest section of Kashmiris.

It is an undeniable and irrefutable fact that the Maharaja of J&K signed the Instrument of Accession on 26 October 1947 and that as the head of state he had the legal right to do so. Moreover, this was done in consultation with Sheikh Abdullah, a Kashmiri leader who enjoyed vast popular support and was widely recognised as the person who would be elected to lead the state, and the accession was also accepted by Lord Mountbatten. It would also be pertinent to note that Sheikh Abdullah was nominated by Maharaja Hari Singh the day after the accession to head the government of Kashmir along with the existing Prime Minister, Mehr Chand Mahajan.<sup>22</sup> It was under this dual guarantee of both the head of state and the leader of the masses that the accession took place. In the light of these developments, challenging the accession was nothing more than a sign of Pakistan's frustration.

Purely from a legal sense, as specified under the terms of the Indian Independence Act, Maharaja Hari Singh had the right to join either India or Pakistan. The act had vested this right in the hands of the rulers of the various princely states.<sup>23</sup>

The second aspect is the role of Lord Mountbatten in the sequence of events. Again, this aspect needs to be put in the right perspective. Much has been made of Mountbatten's friendship with Nehru. It should be kept in mind that it was Lord Mountbatten who forced the issue of a plebiscite to ascertain the will of the people, despite the state's legal accession. This was in fact unnecessary after Sheikh Abdullah's acceptance of the accession. Even prior to that, India's going to the UN was at the behest of Mountbatten, '... at the suggestion of Lord Mountbatten on

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<sup>22</sup> Mahajan had served as the Congress nominee on the Boundary Commission and was a lawyer by profession. Some authors like Lamb have suggested that Mahajan was brought in as the Prime Minister of Kashmir by Sardar Patel 'to see through accession to India'.

<sup>23</sup> Ganguly 1997: 13.

December 20, 1947, the Indian cabinet decided to refer the case to the UN Security Council.<sup>24</sup>

For the sake of analysis, it will be interesting to speculate on what would have happened had a plebiscite been held. There is no doubt that it would have gone in India's favour. There are four reasons that support this surmise. First, after Pakistan's brutal attempt at forcibly taking Kashmir, the people of the state had seen through Pakistani 'concern' and 'compassion'. Their treatment at the hands of the tribal invaders from Pakistan had made clear to them their future position in Pakistan's polity. Second, Pakistan was itself not confident of winning such a plebiscite. This is proved by their not withdrawing their forces after the termination of the 1947–48 conflict to facilitate the holding of a plebiscite. In fact Pakistan has demanded a plebiscite for decades but they have no interest in losing the area they are currently occupying illegally should such a plebiscite go against them. Their aim has always been to take the rest of Kashmir through a mixture of force and devious propaganda. That major world powers accepted the Pakistani argument is not surprising given the geo-political interests at stake in the region. Third was Sheikh Abdullah, whose influence was the deciding factor in the Valley. The Muslim League held sway amongst the Muslims of the Jammu division and the sparsely populated regions north of Srinagar, and in the region of Poonch. The combined population of the rest of the pro-India and pro-Abdullah regions in the Valley and other areas of Jammu and Ladakh would certainly have tilted the balance in India's favour.<sup>25</sup> Fourth, Pandit Nehru's influence and the respect he commanded in the Valley were of a very high order. In the event of a plebiscite he would certainly have swung many votes in India's favour.<sup>26</sup>

Till date, Pakistani attempts at resurrecting the UN resolution on Kashmir are nothing more than an exercise aimed at raising up a smokescreen that enables it to keep the attention of the Pakistani people diverted from the real issues of economic misery, political poverty and fragmentation at home.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.: 11.

<sup>25</sup> The exception to the areas under Sheikh Abdullah's influence were the areas west of the Kishenganga River and areas of Gilgit, which displayed their independence, when the garrison stationed there, the Gilgit Scouts under Major William Brown, revolted and declared their accession to Pakistan on 3 November 1947.

<sup>26</sup> This can be ascertained from the unanimous resolution passed by the National Conference in October 1948. It reads as follows:

In these circumstances, the convention, therefore, confirms the provisional accession of the State with India. It further pledges its fullest support to a final accession to India on the basis of New Kashmir, the realisation and implementation of which will be our first and foremost task. The convention strongly hopes that the Indian Government and the people of India will lend the people of Kashmir all material, moral and political support in completing this task and achieving our goal of economic and political freedom.

Sheikh Abdullah added, 'So far as I am concerned, I feel certain that the political, economic, social and cultural interests of Kashmir demand an immediate and final accession to India, and India alone.'

## The Infringement Begins

The 1947–48 Indo-Pak conflict is a classical example of a cross-border LIC. That it failed to achieve its object is known. The result at the time was a hardening of the Pakistani stance. It stepped up operations turning the conflict into a fully-fledged, albeit undeclared, war. From 22 October 1947, when news of invading tribal hordes from Pakistan reached Srinagar, till May 1948, the struggle largely remained an LIC. During this period, an attempt was made by Pakistan to give it the appearance of an indigenous struggle of the people against the state government. However, with the realisation setting in that this attempt had been a failure and that the conflict was becoming increasingly internationalised, turning into an Indo-Pak conflict rather than an indigenous struggle, Pakistan openly employed its regular forces, thus widening the scope of the conflict.

It is not the aim of this study to go into the tactical details of various battles fought as part of the conflict as these have been covered in adequate detail elsewhere. However, the broad course of the conflict till its conversion into a middle intensity one (an MIC) is analysed with a view to understanding how LICs can be ingeniously employed as a weapon of state policy without causing international repercussions and an enlargement of the theatre of war.

Pakistan has repeatedly employed this method over the years to overcome the inherent disadvantages it suffers from in a conventional conflict, namely the inadequacy of its forces, its small physical size and its lack of economic clout. Despite the fact that the 1947–48 conflict commenced as an LIC, it nonetheless had the potential of achieving its aims as set out by those who had planned it. Prior to Partition, Pakistan had started instigating the local tribal population of Kashmir, particularly in Gilgit and areas to the south, along the Muzaffarabad–Poonch belt. While there are indicators of Pakistan's complicity in the tribal invasion, it is unlikely that it was solely responsible for the invasion from its very inception till its final execution.

These reflections of former Pakistani officials should certainly provoke some scepticism in regard to Menon's statement, quoted earlier, that the tribal invasion was a 'pre-planned and well arranged affair'. Such praise, viewed from almost any angle, doesn't need to have been earned.<sup>27</sup>

It is more likely that Pakistan took advantage of the growing disillusionment of the Muslim population with the Maharaja's government and subsequently took control of the tribals—an action that suited them after the Maharaja had gone against their national interests. It must be emphasised that the misrule by the

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<sup>27</sup> Wirsing 1994: 45. The author refers to Pakistani officials like Suharwardy, a retired civil servant and Chief Secretary of the 'Azad Kashmir' Government and Iskandar Mirza, the Defence Secretary of Pakistan at the time the intrusions took place who have described it as a 'fatal mistake' and 'unfortunate'.

Maharaja's government was partially responsible for the revolt. It is also pertinent to note, as brought out earlier, that these areas were not under the influence of Sheikh Abdullah, unlike areas in the Valley. Therefore, it was not surprising for the Governor to find the Gilgit Scouts Garrison at Gilgit under Major William Brown flying the Pakistani flag, having decided to cede to Pakistan. This incidentally included British officers who commanded the Garrison.<sup>28</sup>

The collusion of British officers almost certainly under orders to assist Pakistan, which was a matter of conjecture earlier, became apparent. Hari Jaisingh, a noted journalist, writes with regard to the entire issue:

The British played a nefarious role in the tribal invasion. They wanted the State to accede to Pakistan. Sir Francis Mudie, the Governor of West Punjab, a Tory gave all out support to the tribals. The US and the British press called the raiders 'liberators'. Jinnah reappointed Sir George Cunningham as Governor of North West Frontier Province (NWFP). Both Lord Louis Mountbatten and his advisor, Lord Ismay, backed this request of Jinnah. It is believed that Cunningham played a crucial role in organising the raiders from the tribal belt.<sup>29</sup>

It is surprising that all this did not spur the Maharaja to some action. His inaction despite the infringement of his sovereignty seems inexplicable.

By mid-October, the raiders were surging ahead in three directions.<sup>30</sup> They had already taken the areas adjoining Pakistan including Gilgit and were moving forward towards Skardu. In the west they had successfully cut off the Kotli–Poonch road, thereby isolating Bhimbar, Mirpur and Mangla, which then came under siege. The main assault finally came on 22 October 1947 in a three pronged thrust started as part of 'Operation Gulmarg', the code name given to the operation. One force advanced along the Murree–Srinagar road. A large force advanced along the Poonch line to Bhimbar and a small force advanced from the north along the Tithwal–Handwara axis.

On 22 October 1947, news of the capture of Muzaffarabad by the raiders came in, followed in quick succession by news of the fall of Domel on 23 October and Uri on 24 October, where Brigadier Rajinder Singh fought valiantly with a small force of 200 loosely collected men and died a hero's death in combat. Finally by 26 October 1947 the *lashkars* had captured Baramula, treating the innocent people with inhuman savagery.

The entire J&K operation from 27 October 1947 till hostilities ceased was fought in three geographical areas. The first was the politically, economically and psychologically sensitive area of the Srinagar valley. These operations commenced on

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<sup>28</sup> Maharaja Hari Singh had ceded Gilgit to the British for 60 years in 1935. It reverted back to the state of Jammu and Kashmir after Lord Mountbatten made an announcement regarding transfer of power on 3 June 1947.

<sup>29</sup> Jaisingh 1996: 65.

<sup>30</sup> The three directions from which the enemy was closing in constituted an enveloping action from the north, west and south-west of Srinagar.



27 October 1947 and ended with the defeat of the tribal force at Shalateng on 7 November 1947 and the subsequent recapture of Baramula and Uri by 13 November 1947. Thereafter, the majority of operations continued in the second area, from Tithwal down till Akhnour including Poonch, Rajauri, Jhangar and Naoshera in the Jammu division, which witnessed major battles. The third area was in the northern sector of Leh-Ladakh, where battles raged from Skardu up to the doorsteps of Leh and south-west of Kargil engulfing the Zojila Pass. Keeping in view these three subdivisions, the progress of operations will accordingly be discussed.

The Indian Army faced its first challenge immediately after Independence in the Srinagar subdivision. It was required to fight with little or no prior intimation which would have enabled it to carry out the necessary procedures to make itself battle-ready. Military action started almost immediately after Maharaja Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession, and once started it engulfed the borders of the state in an arc from its western border till it had reached its northern fringes.

## The Battle for Srinagar

Prior to the receipt of a request for military help from Maharaja Hari Singh, there seems to be no conclusive evidence regarding preparations carried out by the Indian government for military aid to Kashmir. This is adequately borne out by the numbers and the manner in which India inducted its forces into Kashmir and commenced the defence of Srinagar. Major General D.K. Palit then a Major, who had moved to Srinagar as staff officer to Brigadier L.P. Sen, DSO, recalls his move into the Valley along with the Commander designate and says,

'Bogey' [nickname lovingly used by the war veteran's friends and admirers alike to address Brigadier and later Lieutenant General L.P. Sen] went off to Srinagar in a commandeered car but came back to the airfield sometime in the early afternoon and told me that there was a small wooden *dak bungalow* a mile or more down the Srinagar road which I was to occupy and do what I could to set up a Brigade Headquarters. I had no map, no paper or other stationery—just our two bedding rolls. I got hold of an NCO, grabbed an abandoned car and made off down the road. I found the *dak bungalow*, set down the baggage, left the NCO in-charge of our 'Brigade HQ' and went back to the airfield.... I am amused to find some British historians coming out with versions of Indian Government's careful plans and conspiracy to take over Kashmir.<sup>31</sup>

This conspiracy theory is negated in totality by the records of the UN Security Council. With the very aim of repudiating such preposterous claims the three commanders-in-chief jointly issued a statement to clarify matters in this regard

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<sup>31</sup> Major General (Retd), D.K. Palit, VrC, *The Times of India*. The words in brackets are the author's own.

(see Appendix B). The part of the statement reads, ‘On 24 October the Commander-in-Chief, Indian Army, received information that tribesmen had seized Muzaffarabad. This was the first indication of the raid.’<sup>32</sup>

After Independence, India and its army were reeling from the trauma of Partition, and the gory communal violence that both preceded and succeeded it. The army was busy in aiding the government manage the overwhelming flood of Partition refugees. They were ill prepared for a battle of the nature that they were ordered to fight, in hostile terrain and in the freezing cold of the Kashmir winter. It is to the credit of both, the executing battalions and the recently established headquarters, that they managed the induction into the Valley within the short and inflexible time frame that they were given.

Mention must also be made of the prompt and selfless devotion to duty of the civilian Dakota pilots, who were instrumental in moving the Indian forces into Kashmir.<sup>33</sup> It is true that Partition had left India reeling. However, Independence and the sight of the Indian Tricolour atop the Red Fort after two centuries of British rule had given the Indian people the much needed stimulus to fight any threat to the nation’s sovereignty. For the Command Headquarters at New Delhi and its staff officers, the news of the launch of operations was both surprising and unexpected. Major S.K. Sinha (who subsequently retired from the army as a Lieutenant General), who was at the time General Staff Officer Grade 2 (Operations), relating the receipt of this information says:

...On 26 October 1947, I left my office soon after dusk to keep a social engagement, my first one after several weeks. While I was at a party at the Delhi Gymkhana Club, I was summoned post haste to the headquarters. A staff car had been chasing me all over and had ultimately located me.

By about 10 p.m., the eight of us who then comprised the staff of the headquarters had assembled in the Operations Room. We all realised that there must be something very serious for us to be so summoned at that hour, yet we were completely in the dark as to what it was all about. The Army Commander had gone for briefing to Army Headquarters. Major General Rajendra Singhji, DSO, General Officer Commanding, Delhi Area, had also been called for this conference and he soon joined us. A little later the Army Commander returned

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<sup>32</sup> Josef Korbel quoting from *Security Council’s Official Records, Third Year*, Nos 1–15. p. 222.

<sup>33</sup> At this stage, it will be appropriate to recount an incident narrated by Durga Das (1969) regarding the ability and future of the Indian Armed Forces.

I asked Smith how he visualised India’s future, especially that of its armed forces. He replied bluntly: ‘I do not give your army six months. It will crack up before that. You see, the *jawans* are like bricks, and the officer provides the mortar that holds them together. The Indian officer will not provide the mortar because his leadership has not been tested and the *jawan* has no respect for him.’

The exploits of the armed forces in the campaign ably led by its officers proved this prediction wrong.

and our meeting started. Of all the military conferences I have attended, this was by far the most momentous, but in appearance, it looked completely non-martial. Most of us were dressed in our dinner jackets and to add colour to our costumes, the duty officer was in his pyjama suit! He had dropped his food over his uniform which was still not dry and as such he had no other alternative. I remember we were dressed more like a theatrical company rather than army officers in a planning conference hardly eight hours before the launching of a military campaign.<sup>34</sup>

This dramatic meeting was called by the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief to announce the accession of J&K to India and to brief them on the task that had been given to him: to defend the state against the invading tribesmen. The decisions that were arrived at during the meeting were:

- The Command Headquarters at Delhi would be directing the operations from their location itself.<sup>35</sup>
- It was planned to immediately despatch one battalion (1 Sikh) the very next morning by air to Srinagar. This was to be followed by the balance of the brigade, which was also to be moved by air (161 Infantry Brigade) and another brigade (50 Parachute Brigade) that was to move into Jammu over land. The build-up was to be completed prior to the onset of winter.
- The Director General of Civil Aviation was directed to requisition all accessible civilian Dakota aircraft and make them available for the airlifting of troops into Jammu.
- The responsibility for organising the movement of troops and stores was given to Major S.K. Sinha. He was to be given necessary assistance by the officers of the Delhi Area. This temporary organisation was to carry out the assigned task of induction, until the Rear Airfield Maintenance Organisation was effective at the New Delhi airport.<sup>36</sup>
- An operation instruction was to be issued to the Commanding Officer (CO) of 1 Sikh to give him the necessary orders for the impending move.

Before proceeding, it is imperative that we understand the importance of Srinagar in this conflict. Srinagar was the hub and summer capital of the state of Kashmir. It also had an airfield, which at times was the only means of communication between

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<sup>34</sup> Sinha 1987: 11–12.

<sup>35</sup> This must have caused serious problems in communicating orders in the initial stages of the battle. This problem was however soon solved with the move of the Brigade Headquarters on 29 October 1947 to Srinagar. It would seem to be an inconsequential period of three days between the move of the battalion and the Brigade Headquarters, but in these three days 1 Sikh had already had its first encounters with the invaders and the commanding officer of the battalion had already died a hero's death in action.

<sup>36</sup> It was indeed a commendable achievement on the part of this ad hoc organisation to have been able to achieve an extremely healthy average of 60 sorties per day in the given circumstances.

the Valley and the rest of the state 300 miles to the south, especially since the connecting roads were 'indifferent' and were often in a state of disuse during the winter months when heavy snowfall had rendered them impassable. The airfield also provided a fourth dimension to the launch of operations by making a launch pad available for induction, build-up and maintenance of forces. There was a wireless station at the airfield, which was a vital means of communication. At the time of the induction of Indian forces, the *lashkars* (tribal invaders) had already reached Baramula (approximately 55 kilometres away from Srinagar). Had they advanced instead of indulging in looting and rape, and had they not been more concerned with carrying their loot to safety, the Indians would not have won the race to Srinagar. At this stage, the Pakistani propaganda machinery had already announced their victory in the state. It was therefore imperative that the Indians move into Srinagar—the heart of the state—and instil a sense of confidence and a feeling of safety amongst the people, some of which had fled there from Baramula under the onslaught of the marauding tribesman.

The CO of the Indian forces received a signal on 26 October 1947. This signal contained his orders to commence induction of troops and hence movement of the Battalion. The text of the signal was:

YOUR BATTALION LESS TWO COMPANIES WILL CONCENTRATE PALAM AIRFIELD BY 0400 HOURS 27 OCTOBER (.) ONE BATTERY 13 FIELD REGIMENT IN INFANTRY ROLE BEING PLACED UNDER YOUR COMMAND (.) BE PREPARED TO FLY ON AN OPERATIONAL MISSION EX PALAM MORNING 27 OCTOBER (.) REMAINDER BATTALION WILL BE FLOWN 28 OCTOBER (.) OPERATION INSTRUCTION WILL BE HANDED OVER AT AIRFIELD (.) AMMUNITION RATIONS AND WARM CLOTHING WILL BE ISSUED AT AIRFIELD UNDER ARRANGEMENTS THIS HEADQUARTERS<sup>37</sup>

The information, which was made available to the CO, could at best give him a general picture of the task at hand. However, there were many uncertainties, not the least being the state of Srinagar airfield and the location of the *lashkars* in relation to it.

The specific tasks given to 1 Sikh by the the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (which were also personally drafted by him) were:

1. Secure Srinagar airport and civil aviation wireless station;
2. Take such action, as your first task and available troops allow;
  - (a) to drive the tribesmen away from Srinagar, and
  - (b) to aid the local government in the maintenance of law and order in Srinagar.

It is interesting to evaluate the magnitude of the task that faced the Indian Army at this stage. Especially with the negligible information they were given as to how

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<sup>37</sup> Sinha 1987: 13.

they were to accomplish it. There was no logistical backup of the nature that is today deemed a mandatory requirement for the launch of successful operations. The other immediate problem that the CO faced was to get the battalion together in the short period available to him from their locations in the internal security grid, which had spread the companies over a radius of 50 kilometres.

Despite these seemingly insurmountable odds the CO and his command went about their task with the confidence of professionals, and as per their orders were airborne with two of their companies and a battery from the 13 Field Regiment by first light on 27 October 1947.

The civilian Dakotas made their landing on the airfield on the morning of 27 October 1947 at 0830 hours. The Indians had won the race to Srinagar!

The situation was still very fluid when the Indian Army landed at Srinagar. There was negligible information on the *lashkars* and their likely plans. It was during this period of uncertainty that the CO of 1 Sikh decided to take the battle to the enemy and advance towards Baramula with a small force of 200 men. This offensive action against a much larger force did succeed in delaying the enemy's advance towards Srinagar, but at the cost of the life of the CO of 1 Sikh, Lieutenant Colonel Ranjit Rai.

The Brigade Headquarters and 1 Kumaon reached Srinagar by 29 October 1947 and by 2 November 1947, 1/2 Punjab, two companies of 4 Kumaon and 80 machine gunners rendezvoused at Srinagar. At this stage, information on the enemy's movements indicated that they were advancing along three axes. The main force was moving along the Baramula-Srinagar axis. The northern thrust was from Gandarbal and the southern from Badgam.

On 3 November 1947 the company of Major Som Nath Sharma was sent on a patrol to Badgam and asked to remain there in view of reports of the enemy advance in that area. Badgam is located to the south-west of Srinagar and is an important township. The security of Srinagar hinged on Badgam, which served as a buffer to attacks from the south. A threat to Badgam, and worse still its capture, threatened the ability of the Indian forces to defend Srinagar. The enemy's advance had been almost unhindered, and they had almost reached Srinagar, the state capital, so it was therefore imperative that they be stopped at Badgam. This was also perhaps the last opportunity the Indian forces would have to win the psychological battle for supremacy against a foe that prided himself on being hardy and unbeatable. It was therefore understood that the encounter with the enemy at Badgam was to decide the fate of Srinagar, and that the resilience and tenacity of the Indians would be put to the test.

The enemy attack at Badgam took place at approximately 1400 hours on 3 November 1947. The enemy had the advantage of a vastly superior troop ratio of 7:1. However, the Indian forces under Major Som Nath withstood the attack, holding out with great resilience until reinforcements arrived at 1700 hours to secure the area. The encounter cost Major Sharma his life, and for his actions in battle he was posthumously awarded the *Param Vir Chakra*. By 6 November 1947 the 161 Infantry Brigade had been built-up to its full strength. The brigade comprised five

infantry battalions, an armoured squadron, a troop from an artillery regiment and a section of a mountain battery.

This brigade was reorganised to effectively stall enemy attempts to close in on Srinagar. The major force of enemy tribesmen was moving in along the Baramula axis and had also started fanning out in splinter groups in the Valley. This decision could well have been taken by the enemy keeping in mind his proficiency in fighting a guerrilla war, and to avoid exposing his forces en masse. This was exactly what the Indians did not want. The tribesmen were unbeatable at hit-and-run guerrilla warfare. The Indian Army stood a better chance of tackling them if they used conventional tactics. The Indians also had superior artillery and air resources which could be used effectively against a concentrated enemy force. In order to concentrate and draw the enemy Brigadier L.P. Sen (later Lieutenant General L.P. Sen, DSO) used an ingenious ploy. Describing it in his book *Slender Was the Thread*, he says:

The bait, I felt, could only be the road, freedom to use which, I was convinced, would act like a magnet. The tribesmen had been tempted to come to the Valley because of the loot that they would be able to take back, and with the use of the main road denied to them they could not know the vehicles, which were so essential to carry back their booty. 1 Sikh at Pattan was the stumbling block, and I decided to withdraw this battalion and throw open the road to the tribals. The withdrawal from Pattan, coming in the wake of the Badgam battle, would, I hoped, give the tribal leaders the impression that we had taken a crippling knock at Badgam and were pulling in our horns.<sup>38</sup>

The tribesmen fell for the bait and information of their concentration was received. This was further confirmed when air reconnaissance reported their presence between Shalateng and Zainakut on 7 November 1947. This location was approximately 4 kilometres from Srinagar town.

The Indian forces attacked by noon of the same day and by evening the enemy had been decisively defeated on the very doorsteps of Srinagar, thereby reversing the course of battle.

## Counter Offensive in Jammu Subdivision

Immediately after the enemy was routed near Srinagar the Indian forces followed up their victory and by 1830 hours of the same day they had captured Pattan. By 1600 hours on 8 November 1947 Baramula had been captured. This momentum was maintained and dismissing whatever minor opposition the brigade encountered, Uri was finally captured on 13 November 1947. The first objective of recapturing the Valley from the enemy had been achieved.

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<sup>38</sup> Sen 1988.

Thereafter, two options were available to the Indian Army. The first was to block the main route of ingress of the enemy along the road from Muzaffarabad, Domel and Uri to check his free movement into Indian territory. This could be achieved by maintaining the momentum of the successful advance towards Domel and Muzaffarabad before the enemy got an opportunity to firm in. The second option was to recapture areas around the Valley that had been taken by the enemy, thereby securing any infiltration routes on the shoulders of the mountains overlooking the bowl of the Srinagar valley. After much deliberation, the latter option was taken with the added consideration of relieving the beleaguered people at Mirpur, Kotli and Poonch who were at the mercy of the raiders.

It was decided that part of the brigade would continue its advance on the Baramula, Uri, Poonch axis, while the other group would move along the axis of Akhnur, Beri Pattan, Naoshera, Jhangar, Kotli and then to Mirpur with the aim of reaching Mirpur by 20 November 1947. The two groups were to meet up at Kotli by 18 November 1947. The manoeuvre attempted by this force was a pincer movement which was aimed at securing the areas on the second tier of defences towards the west of the Srinagar valley.

The northern column finally reached Poonch after fierce encounters with the enemy on 20 November 1947, while the southern column entered Kotli on 26 November 1947. However, Kotli was only held for a few hours because the news arrived that Mirpur had fallen to the enemy. Mirpur is located to the south-west of Kotli and its capture enabled the enemy to interdict the long stretch of the brigade at will. Kotli was soon abandoned, with Jhangar and Naoshera remaining as bases for the brigade. It had also become redundant for the northern column to link up at Kotli in view of enemy dispositions. Finally the plan for link up had to be abandoned, thus losing the initiative the army had gained after the victory at Srinagar and during the successful advance thereafter. As a compromise, it was decided to dominate and guard approaches to the Valley and thwart enemy attempts at breaking through the arc around the Srinagar valley.

Meanwhile, the enemy was also looking for an opportunity, to strike back after a humiliating and unexpected defeat. By the beginning of December 1947, Pakistani army regulars in uniform could be seen. Thus, indicating an increase in the level of participation of the regular army and a growing sense of frustration on the part of the Pakistani Government. '...I came across Major Aslam (later Brigadier) who was there as a volunteer unknown to me.'<sup>39</sup>

It would be pertinent to correlate political events relating to India, Pakistan and Britain which were then moving forward at a feverish pace. Special attention must be paid to those events that involved Lord Mountbatten and the UN. India was convinced of the righteousness of its cause and was greatly distressed at Pakistan's unilateral attempt at taking Kashmir by force, especially after the state had legally

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<sup>39</sup> Khan reveals in his book (n.d.) that Pakistani army regulars (both soldiers and officers) were involved in the 'tribal' incursion, and were officially shown as being on leave.

acceded to India on 26 October 1947.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, Pakistan felt deceived and deprived of what it perceived as its rightful share of the territory of J&K, which according to them should have merged with Pakistan just like the Hindu majority states of Junagarh and Hyderabad had or were likely to merge with India irrespective of the ruler's desire. '... the people of Pakistan could not abandon their feelings on the issue and their duty to their brothers in Kashmir. Therefore, many felt that India's entry into Kashmir was bringing us almost to the brink of war.'<sup>41</sup> Britain as the third party involved in the imbroglio found itself in an embarrassing and precarious position, with the guilt of having made a grand fiasco of Partition, for reasons which have been discussed earlier. They had probably not foreseen the turn events would take, and were desperate to restrain India, a country where Lord Mountbatten still had considerable influence. When this became impossible in light of the blatant infringement of lawful accession by Pakistan, Mountbatten probably thought it best to place the ball in the court of the United Nations (UN), where combined pressure could be exerted on India by like-minded countries to give in to British and US interests in the region.

On their part India and its inexperienced leaders who were enamoured by utopian dreams and righteous principles fell into this trap under Mountbatten's influence and by what they perceived as the legal strength of their case. They did not realise that in world politics nations functioned through the UN on principles of self-interest, rather than on the principles of what was right or wrong. This fatal mistake brought severe pressure to bear on India. At the UN a problem essentially of illegal infringement of the territorial integrity of India in Kashmir was turned into an Indo-Pak problem and a conflict viewed in the context of Partition and of India's so called aggressive territorial designs. It was also seen in the context of a clash of religious interests rather than as an exasperated expression of frustrated fury on the part of Pakistan.

India made its formal appeal to the UN Security Council on 1 January 1948. The complaint read:

There now exists a situation whose continuance is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security owing to the aid which infiltrators, consisting of nationals of Pakistan and tribesmen from the territory immediately adjoining Pakistan in the north west under directions from Pakistan for operations against Kashmir, a state which has acceded to the Dominion of India and is part of India. The Government of India requests the Security Council to call upon Pakistan to put an end immediately to the giving of such assistance, which is an act of aggression against India. If Pakistan does not do so, the Government of India may be compelled in self-defence to enter Pakistan

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<sup>40</sup> See Khan (n.d.). It has since been revealed that the accession was not accepted in Pakistan even at the highest levels, and Jinnah had ordered an attack on Jammu, only to be persuaded by Gracey to desist from the order.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*: 26.



territory in order to take military action against infiltrators. The matter is therefore of extreme urgency and calls for immediate action.<sup>42</sup>

The benefit of hindsight suggests that this was a grave mistake on India's part, as the sequence of allegations and counter allegations further complicated the case, obscuring the fact that Pakistan was the aggressor in this conflict. It also brought undue pressure upon India from the UN, which hampered its primary objective of getting territory held by Pakistan vacated at the earliest.

Pandit Nehru realised his mistake and the negative role that was being played by both the USA and UK during these events. On 16 February 1948, he wrote to his sister Vijaylakshmi Pandit:

The USA and UK have played a dirty role, the UK probably being the main actor behind the scenes. I have expressed myself strongly to Atlee about it and I propose to make it perfectly clear to the UK Government what we think about it. The time of soft and meaningless talk has passed.<sup>43</sup>

A very important player in the events at this crucial juncture was the head of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) B.N. Mullik. His book, *My Years with Nehru: Kashmir*, throws light on the eventful years after Partition and the thought processes of important leaders like Pandit Nehru, Sardar Patel and Sheikh Abdullah. Regarding India's decision to go to the UN, his reasoning is that India was forced to agree to a plebiscite in accordance with the principle that it propagated of going along with the wishes of the people, as was the case in Junagarh. In case of a refusal, 'the Junagarh case could be re-opened and India's position on Hyderabad also could be questioned. Hence both from the moral as well as from the tactical point of view, India's decision to accept the plebiscite formula was correct.'<sup>44</sup>

## The Battle of Naoshera

After the enemy's initial thrust to capture Srinagar had failed, the Indian forces made the best of the opportunity given to them by the enemy retreat. However as the Indian forces pressed home their advantage, the axis of maintenance and the lines of communication kept getting stretched with little or no enhancement in the level of force build-up required to protect and maintain the same. Conversely, it became easier for the invaders to fight as they came closer to their own areas in present-day Pakistan Occupied Kashmir thus facilitating logistical support.

The enemy realising their weakness in conventional warfare resorted to guerrilla tactics of ambush and raiding and use of a judicious mix of roadblocks and lightning

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<sup>42</sup> Dixit 2002: 117–18.

<sup>43</sup> Nehru 1986: 218.

<sup>44</sup> Mullik 1971: 5.

assaults. In a short span of time after the drubbing at Srinagar and the areas in its vicinity, the tribesmen regained the initiative. The enemy carried out the tactical manoeuvre of establishing effective roadblocks on the Naoshera–Jhangar road, thereby stalling all attempts by Brigadier Usman of the Indian Army at reinforcing the besieged garrison at Jhangar. They were able to trap two convoys along with the armoured cars which accompanied them for protection by blowing up bridges to the rear of the Indian convoys, thus sealing off their route of escape. Having isolated Jhangar, the enemy launched a ferocious attack on 24 December 1947, and captured the garrison on the same day. This gave the enemy the vital Mirpur–Jhangar–Kotli–Poonch road link. It proved advantageous to the enemy during their build-up for subsequent operations in Naoshera and Poonch.

On 20 January 1948 the command of the operations in J&K was transferred from Lieutenant General Russel to Lieutenant General Cariappa, who was moved from the Eastern Command to head the operations in view of the ban on British officers entering J&K. This ban had seriously impaired the ability of General Russel to visit areas of operation, because of which he felt constrained.

General Cariappa, was the seniormost Kings' Commissioned Officer of the Indian Army. He had had varied battle experiences and possessed a personality that commanded respect and awe. He also had the advantage of being an Indian.

General Cariappa visited the area of Naoshera and decided to capture the area of Kot, 9 kilometres to the north-east of Naoshera, in order to strengthen the defensive layout of Naoshera and take away the advantage of a suitable launch pad from the enemy. The Indians successfully achieved this on 1 February 1948, against a formidable, well-entrenched enemy.

An enemy attack was expected immediately after the Indian victory at Kot. This finally came on 6 February 1948 and proved to be one of the biggest challenges to Brigadier Usman and the troops deployed in the area.

The enemy had mustered a large force for this attack and estimates of an approximately 6,000 strong enemy force had been made. The imminent attack on Naoshera came at 0600 hours on 6 February 1948, when the enemy launched simultaneous and co-ordinated operations. There was heavy mortar firing on both Tain Dhar and Kot.

The battle for Naoshera saw some of the most savage attacks that were launched throughout the campaign. The enemy were desperate to avenge the defeat at Kot and further reinforce their position after the capture of Jhangar. Against relentless enemy action Indian troops gave a sterling example of mental and physical tenacity with their resolute stand. The enemy taking advantage of the cover of darkness crept close to the Indian defences. At first light the tribesmen opened fire with mortar rounds and machine guns. Thousands of raiders rushed on the Indian defences, till it seemed that they would be engulfed in a sea of humanity. Similar attacks were also launched on Kot. It is estimated that the enemy fired 80 3-inch mortars on Kot. The fighting at Kot continued throughout the day and carried on into the night. However the enemy suffered heavy losses, with the estimated number of enemy casualties at 400 killed and 250 injured. The enemy

launched similar manpower intensive attacks in and around the south-western areas of Kot and Tain Dhar.<sup>45</sup>

Another deft manoeuvre employed by Brigadier Usman was using the 3 (Para) Mahratta Light Infantry in an offensive role in the Naoshera valley to clear the area of enemy presence. After a sustained effort the companies were able to clear the valley by 1500 hours on 7 February 1948.

By 7 February 1948 the battle for Naoshera was over. The Indians under the inspiring leadership of Brigadier Usman had won a convincing and strategically significant victory. Naoshera had opened the floodgates for a counter offensive against enemy forces at Jhangar and Rajauri.

The battle for Naoshera was important for the Indians as it reversed the losses they had suffered in the period immediately preceding it.

## Jhangar and Rajauri

The loss of Jhangar still rankled Brigadier Usman. He was determined to retake this area and plans began to emerge for its recapture after enemy attempts at capturing Naoshera had been foiled.

Intelligence inputs indicated enemy positions astride the road to Jhangar. These positions had been strengthened in view of likely attempts by the Indians to launch counter offensives in the region. Jhangar lay approximately 26 kilometres from Naoshera. Enemy positions were located on both ridges overlooking Jhangar and in the valley leading towards it. These minor locations were cleared of the enemy by 8 March 1948 and thereafter preparations commenced for the operation for the final capture of Jhangar, named 'Vijay'.

Heavy rains and the resultant muddy terrain delayed the launch of the operation, but despite difficult conditions the operation finally commenced on 14 March 1948. The simple plan envisaged a thrust in two parallel columns moving along Naoshera-Jhangar with armour and artillery support, clearing the route to Jhangar. After stiff opposition, the Indian forces finally entered Jhangar on 17 March 1948. They were spurred on by the success at Jhangar and were rearing to go for Rajauri. En route to Rajauri was the location of Chingas, heavily fortified and strongly held by the enemy. There were in addition several other locations that had enemy pickets. The Indian plan was to clear these locations of the enemy en route to Rajauri. The first target was Barwali Ridge, which was held by the enemy. However, a determined attack was able to clear the same on 8 April 1948. This cleared the way to Chingas which in turn was taken by the Indian forces on 11 April 1948, with the engineers in the Indian Army displaying rare grit and determination in clearing the route leading to the area of roadblocks and mines under heavy enemy fire. This party

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<sup>45</sup> For a detailed account, see Praval (1987). An account of the action by 3 Maratha LI is also available in the regimental history of the Maratha LI by Proudfoot (1980).

was ably led by Second Lieutenant Rane, who despite being injured facilitated the success of the operation in which he ultimately lost his life. This subsequently led to the successful capture of Rajauri on 12 April 1948.

As the Indians advanced against the enemy in the western sector, they were able to blunt attempts to advance from the area of Handwara and Tithwal in the north. The Indians advanced under Brigadier Harbaksh Singh. His brigade commenced operations from Handwara on the night of 18–19 May 1948 and captured Chawkibal on 20 May 1948. At this blistering pace they were able to take Tithwal on 23 May 1948. Thus in five days Harbaksh Singh had advanced 64 kilometres across very difficult terrain and captured his objective. Besides killing 67 of the enemy, his brigade took a number of prisoners.<sup>46</sup>

## Pakistan Officially in Fray

Realising the swift progress of Indian forces in the area, Pakistan threw all it had into the fray. Pakistani regulars now officially entered the war, although they had been involved in active combat even prior to this date of official entry, though not in regular battle formation and in uniform. As mentioned earlier, from December 1947 onward Pakistani regulars were seen in uniform but Pakistan had not officially accepted this. Pakistani officers ‘conveniently’ on leave from the army were ‘certainly fighting alongside the Azad forces’, reported the British high commissioner in January 1948.<sup>47</sup> However, from May 1948 onward, this became a fact that was officially accepted by Pakistan. A personal account of this acceptance by Pakistan came when Pakistani Foreign Minister Sir Zafarulla Khan accepted as much before a five-member UN Commission during their visit to Pakistan. ‘Then came the first bombshell. Sir Zafarulla Khan informed the Commission that three Pakistani brigades had been on Kashmir territory since May. He explained the measure as an act of self-defence.’<sup>48</sup> Sir Owen Dixon, who later became the representative of the United Nations in place of the Commission on India and Pakistan, observed:

When the frontier of the State of Jammu and Kashmir was crossed by the hostile elements, it was contrary to international law and when, in May 1948, units of the regular Pakistan force moved into the territory of the State, that too was inconsistent with international law.<sup>49</sup>

We are not analysing the operations that took place beyond May 1948 as these can no longer be classified as low intensity operations once official Pakistani

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<sup>46</sup> Praval 1987: 54–55.

<sup>47</sup> Victoria Schofield 2000: 65.

<sup>48</sup> Korbel 2002: 121. The meetings of the author with both Pakistani and Indian leaders during this period give an excellent account of the happenings during this torrid period in Indo-Pak relations. It also seems to be one of the few impartial and independent accounts of the period.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Jagmohan (1992: 90).

involvement had been recognised. However, to complete the picture, by the time a ceasefire was declared and came into effect on 1 January 1949, India had consolidated its hold on the areas that it had captured. It secured the Akhnoor–Beri Pattan–Naoshera–Jhangar–Poonch–Uri–Tithwal–Baramula line. On the northern and eastern side it secured Dras, Kargil and Leh, having lost Skardu even before it could take remedial measures. This represented a very impressive counter attack, given the fact that the army fought in extremely rugged terrain in harsh weather conditions, with limited resources for the troops. Indian commanders who had little experience of leading higher formations in battle displayed excellent leadership and brought out the very best in their soldiers.

The eviction of a well-entrenched enemy is probably the most difficult task for troops, especially in mountainous terrain. However the Indians accomplished this task, which resulted in the Srinagar valley being saved and the Indians building up a formidable defensive position in the entire sector. The battles fought as part of the operations are a testimony to the will of the common soldier who displayed dogged determination in the face of the enemy.

Before discussing the role of the UN in the Kashmir affair, it will be pertinent to understand the imperatives before the Pakistanis which are likely to have forced them to finally make a declaration of the employment of their regular forces. General Sir Douglas Gracy, Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan army at the time, is known to have resisted Jinnah's orders to involve the army at the beginning of the intrusion after the open involvement of the Indian Army for fear of escalating the conflict. However, he agreed to do so subsequently for the following reasons. First, India had gained militarily in the post-winter pause in operations and was on the borders of the pro-Pakistani areas in Kashmir that had been instrumental in the uprising. The fear was that it would advance and seize those areas of Kashmir that Pakistan already held, making Pakistan's position relatively weak on the international diplomatic chessboard. Second, both India and Pakistan had already been inundated by large numbers of Partition refugees. This had hurt Pakistan more than India given its smaller size and weaker economy. Any further ingress by India would have aggravated the problem still further. Third, Indian ingress would have made the political position of the Pakistan's government untenable given the impending loss of territory. Fourth, India was likely to get a toehold in the vicinity of Pakistan's relatively autonomous regions of the North West Frontier, which could then be exploited by India to encourage uprisings. Fifth, Pakistan's claim and contention with respect to Kashmir remained alive till the time it still occupied a substantial portion of the state. However with India gaining ground, these claims and contentions would have soon become redundant. Sixth, Indian success was likely to be a severe blow to the Pakistani ideological plank of the 'two-nation theory' which had formed the basis of the creation of Pakistan. Seventh and last, India held the key to the economic well-being of Pakistan as it could stop the flow of water into Pakistan as all its major rivers first flowed through or had their sources in Kashmir.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See Korbel 2002: 138–39.

## UN Steps In

Increasing pressure from the international community and the UN resulted in the UN Security Council passing four resolutions on the Kashmir issue. The third and fourth of these are the most important, as these formed the basis for future endeavours to solve the problem. The third resolution was passed on 13 August 1948 (see Appendix C). Part II of this resolution states:

As the presence of troops of Pakistan in the territory of the State of Jammu and Kashmir constitutes a material change in the situation since it was represented by the Government of Pakistan before the Security Council, the Government of Pakistan agrees to withdraw its troops from that State.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, Part III states:

Government of India and the Government of Pakistan reaffirm their wish that the future status of the State of Jammu and Kashmir shall be determined in accordance with the will of the people and to that end, upon acceptance of the truce agreement, both Governments agree to enter into consultations with the Commission to determine fair and equitable conditions whereby such free expression will be assured.<sup>52</sup>

This resolution was followed up by assurances given by the UN to India, which clarified and qualified the last paragraph of Part III as quoted above. It stated that, 'Plebiscite proposals shall not be binding on India if Pakistan does not implement Parts I and II of the resolution of 13th August 1948.'<sup>53</sup>

On the whole, India's experience at the UN was unpleasant. It was an experience which belied all hopes of a reasonable, just and lasting solution to the problem. Besides the negative campaign and tirade against India in the UN, a number of countries led by the UK, despite having knowledge of the realities of the case, openly sided with Pakistan. That this was a reflection of their national interests was an aspect that India failed to recognise. This lack of understanding was a hallmark of Indian thinking on the issue, which continued for some years, in which it continued to expect international and UN support on the Kashmir issue. India's handling of the case in the UN also left a lot to be desired. Josef Korbel writes:

...if India felt so strongly that the aggressiveness of Pakistan on Kashmir was at the heart of the dispute, why had she not asked the Security Council to deal with it according to Chapter VII of the Charter, which is concerned with 'Acts of Aggression'? Why had she invoked only Chapter VI concerning 'Pacific Settlements of Disputes'?<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Third Resolution of the UN Security Council, 3 August 1948.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Assurances given to India by United Nations Commission.

<sup>54</sup> Korbel 2002: 181.

This poor handling of the issue at the UN by India led to the major issue of Pakistani aggression being sidelined and the non-issue of India–Pakistan relations taking centre stage, largely because of a Pakistani smokescreen enveloping the major issue, and support from major nations. It is felt that while India referred to the case of Kashmir under Article 35 of the UN Charter, it should have also used Article 36, thereby referring it to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). ‘Even foreign experts like Joseph Korbel, Chairman of the First UN Commission on India and Pakistan, have commented that India did not present its case to the Security Council forcefully enough in political as well as legal and constitutional terms.’<sup>55</sup>

Keeping in view the advantages that accrued to India, of having a legally strong position for both Kashmir’s accession and of Pakistan being the perpetuator of the conflict, and the limitations, which were thrust upon it by going to the UN over Kashmir, it is not very difficult to draw certain conclusions. It is a matter of speculation that India may well have been able to free a far greater area of Kashmir had the case not been referred to the UN. India’s case for its sovereign right over J&K may also have been much stronger and less open to question by the international community. However, B.N. Mullik, former Director, IB, refutes this contention. His reasons in doing so are that, first, after India’s initial successes, ‘there was a pause in the advance as Indian troops were by then outstretched’. Second, ‘winter had set in and it would have been impossible to make any further progress for the next several months’. Third, ‘both Pakistani troops and tribals, and not the latter alone, had been engaged in this fight and there was every possibility of this fighting becoming prolonged, a prospect which was not in the interest of either India or Pakistan’. Fourth, ‘even the Military Commanders in the field, whom the Government had consulted, agreed that cease-fire was the best solution at that stage’.<sup>56</sup> However, another view, contrary to the one given by the chief of the IB, is that more than any compulsions, it was because of world opinion that Nehru refrained from further use of force as a means of resolving the dispute at the time. ‘The only option available to him was enlarging the conflict by hitting some areas in Pakistan, which was unacceptable to the major powers, senior British officers leading the Indian Army and Mountbatten.’<sup>57</sup>

However, the British role in all of this was at best pernicious. They were ‘not unhappy about the Pakistani intrusion’ in J&K. It is also pertinent to note that the Defence Council of the Indian Parliament was presided over by Mountbatten and not Nehru. Further, Auchinleck, responsible for partitioning the Indian Army, was in constant touch with the Pakistani military head and a free hand was not given to Indian commanders like Field Marshall Cariappa, General Thimayya and Lieutenant General Kulwant Singh. After having reached the Akhnoor–Beri Pattan–Naoshera–Jhangar–Poonch–Uri–Tithwal–Baramula line, and on the northern and

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<sup>55</sup> Dixit 2002: 119.

<sup>56</sup> Mullik 1971: 6–7.

<sup>57</sup> C. Dasgupta 2002: 197.

eastern side having secured Dras, Kargil and Leh, Sheikh Abdullah was not keen that the army cross the Krishen Ganga as he had limited influence across it and would have lost a referendum if it was conducted.<sup>58</sup>

It is interesting to look at the views of Sheikh Abdullah at this stage of the conflict, when the UN Commission had already finalised the third resolution as discussed. When asked for his views on a possible solution by the head of the UN Commission Josef Korbel, Sheikh Abdullah gave four possible solutions. The first and second according to him was the merger of Kashmir with Pakistan or India after a plebiscite. The third was Kashmir's becoming independent with a joint guarantee of, 'India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the Soviet Union'. Sheikh Abdullah proposed to carry out this recommendation in consultation with Ghulam Abbas, the leader of 'Azad Kashmir'. However, he doubted this arrangement saying, 'But even should Kashmir's powerful neighbours agree to give us a guarantee of independence, I doubt that it could last for long.' The last solution offered was, '... the division of the country. If it is not achieved the fighting will continue; India and Pakistan will prolong the quarrel indefinitely and our people's suffering will go on.' The views of Sheikh Abdullah at this stage were still bereft of any kind of animosity towards hardline Indian elements, which subsequently developed and induced him to openly propagate ideas in contravention of his ideas at this juncture. It is also possible that this logical and practical reasoning was abandoned merely as a defence mechanism against a fear of being overwhelmed.

The Indian government had indicated previously its willingness to divide Kashmir between India and Pakistan. But there seemed to be this important difference—that while India seemed ready to divide the country as a realistic solution, Sheikh Abdullah saw it as an act of desperation and a last resort.<sup>59</sup>

Thus Sheikh Abdullah's opinion seemed to have been based on a pragmatic appraisal of the situation, and not on emotion. He knew that if he tried to declare independence there would be no difference between him and Maharaja Hari Singh. It would have prompted a belligerent Pakistan to militarily intervene—a course which was unlikely to be adopted by India given its preference for peaceful solutions. So after much deliberation he chose to support the option of a merger with India.<sup>60</sup>

Pakistan ultimately never met the conditions imposed by the UN Resolution. Therefore, the UN resolution could never be implemented, and remains buried till this date. It is a recognised fact that the situation on the ground has changed beyond the parameters of the resolution, after numerous popular governments in the state and Pakistan's virtual amalgamation of the part of Kashmir it had illegally occupied. The situation was further complicated by Pakistan's unilateral decision in 1963 of ceding territory that it had occupied in Kashmir to China. This led Kofi Annan,

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<sup>58</sup> J.N. Dixit, personal communication.

<sup>59</sup> Korbel 2002: 148.

<sup>60</sup> Dixit 2002.



the present UN Secretary General, to remark during his visit to Pakistan and India that the UN Resolutions of 1948 had lost their relevance during the past five decades. The significance of the Secretary General's remark can best be understood in the light of developments which have taken place in Kashmir over the past five decades.

There is a general consensus amongst the world community of late that both countries can best resolve the issue of Kashmir bilaterally, in the spirit of the Shimla Accord and the Lahore Declaration. Over the past five decades, the impractical and unreasonable UN resolutions on Kashmir have been laid to rest, which are only occasionally resurrected by Pakistan, with little support from either the international community or from the UN itself. From the Indian perspective, the issue continues to be governed by Nehru's words, which laid the foundation of India's policy on Kashmir:

No one has expressed it more eloquently than when he said, '... it is not Kashmir, therefore, but rather a much deeper conflict that comes in the way of friendly relations between India and Pakistan and the situation is a grave one. We cannot give up the basic ideal which we have held so long and on which the whole concept of our state is founded.'<sup>61</sup>

## The Intervening Years

Once Partition was inevitable and violence erupted along the borders of what would soon be two separate nations, multitudes of refugees began pouring across the borders. The tales of gruesome killings—especially in the Punjab and Bengal—lent credibility to the belief that there was mutual hatred between the Hindu and Muslim communities of the subcontinent. However, what is largely ignored is that even in the gruesome violence of Partition there were voices of tolerance and brotherhood. There were millions of Muslims who chose to stay in India, despite the creation of Pakistan and Jinnah's 'two-nation theory'. After a wave of hatred in the border areas, the secular values of the majority of Indians prevailed, as did the faith of their leaders in revitalising a pluralistic society.

Against the background of these painful events, monarchy finally came to an end in J&K with the adoption of the Indian Constitution on 26 January 1950. There was hope amidst much apprehension, which was primarily created by vested political interests rather than resulting from any substantive sentiment in the region. Frenetic discussions and bargaining took place to decide upon the status of J&K within the overall ambit of the Constitution of India. This period also saw a change in the stance of Sheikh Abdullah and his relationship with Pandit Nehru, caused by the stresses and strains resulting from the clash of perceived national and state

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<sup>61</sup> Korbelt (2002: 43) quoting Nehru's 'Report on Indian National Congress Committee'.

interests. While Pandit Nehru, the Prime Minister, wanted Kashmir to amalgamate as far as was possible with the rest of the country, Sheikh Abdullah wanted the exact opposite.

It is a question of motivations of Sheikh Abdullah; frustrations of objectives not being met. He thought by merging with India he will sustain his political position of Jammu and Kashmir... it is speculative, but looking at his latter years it seems, he thought he would accede to India and with special provisions consolidate himself and then forge an independent status with Jammu and Kashmir. By 1952–53, he realised that the merger is an integration with the advantages of a federal system, but he was not going to be allowed to be independent.<sup>62</sup>

Sheikh Abdullah's contention was centred on the Instrument of Accession, which gave India powers to control the three aspects of defence, foreign affairs and communications for the state. Though Maharaja Hari Singh had signed it, Abdullah asserted that his approval had also been sought and given and that he, therefore, had accepted India's control over these three aspects only. He was fighting for autonomy of the highest degree for Kashmir. These assertions began to cause much irritation and discomfiture in Indian circles, as he refused to accept the Fundamental Rights, Directive Principles of State Policy and Citizenship as enshrined in the Indian Constitution. It must be mentioned though that these issues were finally resolved with the signing of the Delhi Agreement in 1952, which had similar provisions as those given in Article 370 of the Indian Constitution (see Appendix D).

It is pertinent to briefly describe the significance of this Article. Article 370 was formulated after Kashmir had signed the Instrument of Accession, as it was felt that it should subsequently be ratified by the Constituent Assembly of the state of Kashmir to get the approval of the people's representatives. The Article was intended only as an interim measure. The Article stated that:

... the power of Parliament to make laws for the said State shall be limited to, those matters in the Union List and the Concurrent List which, in consultation with the Government of the State are declared by the President to correspond to matters specified in the Instrument of Accession governing the accession of the State to the Dominion of India as the matters with respect to which the Dominion Legislature may make laws for that State; and such other matters in the said Lists as, with the concurrence of the Government of the State, the President may by order specify.

Thus, the Article's provisions laid restrictions on the Union Government's powers to make laws for the state on subjects other than foreign affairs, defence and communications, which was continued with slight changes by the 1952 Delhi Agreement.

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<sup>62</sup> Dixit 2002.

Another disturbing trend which emerged in the state at this stage was the relationship between the Hindus and Muslims. Prior to Partition, the Hindus had felt secure given that the state had a Hindu ruler. However, all this changed as soon as they realised that the key to rule in the state rested with the predominantly Muslim Valley and its leader, Sheikh Abdullah. This was further aggravated when Sheikh Abdullah made speeches about the atrocities Muslims had faced under Dogra rule.

The pressures began to tell on Abdullah. He made several speeches criticising the Hindu lobby in New Delhi, climaxed by the one made in Ranbirsinghpura, on 11 April 1952, which was widely reported by the press. In his speech he expressed fears about what would happen to Kashmir after Nehru's departure and suggested that Kashmiris think about their future, thereby questioning the finality of the accession.<sup>63</sup>

The Praja Parishad, which was formed by Balraj Madhok in 1947 and which was basically an offshoot of the Rashtriya Sayamsevak Sangh (RSS), questioned the policies of Abdullah, the provisions of Article 370 and subsequently those of the Delhi Agreement of 1952. The Praja Parishad had the tacit support of Sardar Patel, India's then Deputy Prime Minister and the growing hardline lobby in the country. Abdullah was comfortable dealing with Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru, but pressures generated by groups like the Praja Parishad further alienated him and forced him to take a hardline approach to prove himself to his supporters as the one who was going to protect Muslim interests in the state. He started feeling that the hardline Hindu stand taken by some of these organisations represented the stand of the majority of the Indian population. Abdullah's frustrations and his defence mechanism were very probably at the bottom of his controversial statements about the logic of accession and the anti-Muslim forces in the state.

On the other hand, the hardline approach of the Praja Parishad, the RSS and later the Jan Sangh stemmed from their views on the unacceptability of any special status being conferred on Kashmir vis-à-vis other states of the country. They regarded this as an undue concession and agitated for the complete and uniform merger of the state.

It was this persistent and vehement accusation by the Sheikh against the Dogras, including the Maharaja, which caused deep-seated suspicion about his basic communalism in the minds of many people in India who further suspected that his professed friendship for the Prime Minister and India was only a poser for strengthening his own position in Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>64</sup>

Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, President of the Jan Sangh, led an agitation in the state and was eventually arrested on 8 May 1953, and this further aggravated the situation. He contended that concessions of this kind were likely to encourage the

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<sup>63</sup> Bhattacharjea 1994: 193.

<sup>64</sup> Mullik 1971: 8.

state to break away from India. The situation worsened with Mookerjee's death due to heart failure on 23 June 1953 while in jail. This led to widespread agitation, indignation and the condemnation of Sheikh Abdullah. The death of Mookerjee may have finally led to the downfall of Sheikh Abdullah a few days later.

Another factor was the government's fear of Hindu-Muslim riots in the region after those that had taken place in the rest of the country. Though these did not affect J&K initially, they did spread to Jammu later. The psychological impact of these riots caused a general sense of insecurity and alienation amongst the Muslims in the country, and also certainly had an impact on Sheikh Abdullah. It also had an impact on the Muslim population at large, and the resultant mistrust persists amongst some sections of the population even today.<sup>65</sup>

Sheikh Abdullah had still not given up on the idea of Kashmir's independence. He pursued this cherished goal surreptitiously, secretly negotiating with US leaders to gauge the level of international support for, and the feasibility of, his proposals. His meeting with Adlai Stevenson in May 1953 in Srinagar was viewed with alarm. As reported by the *Manchester Guardian*, Stevenson had stated that the best status for Kashmir could be independence both from India and Pakistan.<sup>66</sup> However, when the information of his likely talks reached Pandit Nehru, the issue was taken up with the USA at the appropriate level, to elicit an assurance from the USA that it had no intention of meddling in India's affairs. This was however another reason for Abdullah's detractors to step up their criticisms against him. Even Pandit Nehru could not justify his actions and was forced to agree to the taking of a hard line against him. The final act which forced the hand of the Prime Minister was the information that 'Pir Maqbool Gilani had established contacts with Pakistan and that an emissary was on his way to Tagmarg [near Gulmarg] to meet the Sheikh.'<sup>67</sup> The Sheikh was dismissed and arrested at Gulmarg in the early hours of 9 August 1953. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad replaced him and was sworn in the same day.

Thus six years after Independence and the accession of J&K the euphoria of well-being in the state was beginning to fade. Some of the seeds of dissatisfaction and disillusionment were thus sown at this stage. However, the discontent simmered on until its final eruption in 1989. Some of these incidents that fuelled the discontent were unavoidable, in that they resulted from certain compulsions, others were created due to inexperience and lastly, some because of selfish interests. Details of these roots will be analysed in Chapter 6, prior to charting the course of the outbreak of insurgency in Kashmir in 1989.

The period after Sheikh Abdullah's arrest witnessed a reasonably able administration in the state, though charges of corruption and of favours being granted

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<sup>65</sup> The author happened to meet certain aggrieved people of a particular community in Doda, who alleged that their ancestors had been treacherously murdered by members of the other community despite assurances of arranging mutual protection.

<sup>66</sup> Schofield (2000) quoting from Puri (1993).

<sup>67</sup> Mullik 1971: 45.

to the kin of the chief minister Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad kept surfacing. The chief minister's government became a contradiction of sorts. While it brought about improvement in the economic condition of the people on the one hand, on the other it suppressed all voices of dissent. As Prem Nath Bazaz, who visited the Valley in the 1960s, wrote:

So far as the economic and social life of the Kashmiris is concerned... I have no doubt that they are grateful to India for the little progress they have made... but political persecution and suppression of free opinion coupled with harassment by the goonda element, besides making them sullen and resentful, is neutralising the good effects of the benevolent attitude of the Union government.<sup>68</sup>

Detractors of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad remained in the fray, with the tacit support of Sheikh Abdullah. Pandit Nehru continued to have a soft corner for Sheikh Abdullah. 'The Prime Minister was, however, never fully reconciled to the Sheikh's detention and from time to time raised the question of his release.'<sup>69</sup> One of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's opponents Mirza Afzal Beg formed the Plebiscite Front on 9 August 1955 and remained a constant irritant. The Front gave Abdullah a platform from which he could once again raise the spectre of Kashmir's independence, thus keeping the Indian government at all times wary of his unpredictable attitude and dealings.

Sheikh Abdullah was released on 8 January 1958 only to be re-arrested on 29 April of the same year, after making inflammatory speeches at Hazratbal which led to rioting and loss of lives. He was later charged in the Kashmir Conspiracy Case along with Mirza Afzal Beg for attempting to bring about the 'forcible annexation of the State by Pakistan'.

Despite a period of stability, the Valley was once again in preparation for a round of internal and external disturbances—disturbances which were destined to have far-reaching consequences for the history of LIC in J&K.

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<sup>68</sup> Schofield 2002: 96.

<sup>69</sup> Mullik 1971: 46.

## Chapter 4

# LIC Preceding 1965 Indo-Pak War

### Events Leading to Conflict

While Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad proved to be a cooperative chief minister, mounting criticism against him on charges of corruption and nepotism made the situation untenable for the central government. Bakshi himself found a graceful way out of the situation by offering to resign in 1963, a suggestion to which the central government immediately agreed. Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq took over from him on 29 February 1964 after a brief period of rule by Khwaja Shamsuddin. Ghulam Mohammad Sadiq was instrumental in withdrawing the cases against Sheikh Abdullah, with Pandit Nehru's support. These cases were withdrawn on 8 April 1964, and the Sheikh was released from jail. However, a short while after Pandit Nehru's death, the Sheikh once again indulged in political propaganda of the kind that was embarrassing to the Indian government, which ultimately led to his re-arrest on 9 May 1965.

During the period 1962–65, India was politically and militarily in a weak position. She had just lost a war with China and there was much pressure on her from the Anglo-American lobby to come to a negotiated settlement with Pakistan. 'The purpose of this mission was to persuade Nehru to settle the Kashmir dispute with Pakistan on terms that would be acceptable to Pakistan. Anglo-American leverage over India at this time was probably at its zenith.'<sup>1</sup> Several rounds of talks were held at the insistence of the said lobby, but the result seemed to be a foregone conclusion with the then Pakistani Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto angling for a part or the whole of the Kashmir valley. This was not acceptable to the Indian side led by Sardar Swaran Singh. Amidst these developments at the international level, the situation in Kashmir had deteriorated. The Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad government had become a growing embarrassment to the central government because of the charges of corruption levelled against it. He was ultimately relieved

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<sup>1</sup> Ganguly 1997: 45. The period relates to the days immediately after the 1962 Sino-Indian War. The mission referred to was led by Averell Harriman of the USA and Duncan Sandys of the UK.

under the garb of the Kamaraj Plan.<sup>2</sup> The pressure on Pandit Nehru further increased with the incident of the disappearance of the holy relic or *Moe-e-Muqaddas* from the Hazratbal mosque. This led to widespread disturbances in the Valley, with hard line elements whipping up a frenzy at the opportunity of heaping derision on the government over the issue. This incident according to some was Pakistan's handiwork, aimed at causing widespread disturbances in the Valley and an uprising against the government.

Pakistan had really planned the removal of the Moe-e-Muqaddas with a view to bring about not only an upheaval in Kashmir valley but also, on that score, to start serious communal riots in Pakistan, knowing fully that repercussions would take place in the bordering Indian States as well. The next plan then would have been to send large bodies of tribals and disguised Pakistani servicemen into Jammu and Kashmir on the plea that that they were exasperated not only at the suppression of the Kashmiri people but also at the treatment which their co-religionists were receiving in other parts of India.<sup>3</sup>

On the domestic front too, there was widespread propaganda against the Bakshi family, who were accused of planning the theft.

The Sheikh's release and Bakshi's head were being demanded, because the Sheikh was identified with the pro Pakistani groups and Bakshi as a loyal Indian. We had by then enough material to give us certain clues and all these clearly pointed to a Pakistani conspiracy.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the fact that the *Moe-e-Muqaddas* was ultimately recovered, the event managed to create a considerable upheaval in the Valley. This was primarily due to the propaganda by both Pakistan and the detractors of Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad within the state, with a view to unsettling him. When these events are seen in consonance with the Anglo-American pressure for talks and a negotiated settlement and Pakistani attempts to create disturbances in the Valley, the steps taken by Pandit Nehru to integrate the state of Kashmir more closely into the Indian union can be better understood. These efforts at greater integration were carried out during Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad's successor Ghulam Sadiq's regime. On 21 December 1964, the President promulgated two ordinances: one dealt with extending President's rule to the state and the other with giving the Indian Parliament the power to make laws for the state during the period of President's rule. A bill passed in the Kashmir Assembly on 30 March 1965 to change the designations of the Prime Minister and Sadar-i-Riyasat to Chief Minister and Governor respectively

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<sup>2</sup> The Kamaraj Plan envisaged a change in the organisational structure of the Congress and it required all the chief ministers to tender their resignation to enable it. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad also followed the Plan despite not belonging to the Congress.

<sup>3</sup> Mullik 1971: 151.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: 136.

followed these ordinances. It also gave the President the power to appoint the Governor of the state. Thus Sheikh Abdullah's dreams of remaining autonomous were shattered. His discomfiture and anger are better understood in this light. 'Sheikh Abdullah protested these changes. His public speeches became increasingly intemperate and, on occasion, even took on a communal tenor.'<sup>5</sup>

## Factors Leading to Conflict

Having looked at the major events preceding the 1965 Indo-Pak conflict, it will be relevant to understand the likely reasons for Pakistan having taken the decision to yet again attempt an LIC in the Valley, by inducting tribals who would be supported by Pakistani army regulars.

Pakistan felt that conditions in the Valley were fast moving towards anarchy and revolt against the elected government and that the time was ripe for them to take advantage of the situation. There were two factors that confirmed their belief. First, it was probably they who had engineered the *Moe-e-Muqaddas* episode to create a rallying point for all disgruntled elements and pro-Pakistan forces. The resulting upheaval may have led Pakistani intelligence to presume the existence of a groundswell of popular opinion against the state government that would soon be beyond its (the state government's) control. 'The Foreign Office and the military intelligence agencies were churning out reports of an insurrection in Kashmir but Ayub always treated these reports with great scepticism.'<sup>6</sup> Foreign Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, while briefing his aides in the military secretary's room harboured similar misgivings. 'Bhutto, looking unusually stern, gave a brief account of what he called "a popular revolt" that was sweeping the whole of Indian held Kashmir.'<sup>7</sup> Second, the anti-India and anti-state government propaganda by Sheikh Abdullah and his lieutenants, probably made Pakistan feel that the Sheikh's mass popularity would tilt the scale of popular sentiment in a pro-Pakistan direction.

Third, the charges of corruption against the Bakshi government had largely and tacitly been accepted and he had been eased out. This gave Pakistan yet another point on which to heap derision on the Indian government. Pakistani propaganda made much of the fact that Sheikh Abdullah, Kashmir's most popular leader, who was regarded as having strong pro-people ideals vis-à-vis the Bakshi administration (whatever the ground realities may have been), was repeatedly imprisoned by the Indian government.

Fourth, India's humiliating defeat at the hands of the Chinese in 1962 was a huge psychological boost for Pakistan, which immediately went on a diplomatic offensive against India. This was yet another reason for Pakistan's feeling that this

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<sup>5</sup> Ganguly 1997: 51.

<sup>6</sup> Gauhar 1996: 204. It is however, not understandable how Ayub could have given the green signal to a military planned and led incursion despite his 'scepticism'.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.: 206.



was the right time to strike, prior to India's recovering from the setback and completing the military restructuring it had decided to undertake.

The significance of this affair is that it undoubtedly encouraged the Pakistanis in their assessment that the Indian army, still suffering from after-effects of its defeat by the Chinese, and not yet bolstered by its planned expansion, was inferior to their own.<sup>8</sup>

Fifth, India was under pressure from the Anglo-American lobby to accommodate the Pakistani viewpoint on Kashmir and resolve the issue. Pakistan probably felt that both the UK and USA were likely to side with it in any conflict that ensued.

Sixth, Pandit Nehru's demise came as a shot in the arm for Pakistan, which saw him as a colossus among other Indian leaders. They probably felt that India was not strong and mature enough to stand up to any major aggression in his absence. '... Nehru's magic touch is gone. The key to India's unity and greatness has not been handed over to any individual. It has been burnt away with Nehru's dead body.'<sup>9</sup>

Seventh, Pakistan suffered from the false notion of the soldier-to-soldier superiority of its forces, regarding Hinduism as a religion that did not engender in its followers the requisite ability to fight. Altaf Gauhar comments:

For all his realism and prudence Ayub's judgement did get impaired by the Rann of Kutch in one respect, his old prejudice that, 'Hindu has no stomach for a fight' turned into belief, if not a military doctrine, which had the decisive effect on the course of events.<sup>10</sup>

Thus the Pakistani idea of initiating conflict was based on a grave misconception regarding India and its people. They felt that India as a predominantly Hindu country was non-militant; that it had been ruled by Muslim conquerors for a thousand years and that they, the Pakistanis, were the inheritors of this legacy. They also felt that since Indian secular principles were weak and that India in its diversity was a weak entity; that once they had achieved initial successes in the Valley, the Muslim factor would operate.<sup>11</sup>

Another diplomatic coup from Pakistan's point of view was President Ayub's winning over of the Chinese during his visit to China which had lasted from 2–9 March 1965. The visit resulted in the signing of a boundary protocol:

which gave details of the demarcation work jointly undertaken by the two countries.... As a gesture of friendship Zhou Enlai allowed some grazing areas to be placed on the Pakistani side of the border. Ayub was deeply moved by this because Pakistan had given up its claim to those areas during the negotiations.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Schofield 2000: 201. See also Gauhar 1996: 204.

<sup>9</sup> Mukherjee 1972: 46–47.

<sup>10</sup> Gauhar 1996: 203.

<sup>11</sup> Dixit 2002.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*: 185.

This warming of relations with China fuelled Pakistani hopes of China's ability to ensure that India would not be able to enlarge the theatre and scope of the conflict beyond Kashmir.

Last, as always, this playing of the Kashmir card seemed an ideal solution to Pakistan's military government, as a means of diverting the Pakistani people's attention away from internal woes and unite them against a common but external enemy, India.

## Waters Tested

Prior to launching its LIC model in the Valley, Pakistan felt it appropriate to test the waters on the Indian side. They wanted to witness the strength of the Indian response in an area they could claim as being disputed. The Rann of Kutch became Pakistan's ground for testing the Indian will to retaliate or for launching a counter offensive. On 9 April 1965, Pakistani rangers attacked the Indian Sardar post on the western fringes of the Rann. Their occupation of the post did not elicit a major reaction from the Indian side, which was in no mood to escalate hostilities. A ceasefire was finally declared on 30 June 1965 under the aegis of the Commonwealth of Nations. The Pakistani mood can be gauged by Altaf Gauhar's writings on the subject:

There was one last engagement between the two armies on 26 April 1965, which resulted in a further retreat of the Indian forces. There was great excitement in the country, and the military establishment was in a state of euphoria. A few minor skirmishes were projected as a war in which the Indians were as thoroughly defeated as in their war against China in 1962. It was this little skirmish in the Rann of Kutch, which took Pakistan to war with India six months later.<sup>13</sup>

In the ensuing agreement that was thrashed out, 'A year later Pakistan was awarded the northern part of the Rann.' Quoting Morris James from the *Pakistan Chronicle*, Victoria Schofield writes, 'The Pakistanis thus gained more by accepting Western mediation between India and themselves than they would have achieved alone.'<sup>14</sup> This was the second instance when intervention by a third party had imposed a less than acceptable solution on the Indian side.<sup>15</sup> However, the Indian reaction did assist the Pakistanis in drawing some valuable lessons. It became apparent to them that India was in no mood for flexing its military muscle even after grave provocation.

The conclusion which Morris James believes President Ayub Khan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Aziz Ahmed, Ayub's expert on Indian affairs drew from the Rann

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.: 199.

<sup>14</sup> Schofield 2000: 107.

<sup>15</sup> India's experiences in 1948 and thereafter in 1965 are probably the main reason for its being averse to any mediation by a third party, even if that party is the UN. In both 1948 and 1965 India felt that UN decisions had gone against it because these decisions were influenced more by the geo-political interests of major powers, rather, than taken on the basis of the case.

of Kutch affair was as follows: if the Kashmir dispute could be reactivated by stirring up a rebellion in the Indian-held section, a critical situation would arise which would be sufficient to oblige the western countries to intervene. India might then be pressurised to submit the dispute to mediation, which if successful might lead to a more favourable solution to Pakistan than the status quo.<sup>16</sup>

## Planning for Intrusion

The planning for the intrusion into Kashmir did not commence with clear-cut aims, as may be perceived from the conduct of Operation Gibraltar.<sup>17</sup> Ayub's orders to the Foreign Office in consultation with the General Headquarters (GHQ) were to 'defreeze' the Kashmir issue. In pursuance of this objective, a cell headed by Aziz Ahmed was formed to enforce the directive of the President. In 1964, the cell received two directives. The first ordered them to prepare a plan which could 'encourage sabotage activities across the ceasefire line'<sup>18</sup> and the second directive ordered them to plan 'all out support for guerrillas to be inducted into Kashmir'.<sup>19</sup> A plan for 'inducting groups of armed men, disguised as freedom fighters, into Kashmir to carry out a sustained campaign of sabotage in the territories under Indian occupation',<sup>20</sup> was also submitted by the Foreign Office and the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). It initially received a cool response with descriptions such as 'quixotic' and 'amateurish'. Despite the initial rejection of the plan, its main proponents—Bhutto, Aziz Ahmed and the man who created its final structure, Major General Akhtar Malik, General Officer Commanding 12 Division—were able to carry out a campaign to convince elements that mattered to adopt the plan. Bhutto wrote a strong letter to Ayub in an attempt to convince him to undertake the operation.

A day before Operation Gibraltar was approved, Bhutto who had been re-appointed as Foreign Minister, wrote a letter to Ayub in which he advised him that India was '...at present in no position to risk a general war of unlimited duration for the annihilation of Pakistan'. According to him Pakistan 'enjoyed relative superiority...in terms of quality and equipment'. For Pakistan there were two alternatives: '(a) to react now boldly and in self-defence or (b) allow the initiative to move irrevocably to India, who would then proceed to launch her final attack for the liquidation of Pakistan subsequently at a place and time of her own choosing'. Bhutto strongly urged Ayub to opt for the first alternative: 'This is our hour of decision and may God guide us on the right path.'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Schofield 2000: 107.

<sup>17</sup> Operation Gibraltar was the code name given to the planned intrusion into Kashmir by tribals supported by Pakistani army regulars.

<sup>18</sup> Gauhar 1996: 209.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Gauhar 1996: 211–12.

Thus, Operation Gibraltar occurred, very probably as a second thought, to Ayub Khan. After finally agreeing to the plan the only change made to it by Ayub Khan was to include the option of squeezing Indian forces in Kashmir by going for its 'jugular' at Akhnoor.

The plan involved conduct of the operation by five main task forces named after legendary Muslim invaders.<sup>22</sup> These task forces also had a smaller support force. The task forces were required to infiltrate into Kashmir across the ceasefire line and take up their operational positions. It was presumed that they would receive the complete and voluntary support of the locals who would assist them in a mass uprising given the anti-India sentiment. The plan remained a figment of the imagination of planners like Bhutto from the time of its conception till its ultimate failure.

Thus the Pakistanis were encouraged to launch their second attempt at taking over Kashmir by using tribesmen to infiltrate the Valley. One problem in all of this was that Pakistan was not able to clearly distinguish between discontentment and anti-nationalism. They interpreted discontent as anti-nationalism and expected their attempt to get the full support of the Kashmiri people. This was a gross error and one of the primary reasons why their attempts at large-scale infiltration of the Valley failed, as did their attempt at enlarging the conflict through an attack on Akhnoor on 1 September 1965.

## The Intrusion

There is no better description of the conduct of the operation than the one provided by the Pakistani author Altaf Gauhar:

All forces started moving to the forward concentration areas on 24 July and reached their destination by 28 July. From there they infiltrated across the ceasefire line and made their way to other operational positions inside Kashmir territory under Indian control.

Tariq moved over the Himalayan Range at heights reaching 17,000 ft. The force commander and 21 men died due to lack of acclimatisation. The force was then withdrawn. Qasim established its base north of Bandipura and demolished several bridges. But by the third week of August the force found it impossible to live off the land. As the Indians started tightening the noose, the force, caught between necessity of survival and enemy attacks, decided to withdraw on 4 September.

Khalid launched a raid on an enemy battalion at Trahagan but the commander lost control of the companies and the force made its way back in small groups.

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<sup>22</sup> The task forces were named Tariq, Qasim, Khalid, Salahuddin and Ghaznavi with a support force called Nusrat.

Salahuddin, commanded by Major Mansha Khan, who was reputed to have a great deal of experience and knowledge of the Srinagar valley, moved over the snow-covered Pir Panjal Range and reached Tosha Maidan, which was to be its base camp, only to discover an Indian battalion engaged in a field firing exercise. Mansha Khan decided to descend from the Panjal heights and found himself in the thick of meadows (margs) on the western slopes of the range, which was swarming with shepherds. Mansha's plan was to infiltrate into Srinagar by mixing with the local population, who would be celebrating the anniversary of a Saint (Pir Dastagir) on 8 August. But on 5 August, a shepherd boy, Mohammad Din, reported to the police in Tanmarg the presence of 'strangers' who had tried to bribe him to get information. The Indians reacted immediately. Guided by the shepherds they attacked Mansha Khan's base camp. By 18 August, Major Mansha Khan had lost control over his force, which withdrew from the area in disorder. The force met with no significant success as the Srinagar Air Force base was well guarded, the Banihal Pass well defended, and the ammunition dumps fully secured.

Ghaznavi established its base camp in Budhil area by 6 August. The Indians attacked this force, but it stood its ground, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. By 18 August, Ghaznavi was in virtual control of Budhil and a large number of local inhabitants volunteered to join in. Ghaznavi continued to dominate the wide region in western and south-western Jammu throughout the war and was not withdrawn until after the cease-fire.

Nusrat groups were to operate in the immediate rear of enemy positions along the cease-fire line and attack enemy communication centres, gun positions, and supply dumps. The operation was to last for about 15 days and, depending on its outcome, the force was to merge with Gibraltar. None of the Nusrat groups succeeded in making any impact on enemy positions. By the third week of August, both Gibraltar and Nusrat were spent forces. Operation Gibraltar had ended in complete disarray by the third week of August, leaving Ghaznavi as the only force which succeeded in maintaining its hold in Budhil and certain adjoining areas and managing to get the support of the local people.<sup>23</sup>

The 1965 war established Pakistan's inability to accept the situation in Kashmir.<sup>24</sup> It also provided a mirror image of what could be expected in the future. While Pakistan did realise the folly of its incursion,<sup>25</sup> based on the premise that India would not escalate the conflict, it nonetheless repeated history in Kargil 34 years later with results as disastrous as this first attempt in 1965.

After the 1965 Indo-Pak War, frustration continued to grow in Kashmir. The newly educated elite did not want to merge with Pakistan, yet the feeling of simmering discontentment was on the rise. This was fuelled by better levels of

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<sup>23</sup> Gauhar 1996: 213–14.

<sup>24</sup> Schofield 2000: 112.

<sup>25</sup> See Gauhar (1996) for an authentic assessment.

education and awareness, coupled with the lack of job opportunities and most importantly, increasing loss of autonomy by the state of Kashmir within India. The attitudes of hard line Hindu groups and the fear they engendered also contributed to the problem.<sup>26</sup> However, Pakistan's failure in the 1965 conflict came as a setback to the secessionist dreams of the hardliners in Kashmir, as it was realised that apart from having a certain nuisance value, Pakistan did not have much of a role to play. Secessionist forces, which were relying heavily on Pakistani support to further their agenda, thus had to wait for yet another opportunity to realise their dreams.

## Simmering Continues

In the aftermath of the 1965 war with Pakistan, the situation in Kashmir was further aggravated, by the injection of hard line elements of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) into Kashmir. This followed a meeting in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) between Amanullah Khan, Maqbool Butt and Muhammad Saraf. As Butt later recounted: 'Interestingly, Amanullah Khan and several others in my group had seen eye to eye with my proposal favouring an Algerian type struggle to free Kashmiris from Indian occupation.'<sup>27</sup> After having crossed into POK in 1958, Butt crossed back into Kashmir in June 1966 to begin his mission of sabotage.<sup>28</sup>

On 8 December 1966 Sheikh Abdullah was released. He was however, expelled from the state along with Mirza Afzal Beg and G.M. Shah. This was accompanied by the banning of the Plebiscite Front on 12 January 1971.

By 1970, violent incidents occurred in the state with increasing regularity. These were attributed to the Al Fatah group, which was presumed to have Pakistani backing. Kashmir related terrorism escalated with the hijacking of an Indian Airlines aeroplane in January 1971, which was subsequently blown up by the terrorists after the passengers had been off-loaded. This was a visible blow to the Indians, who saw Maqbool Butt meet the hijackers and subsequently claim responsibility for it. The tumultuous celebrations kicked off in Lahore further confirmed Pakistan's complicity in the episode.<sup>29</sup>

## Effects of the 1971 Indo-Pak War on Kashmir

The resounding Pakistani defeat during the 1971 war with India and its subsequent dismemberment, resulting in the creation of Bangladesh, was a huge

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<sup>26</sup> Schofield 2000: 113–14.

<sup>27</sup> B.L. Kak 1987: 76.

<sup>28</sup> Schofield 2000: 115. Soon after his induction Butt was arrested for sabotage and murder and was convicted for the same. He was sentenced to death, but escaped before the sentence could be carried out, reaching POK in January 1969.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*: 116.

blow both to Pakistan as also to secessionist elements in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

The failure of the 1965 war, which Bhutto had blamed on Ayub, and Pakistan's defeat and emergence of independent Bangladesh in 1971 left those Kashmiris who would have preferred the state to be joined to Pakistan with little hope for the future.<sup>30</sup>

Sheikh Abdullah realised the futility of seeking Pakistan's support and playing on communal sentiments. It brought home the gross inability of Pakistan to help liberate Kashmir. He seems to have simply been playing on Pakistani sentiments, to gain a better personal deal for himself and in turn if possible for the state.<sup>31</sup> This aspect of Sheikh Abdullah's role will be discussed later to highlight his contribution to the LIC in Kashmir.

Pakistan's ability to cause any kind of substantive problems for India became severely restricted after their defeat. The Shimla Agreement itself effectively removed the clause of third party mediation and any mention of holding a plebiscite in Kashmir, which were positive developments for India. Its renaming the 'Ceasefire Line' (CFL) as the 'Line of Control' (LoC) virtually made it irreversible, much to the discomfiture of Pakistan. The Indian suggestion of converting the LoC into an international boundary (IB) was also agreed to in principle.

Bhutto agreed not only to change the ceasefire line into a line of control, for which he had earlier proposed the term 'line of peace', but also agreed that the line would be gradually endowed with the characteristics of an international border....<sup>32</sup>

However, the Shimla Agreement failed to give finality to the dispute by ending it, which it could have done by actually converting the LoC into the IB. The agreement did, however, indirectly reduce animosity between Sheikh Abdullah and the Centre, as Abdullah realised that he was no longer in a position of strength. The Pakistan card had been greatly weakened if not demolished.

When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto once more called for self determination of the Kashmiri people, Abdullah spoke against any intervention in the internal affairs of the state. In a series of negotiations which lasted over a year, Indira Gandhi chose to capitalise on Abdullah's more favourable stance towards India.<sup>33</sup>

## Kashmir Accord and the Return of Sheikh Abdullah

The defeat of Pakistan slowly brought the Centre and Sheikh Abdullah closer to reconciliation. This finally resulted in a mutually beneficial agreement, which was

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.: 121.

<sup>31</sup> Schofield 2000: 124.

<sup>32</sup> P.N. Dhar, *Times of India*, 4 April 1995.

<sup>33</sup> Schofield 2000: 122.

signed on 24 February 1975, between G. Parthasarthy and Mirza Afzal Beg called the Kashmir Accord (see Appendix E).

The Accord proved to be a landmark in Kashmir's political history. Mrs Gandhi was praised for the settlement. It was described as:

Indira Gandhi's finest achievement. She did not put the clock back. But she picked it up and wound it again; and it was because of her that Kashmir saw a wonderful decade of freedom and peace. There was great joy in the nation at the news.<sup>34</sup>

The accord gave continuity to Article 370, allaying many of the fears of Sheikh Abdullah and his supporters. However, it gave the Centre certain powers necessary to curb secessionist activity in the state.

Parliament will continue to have power to make laws relating to the prevention of activities directed towards disclaiming, questioning or disrupting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India or bringing about cessation of a part of the territory of India or secession of a part of the territory of India from the Union or causing insult to the Indian National Flag, the Indian National Anthem and the Constitution.<sup>35</sup>

It gave powers to the President to alter any provisions of the Constitution of India that had been applied to the State of Jammu and Kashmir with adaptations and modifications.<sup>36</sup> In order to give special powers to J&K, it gave the state powers for its 'own legislation on matters like welfare measures, cultural matters, social security, personal law and procedural laws, in a manner suited to the special conditions in the State'.<sup>37</sup>

Peace between the Centre and Sheikh Abdullah did not last very long, as he was able to outwit the ruling Congress party after getting the state legislative assembly dissolved by the Governor L.K. Jha and subsequently getting elected with a strong majority in the elections held in 1977. Abdullah's autocratic ways became more pronounced after this victory. He took some controversial decisions, like passing the Resettlement Bill, which made provisions for residents of POK, who had migrated there earlier, to resettle in Kashmir. The aim was to:

...present Sheikh Abdullah and the National Conference as champions of Kashmiri identity, lionise the Sheikh further, blow up his image, create an atmosphere which would facilitate 'coronation' of Farooq Abdullah as the Sheikh's successor, make a show of autonomy and independence, display a bit of insolence towards the Central Government, undermine the Kashmir Accord, give some shape to what has been called the 'Greater Kashmir' plan by ensuring

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<sup>34</sup> Akbar 1991: 118.

<sup>35</sup> The Kashmir Accord, 1975: 1, para 2. See Appendix E.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*: 1, para 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*: 1, para 4.



effective Muslim majority for the districts of Poonch and Rajauri, and to bring about a general situation in which the basic issues of progress and welfare were forgotten by the masses and no one questioned the honesty of the leaders.<sup>38</sup>

Power was soon handed over to Dr Farooq Abdullah after Sheikh Abdullah died on 8 September 1982. During the next seven years governments were dismissed and reinstated with increasing frequency. The first dismissal of Farooq Abdullah's government by Jagmohan, the then governor of the state, was brought about using questionable means, without summoning the state assembly, all of which indicated behind-the-scenes political manoeuvring. The act received widespread condemnation and led to a growing loss of faith in the central government.

G.M. Shah, the man responsible for Farooq Abdullah's dismissal in consonance with Jagmohan, did not last long, his government was also dismissed, and this was followed by the imposition of Governor's rule in the state. What followed was a mixed bag of events. While Jagmohan was able to improve the lot of the people by gearing up the administration and civic amenities, his hard line approach and discreet support and soft corner for the Hindus and their religious sentiments, estranged the common people who saw him as an instrument of suppression of their religion, i.e., Islam. An incident which further strengthened these feelings was a ban on the slaughter of sheep on the Hindu festival of Janmashtami, a ban not prevalent anywhere else in India. This infuriated the people who saw this as further proof of a pro-Hindu tilt and sparked off an agitation that proceeded to grow in intensity.

Farooq Abdullah was brought back as interim Chief Minister on 7 November 1986, as a prelude to elections being held in the state. Elections were subsequently held on 23 March 1987, and there were suspicions of rigging by Farooq Abdullah's National Conference. 'The manner in which State Assembly elections of 23 March 1987 were conducted caused grave misgivings about their fairness.'<sup>39</sup>

The 1987 elections are seen by many as a watershed in Kashmir politics and also as the spark which lit the flames of insurgency in the Valley. These elections exhausted all hopes that the people had held, of their will being respected by either the Centre and/or the state, resulting in disillusionment and anger. It also provided an ideal atmosphere for Pakistan to step in and fan the flames of discontent, harnessing the anger of the common people to perpetuate violence. An overt form of insurgency had started in Kashmir after years of systematic subversion.

## Sheikh Abdullah

Sheikh Abdullah is a paradoxical character. It was he who shaped the destiny of J&K on the one hand and on the other was partially responsible for the degradation

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<sup>38</sup> Jagmohan 1992: 145.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*: 163.

in the state and its virtual isolation from the rest India. From the time when he first burst onto the scene of events in Kashmir, his destiny to reach the very top echelons of government in the state was never in doubt. Tall, handsome, with a formidable presence, Sheikh Abdullah could mesmerise a crowd with his fiery oratorical skills, motivating them to lay down their lives or moving them to tears. Nehru in eloquent praise for Sheikh Abdullah said, 'Everyone who knows Kashmir knows also the position of Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah there. He is the Sher-e-Kashmir, beloved of the remotest valleys of Kashmir.'<sup>40</sup> However, a more candid and realistic reading of Sheikh Abdullah suggests that he was a realist, pragmatic and even self-serving in his dealings with India.

He was a charismatic leader, but he was primarily driven by his personal ambitions. I don't think there was any genuine and deep intellectual and emotional commitment on his part about making Kashmir an integral part of the Indian Republic. The linkage with India for him was—when I look back, he considered it a necessary step a necessary move to ultimately create a very special and extensively autonomous political status for Jammu and Kashmir of which he would be the supreme authority.<sup>41</sup>

Sheikh Abdullah was deeply hurt and affected by the gross partiality to the Hindus and the repression of Muslims during the period of Dogra rule in the state. His personal experience of not getting state support to study medicine influenced his thinking; this was further reinforced when he saw the majority of government jobs go to Hindus. He writes in his autobiography:

We constituted the majority and contributed the most towards the State's revenues, still we were continuously oppressed. Why? How long would we put up with it? Was it because a majority of Government servants were non-Muslims? Or because most of the lower grade officers who dealt with the public were Kashmiri Pandits? I concluded that the ill treatment of Muslims was an outcome of religious prejudice.<sup>42</sup>

Despite these instances, it is quite evident that Sheikh Abdullah was not a fundamentalist in his thinking and approach. As J.N. Dixit notes, 'I don't think he was ever Islamic in his orientations as the present Islamist approach of some people is.'<sup>43</sup>

What Sheikh Abdullah sought was Kashmir's independence from India and also freedom from Pakistani influence. However, on realising that this was not possible and that overt support was not forthcoming, even from countries like the UK and

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<sup>40</sup> Bhattacharjea 1994: 78.

<sup>41</sup> J.N. Dixit in an interview with the author.

<sup>42</sup> Sheikh Abdullah 1993: 40–41.

<sup>43</sup> J.N. Dixit in an interview with the author.

USA, he decided to side with India. Thereafter, this deep hurt was instrumental in his seeking ironclad guarantees of autonomy for the people of the state from India, both at the time of Partition and subsequently when heading Kashmir's government. In order to obtain these guarantees Sheikh Abdullah resorted to various tactics, which included raising the bogey of Kashmiri independence, questioning the secular credentials of the country and further consolidating popular sentiment against any change in the guarantees given to Kashmir. It is unlikely that Sheikh Abdullah was aiming to merge Kashmir with Pakistan. As B.N. Mullik states, 'It would be wrong to conclude that Sheikh Abdullah was as yet planning to take Jammu and Kashmir into Pakistan. He was evidently angling for a special status—just short of independence.'<sup>44</sup>

The second and related advantage that was likely to accrue to him from his outbursts against the Centre was Delhi's inability to oust him without the danger of widespread protests and violence. However, in lieu of his dismissal and subsequent imprisonment, it would seem that he had overestimated popular support for his cause as also the Centre's resolve to come down heavily on any secessionist propaganda in Kashmir, especially after its embarrassing experience at the United Nations. Sheikh Abdullah's actions led to the state's isolation from the rest of India and a separation in the minds of the Kashmiri people, who never ceased referring to India and Pakistan as two separate entities bordering their state.<sup>45</sup>

It also seems likely that towards the latter part of his political career, Sheikh Abdullah became increasingly autocratic and self-serving building, up a close coterie around him, who exploited the perks of power, giving rise to rampant corruption. Perhaps it was not realised by the popular leader that his dream of seeing a prosperous and self-reliant Kashmir was being shattered by the very people who were supposed to run the administration of the state.

It is not easy to sit in judgement on any historical personality on the basis of facts and achievements. In the case of Sheikh Abdullah, it is a difficult task by any standard. While he helped the people gain self-governance and freedom from the oppressive Dogra rule, he was also instrumental in fanning the flames of secession in the state. Even if this was done with the aim of preserving the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and political independence of the people, the end result of this ceaseless political game of brinkmanship is left to the reader to judge.

The rumblings of discontent emerging from the Valley, along with demonstrations and occasional bomb blasts rocked the administration out of their stupor. The writing was well and truly on the wall. However, familiar speeches of well-being

<sup>44</sup> Mullik 1971: 39.

<sup>45</sup> They always referred to the Indian currency that they used as '*Hindustan ka paisa*' (the Indian rupee) as though Hindustan (India) was a foreign country, and Kashmir was not a part of it. The author remembers an incident during a visit to the state. In Srinagar, after having purchased some groceries, on receipt of the balance, the author's father returned a currency note to the shopkeeper pointing out that it was torn. The shopkeeper retorted, 'What can I do, this is an Indian rupee. We do not make it here, it comes from India.'

and normalcy continued to blare from radios, even as the training of terrorists for induction into J&K commenced in Pakistan. The seeds of separatism, sown in the state over the years, had germinated and were now flowering and spreading their poisonous contagion across the length and breadth of the Valley. This was unfortunately complemented by the emergence of increasingly hard line Hindu views in the rest of India, expressing a loss of patience with what they perceived as weak policies to tackle the divisive forces in Kashmir.

However before discussing the start of active insurgency in Kashmir, it will be interesting to read an account of certain activities that had begun in a far corner of the state, the Siachen Glacier.

## Chapter 5

# The Siachen Imbroglio

The Siachen Glacier—the site of ongoing hostilities between India and Pakistan—is the world’s highest battlefield. It was this inhospitable and uninhabited area, that was not even demarcated at the time of Partition, which became the site of a conflict between India and Pakistan. This, in turn, acted as a prelude to a series of conflicts over Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) between the two countries.

In Siachen, an army is required to fight two enemies, the first and obvious one being the opposing forces of the enemy. The second and less obvious enemy is the harsh climate prevalent in the area. And it is to this enemy that innumerable lives have been lost.

The conflict in Siachen is one of the most difficult low intensity conflicts (LICs) ever witnessed anywhere in the world in the five decades since the beginning of hostilities between Indian and Pakistan over Kashmir. Siachen is a wasteland, and the cost of sustaining a conflict here is very high. Many lives have been lost here and to strategists and analysts it makes little military sense to hold the area. However, for two decades, since Indian soldiers first set foot on the Saltoro Range, it has been a symbol of national grit and resilience.

## Geography

The Indian Army is not deployed on the Siachen Glacier. This statement may come as a surprise to many readers. For the ordinary reader, and the population at large, talk of the region is synonymous with the glacier. The reality is, however, very different. Neither of the countries’ armed forces are deployed on the glacier proper. The Indian Army is deployed further west and beyond the glacier towards Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK), with the entire glacier area under its control. Pakistani talk of waging war with India on the glacier is yet another instance of the untruths it perpetuates. The fact of the matter is that Pakistan had already lost the glacier even before the conflict had started. In order to understand the truth about Siachen, it is necessary to understand its geography.

The northern reaches of Kashmir rise and merge into one of the largest and most formidable mountain ranges in the world, the Himalayas. All the major ranges

of this area originate in this large landmass called the Pamir Knot. The first major range moving eastwards from the Pamirs is the Kunlun Shan Range, which is in western China. The second major range south of the Kunlun is the Karakoram Range, which separates Kashmir from China, with the famed Karakoram Pass providing one of the few points of crossing on its formidable crest. Further south and extending eastwards is the Himalayan Range, which separates Tibet and India. To its south lies the Pir Panjal Range, separating the Kashmir valley in the west and south from the rest of the state. To the west of Pamir, lies the Hindukush Range leading the way into Gilgit in POK.

The focus of this study will further be narrowed down to the specific area between the Karakoram Range and the Himalayas, which cradles the Siachen Glacier and the Salto Ridge. For an easier understanding, an attempt will be made to move from the south-west of the area towards the north-east along the general alignment of the Line of Control (LoC). Readers would be familiar with the area of Zojila Pass and the route beyond towards Dras, Kargil and further on to Leh. This route, till the Karakoram Range, is arranged in a series of parallel lines of mountain ranges with rivers flowing through the intervening valleys. Starting from Kargil and going on towards the north-east, the first major obstacle is the Indus River flowing between the Zaskar Range to its south-west and the Ladakh Range to its north-east. Further beyond the Ladakh Range flows the Shyok River, buttressed by the Salto Ridge to the north-east. From the watershed formed by the crest of the Salto, many streams flow towards the south-west into the Shyok River and to the north-east into the Nubra River. The Nubra River emerges from the snout of Siachen Glacier and together with it forms the second-last parallel divide before the Karakoram Range.

Focussing on the Salto and Siachen Glacier area, it must be noted that the terrain and climatic conditions here are a combatant's nightmare. The Salto Ridge is situated at an approximate height of 18,000 to 21,000 feet and is ravaged by frequent avalanches and strong blizzards. The extremely low temperatures here, coupled with a high wind chill factor, make any movement in the area extremely difficult and hazardous. Crevasses abound in the region and a single lax moment can send soldiers plunging hundreds of feet to their death. Moreover, exposure to the harsh climatic conditions can and often does result in several serious life threatening medical conditions, such as frostbite, chilblains, pulmonary oedema and hypothermia.

## The Dispute Takes Shape

As has been mentioned previously, the Radcliffe Line was demarcated during the tumultuous five weeks preceding and culminating with Partition. In the Siachen area this line extends on the map till a point in the square NJ 9842, i.e., Point NJ 980420. Beyond NJ 9842, the Boundary Commission did not actually mark the

line separating Indian and Pakistani territory on the map in this area, but the 1949 Karachi Agreement between India and Pakistan contains the qualifying statement, ‘*thence north to the glaciers*’<sup>1</sup> delineating the general alignment of the LoC in the region. This agreement was again reinforced in 1972, leaving little scope for doubt. However, Pakistan undertook a subtle campaign aimed at infringing on this understanding by unilaterally delineating the LoC ahead of NJ 9842, extending further beyond towards the Karakoram Pass.

According to Lieutenant General V.R. Raghavan, an indication of this aberration on the LoC in the area was noted when:

... the 1974 edition of the US Defence Mapping Agency’s operational navigation chart was the first to show an Air Defence Information Zone (ADIZ) separating India and Pakistan in the Karakoram region. The line marking the separation was drawn straight from NJ 9842 to the Karakoram Pass.<sup>2</sup>

This problem was compounded when an increasing number of atlases carried maps containing similar aberrations.<sup>3</sup> A straight line of the kind drawn on the maps for the area was both impractical and, cartographically speaking, unprofessional, keeping in mind the principle of marking and delineating boundaries along the crest lines of mountains. This problem was worsened by a concerted and planned campaign by Pakistan in collaboration with China to strengthen its claim to the region.<sup>4</sup> Pakistan started encouraging foreign mountaineering expeditions to the region to climb the hitherto virgin peaks of the Karakoram Range, with a view to further establishing and reinforcing Pakistani claims to ownership of the area. On the contrary, Indian expeditions to the region were said to be ‘violating’ the existing LoC in what was ‘disputed’ territory. This state of affairs continued through 1981–82, sufficiently alerting India to the extent of the problem, and prompting them to send their own expedition to the area to ascertain the extent of incursion and the feasibility of military intervention.

These expeditions by the two sides resulted in official protests by their respective armies. The situation was slowly but surely moving downhill towards a military showdown. The first serious Pakistani military attempt to seize the initiative occurred in 1983, starting the race towards domination and control of the area. As V.R. Raghavan states, ‘Indian military had intelligence of Pakistan having attempted an armed occupation of the passes west of the Siachen Glacier in September–October 1983.’<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Karachi Agreement, 1949, emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> Raghavan 2002: 33.

<sup>3</sup> The National Geographic Society’s *Atlas of the World*, the University of Chicago’s *A Historical Atlas of South Asia* and *The Times Atlas of the World* all showed these aberrations.

<sup>4</sup> Pakistan illegally ceded a part of its territory in POK to China in March 1963, a total of 2,700 square miles in the Northern Areas, giving China access to the Shaksgam valley.

<sup>5</sup> Raghavan 2002: 36.

At this stage, it is necessary to understand the reasoning behind the Indian decision to move into the area. For the Indians, Siachen was not the extremely strategic area that it is often made out to be by certain thinkers in India in order to support the argument for continued deployment there. Reasons like a pincer movement by Pakistan and China in the region are ascribed to justify the Indian response. A mere look at the region would, however, rule out such operational and logistical nightmares. However, there were other very valid reasons for the Indian move. First, India had been humiliated by the loss of the Aksai Chin area, a part of which China had occupied prior to the 1962 Sino-Indian War and which it continues to do after the war. Under no circumstances was India willing to allow a repetition of this kind of pre-emptive operation, and that too in Kashmir by Pakistan. Nevertheless, India did not have any intention of moving deeper into Pakistan occupied territory in a bid to alter the existing LoC. It therefore required some deftness on the part of the Indians to ensure that the sanctity of the existing LoC was maintained, without altering the status quo. After detailed planning and deep deliberation, it was decided that the words, 'thence north to the glaciers' correctly signified the crest of the Salto Ridge from the map reference at NJ 9842.

Second, for India any Pakistani presence in the Siachen area held the likelihood of their extending this breach with the passage of time. If not for use in foreseeable military thrusts from the region into Kargil and Leh, it could certainly serve as a diversion in times of skirmishes on the LoC or during a full-fledged war. Besides, it would prove to be a psychological victory for the Pakistani army, which was on the look out for a redeeming venture to raise the morale of its forces and its population in general after its debacle in the 1971 war with India.

Third, India had also started facing the onslaught of Pakistan sponsored terrorism in the state of Punjab and the pressure was beginning to build on both the government and the armed forces, placing them on the defensive. Any further losses, at such a time, carried the potential of demoralising the Indian troops and rendering the political survival of the government at the Centre impossible. Finally, though Siachen was a mere toehold on the LoC, it was, nonetheless, national and military pride that was at stake.

In 1983 the presence of both the Indians and the Pakistanis in the area increased. Both sides staked claim to the area, protesting the other's presence there. Pakistan for its part was the first to make known its intentions and point of view on the issue. In one of the notes sent by the Pakistani army's Northern Area Headquarters on 21 April 1983 to the Indian Army, it clearly emerged that it considered the line NJ 980420 Karakoram Pass, as the LoC. This was subsequently repeated in a tone and tenor suggestive of an impending military confrontation.

These developments were supported by intelligence reports of procurement of high altitude clothing in such quantities by the Pakistani armed forces, as to substantiate other intelligence reports of an enemy build-up around Skardu. Pakistani preparations were decidedly underway for a rush to the Salto Ridge, thereby enabling them to gain control of the area. The race to Siachen was on.



## Indian Planning and Execution

At this stage, India was not very certain of Chinese involvement in the entire episode and their specific interest. Pakistani claims with respect to their interpretation of the LoC in the area had drawn no comment from the Chinese. However, India had not forgotten its past experience of Chinese pressure and veiled threats during the 1971 Indo-Pak War. Therefore, it felt that it would be prudent to employ the minimal force necessary to hold and deny Pakistan the area and, thereafter, build-up as per operational requirements and necessity.

In 1983 the Indian Army was able to build a logistics hut in the Siachen area, thus enabling it to support future operations there. Thereafter, it was planned that a small force capable of denying Pakistan the vital passes be inducted in the area. A large military presence on the Saltoro Ridge was not visualised. Indian planners appreciated Pakistan's ability to cross the Saltoro Ridge from the existing passes of Bilafond La and Sia La. In view of this vulnerability, it was decided to hold these two passes, thereby denying them these crossover points and thus the area beyond.

Having decided on the level of forces to be employed, the next important and the most difficult part of the plan was its execution. Planning and sustaining mountaineering expeditions in the area with trained manpower for a limited duration was a feasible military proposition. However, repetition of the same feat for a large force, deployed over a sustained period, with periodic turnover, was a planner's nightmare. Another stupendous task was keeping such an isolated force supported logistically, despite the vagaries of the weather and the harsh climatic conditions prevalent there.

It was thus decided to rely on helicopters, rather than on road communications, to deploy and administer the forward troops, as in any case heavy snowfall rendered the road impassable for more than half of the year. Speed and surprise were the two essential factors that the Indians employed in their final thrust towards the Saltoro Ridge. It was decided that a platoon each would be used to hold the two passes, Bilafond La and Sia La, and that helicopters would be employed to land these troops, thereby gaining invaluable time. Finally, on 13 April 1984, helicopters dropped the first troops of the Indian Army, 3 kilometres short of Bilafond La Pass. However, inclement weather forced similar operations to be abandoned at Sia La. Finally, on 17 April 1984 successful airdropping, landing and occupation of Sia La was accomplished. A Pakistani reconnaissance helicopter noted the Indian presence in the area, and, thereafter, it was only a matter of time before a military confrontation commenced.

As General Raghavan writes in his book:

The special force Pakistan had raised for occupying the pass was called the Burzil Force and the operation was named Ababeel. The force apparently speeded up its movement after the helicopter sortie sighted the Indian troops on the two passes on 17 April. Seven days later, elements of the Burzil Force were sighted at the Bilafond La on the western slopes of the Saltoro range.... On 25 April,

Burzil Force, comprising Special Services Group and Northern Light Infantry, started the firefight with small arms and machine guns. The military conflict between the two countries for the control of the Saltoro range had started.<sup>6</sup>

Hostilities had started on the Siachen Glacier with commencement of an undeclared conflict in a region beyond the demarcated LoC, on the Indian side. Till that time the area had been devoid of the military presence of either side. It was not long after that the Pakistanis realised their inability to capture the two passes on the Saltoro. In their desperation, they flung their troops at the Saltoro, enlarging the battlefield in an attempt to gain a toehold in the region. The Indians responded in kind, beating back the Pakistanis each time as the two Indian platoons holding the passes were slowly increased to a brigade-sized force. This increase was dictated by India's ability to deploy on the ridge. It was also aimed at thwarting Pakistani attempts to climb some of the snowbound slopes along the spurs leading up to the Saltoro from the western side. It was only a matter of time before Pakistani forces realised that they had failed.

This failure put General Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan's military dictator on the back foot. There was much strong and humiliating propaganda, emphasising his failure to safeguard national interests.<sup>7</sup> This led to frantic efforts to gain the territory, but all these ended in failure with heavy casualties and a loss of honour for the Pakistanis. This defeat compounded Pakistan's earlier humiliation by India during the 1971 war. It also translated into a burning desire to take Kashmir. The result was Pakistan sponsored cross-border terrorism and an attempt at forcing a decision with the Kargil conflict.<sup>8</sup>

The Indian camp, on the other hand, experienced much jubilation and euphoria at yet another strategic victory over Pakistan. Despite the high rate of casualties, especially in the initial years—both in combat and also in equal measure due to the harsh conditions faced in the area the nation stood firm behind its soldiers, bolstering their already high morale and spirits.

## Resolution of Conflict

From the very beginning of the struggle, both sides probably realised the futility of an armed confrontation in the area, understanding the considerable cost this would entail both in terms of lives, as well as in the damage done to the region. They also realised that possessing the region did not confer any real advantage on either side. However, political and military brinkmanship on the part of Pakistan had forced matters to the extent where neither side could afford to withdraw. It was a catch 22 situation where continued deployment was undesirable but withdrawal was also not possible.

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<sup>6</sup> Raghavan 2002: 55.

<sup>7</sup> Benazir Bhutto, a sworn enemy of General Zia-ul-Haq—who had ordered the execution of her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto—led this attack against him.

<sup>8</sup> The Kargil War will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Finally, political initiative resulted in breaking the ice between the two countries, when talks were initiated in 1986. After the first round of talks held that year, a total of seven rounds were conducted in the intervening years up to 1999, though with little success. The talks were characterised by dogged persistence, with each side sticking to its point of view during most of the negotiations, with only a few occasions where a solution seemed possible. Unlike the major Kashmir tangle, Siachen is more an issue of both sides backing off. However, it seems that political compulsions and the initial untruths that Pakistan has been propagating—of its having control of the glacier when it was really under Indian control—had rendered their position untenable vis-à-vis that of India. Pakistan probably felt that India, given the pressure exerted by its domestic compulsions against the loss of lives without tangible gains, the cost of fighting a war, and the three-front attrition of LIC operations in J&K, Punjab and now in Siachen, would become battle-weary and sue for peace, which would be to the advantage of Pakistan. Siachen was, however, another Pakistani miscalculation. After its failure in Siachen, it was left to wait for another opportune moment to launch an attempt to avenge its past defeats, and this finally came with the launch of the Kargil conflict. Pakistan's thrust at the talks was aimed at asking India to back off from the Saltoro and move its troops back to the previous position as prevalent before 1971. India however, was not willing to withdraw from the positions it held on the Saltoro—assuming these as its pre-1971 positions.

India also negated Pakistan's second argument that the line NJ 9842-Karakoram was the de facto alignment of the LoC, by quoting the words 'thence north to the glaciers' from the previous agreements. Refusing to accept the Sino-Pakistani border agreement of 1963 delineating this line, India contested Pakistan's unilateral concession and its illegal ceding of territory to China.

Pakistan's contention that the Siachen area had traditionally been a part of Baltistan was also refuted by India, which produced government gazettes to prove its point. Thus Pakistan lost yet another of its carefully crafted arguments.

Pakistan's fourth contention, that India had violated the 1972 Shimla Accord by altering its position and moving into the area, was refuted by India with the counter-argument that Pakistan had unilaterally altered the LoC by encouraging mountaineering activities in the region.

After the initial rounds of talks, Pakistan dropped its demand that the NJ 9842-Karakoram line be regarded as the LoC. It also eventually agreed to a mutually acceptable withdrawal to create a 'Zone of Disengagement'. However, they did not agree to the marking of present positions as they existed on the ground, as this would have given away the years of lies fed to people regarding its actual position. The Zone of Disengagement proposal gave India a dominant position, with its troops located on the Siachen Glacier and with Pakistani positions near the Conway Saddle, which is part of an advanced mountaineering camp.

Finally, negotiations again failed during the sixth and the most significant round of talks, where both sides had come close to an agreement. India sent suggestions for confidence building measures to Pakistan on 24 January 1994 based on the sixth

round of talks. One can gauge the line of thinking of both sides from the text of these suggestions. A settlement envisaged an understanding on 'disengagement and redeployment, monitoring, maintenance of peace and implementation schedule'.<sup>9</sup> While agreeing to maintain peace, 'both sides agreed that the delineation of the LC beyond NJ 9842 shall be examined by a Joint Commission later'.<sup>10</sup> The two sides seem to have come to a broad understanding on the 'Zone of Complete Disengagement'. It will be relevant to quote the text of this agreement, as this is the closest understanding to which both sides ever came. Moreover, this understanding would become the foundation of any agreement likely to be achieved in future.

Both sides agreed that to reduce tensions in Siachen, the two sides shall disengage from authenticated positions they are presently occupying and shall fall back to positions as under. This disengagement and redeployment of forces, aimed at securing peace and tranquillity in the area is without prejudice to the known positions of either side. Both sides agree that the positions/areas vacated will constitute a Zone of Complete Disengagement. Both sides commit:

- (a) That they shall not seek to re-occupy the positions vacated by them or to occupy the positions across the alignment determined by the vacated positions.
- (b) That they shall not undertake any military, mountaineering or any other activity whatsoever in the Zone of Disengagement.
- (c) That if either side violates the commitment in (a) or (b) above, the other shall be free to respond through any means, including military.

Both sides agree to evolve monitoring measures to ensure against any violation, to maintain peace and tranquillity in the area. Both sides agree to disengage and redeploy as per time schedules to be worked out to mutual satisfaction.<sup>11</sup>

The failure of talks can be attributed first to Pakistan's unwillingness to agree to the marking of existing positions on the ground. Second, India was not willing to take the risk of withdrawing from the Saltoro without an ironclad guarantee from Pakistan of the inviolability of the agreement to pull back. This was not possible without an indication of positions on the ground by both sides. Third, the Zone of Disengagement emerging on both sides of the Saltoro made Pakistan's present position public and gave India an edge, this was unacceptable to Pakistan. Fourth, the losses in Siachen and the prohibitive cost of maintaining the armies there, on both sides, seems to have been erased from public memory, with little pressure on

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<sup>9</sup> Government of India, Suggestions and Confidence Building Measures sent by Government of India to the Government of Pakistan on 24 January 1994, Section II(1).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*: Section II(2).

<sup>11</sup> Part of Suggestions and Confidence Building Measures sent by the Government of India to the Government of Pakistan on 24 January 1994.

the domestic front for disengagement and withdrawal. Thus, there was no compulsion for either side to compromise and negotiate, even if the risk was minimal. There was no risk in holding on to the existing positions. Fifth, a settlement can be effected only if there exists the political will to do so. After the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's attempt at reaching a settlement, the Indian political scene became increasingly fragmented, with no one political party coming to power with a sizeable majority. This made it difficult, if not impossible to take bold and risky decisions. Sixth, the frequent change of governments and political uncertainty snatched away any kind of continuity of policy, a factor vital to the resolution of an issue that was politically and strategically so complex. Seventh and last, the shadow of insurgency in Kashmir loomed large over the conflict in Siachen and the subsequent negotiations; India's stand started to harden as Pakistan's direct involvement in Kashmir became apparent. Any chances of a compromise became remote, as tempers on both sides began to fray and the threat of a war once again loomed large on the horizon.

## Chapter 6

# Active Insurgency

### Causes of Conflict

Active insurgency started in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in 1988, with the major thrust finally hitting the state machinery in 1989. Widespread and fully representative protests, a series of bomb blasts, selective killings, well-planned alienation of the population, and exploitation of a popular dissatisfaction were some of its characteristics. Before going on to the sequence of events, it will be pertinent to analyse the causes for this mass uprising against a popular government in the state. It will also be relevant to understand the importance of J&K, to both India and Pakistan. This will help the reader appreciate the intensity of feelings in both countries, and their continuing fight for what each perceives as its right as also the necessity that each side feels to regain lost honour and prestige.

Kashmir is a case of lost opportunities. Partition and subsequently the accession of J&K gave India an opportunity to inherit a test case for its secular credentials. Kashmir also gifted the country a geographical barrier of geo-strategic importance. With one stroke of the pen, the state gave India a gateway to the politically, strategically, and economically vital heartland of Central Asia, where it could have played a dominant role in influencing and moulding political events to its advantage. Kashmir is an invaluable jewel in India's crown, which, for more reasons than the overtly simplistic and oft repeated ones, has become the test of India's ability to stay united and homogeneous.

If this contention is accepted, why is it that the nation has blundered time and again, and has brought matters to such an impasse? The reasons for this will be discussed in this chapter. An attempt will also be made to analyse Kashmir's importance to India before commencing with the history of the present low intensity conflict (LIC) which engulfs the state, so as to give the study a requisite background.

J&K is one of the few states in the country in which there was a confluence of major religious movements and sects. This confluence resulted in a unique civilisation, isolated from fanaticism, where ideas of moderation developed and flowered. The region did witness periods of religious fanaticism, but whenever this happened there would eventually be a counter-surge of ideas that re-established

liberal ideals of secularism, religious tolerance and universal brotherhood. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Sufism, Sikhism and a number of other religions influenced the area at one time or another. Centuries of liberal ideas resulted in the distillation of a distinct liberal ethos termed *Kashmiryat*, which was regarded as the essence of what it meant to be Kashmiri. It was the indigenous core of Kashmiri life, and the foundation of a distinct Kashmiri identity. The age-old ideal of *Kashmiryat* thus transcended man-made boundaries of religion, caste, creed, colour and geography, and was probably closest to the essence of the Indian nation and the spirit of the Indian Constitution. Despite this liberal ethos, Kashmiri society is today plagued by a form of fundamentalism that has eaten into the core of its unique ethos and culture, threatening to destroy the very essence of its existence, transforming it into a fundamental society in perpetual revolt; a society disillusioned with its heritage and idealism; a society sworn to the uprooting of principles of secularism and tolerance; a society which, in short, is repudiating the very principles of *Kashmiryat*.

There have to be discernible causes for this rot, and they are neither difficult to identify nor understand. A brief look at the history of the unfortunate state and its people is enough to bring these reasons to light. First, the people of Kashmir have been suppressed and exploited for centuries at the hands of various rulers, both Hindu and Muslim. Each imposed his particular brand of dictatorial cruelty and autocratic eccentricity on the people. What made matters worse were the opportunistic raiders who often swept over the land, attracted by its wealth, looting and plundering, and destroying what they could not carry away with them. Such raids were especially characteristic of the period of Afghan rule over the state. More recently, the Kashmiris have suffered periods of short-sighted exploitation that characterised the Sikh and Dogra rule. Under successive rulers the region was slowly and continuously milked of its riches, with no attempts at developing it. This was accompanied by religious, economic and social discrimination, which caused a sharp divide between religious entities. With Independence, there was widespread and universal expectation of a change for the better. The people had hoped that Independence would put an end to their misery and exploitation. However, at different stages in the state's evolution, one or the other community continued to feel oppressed. First, it was the Muslims who felt, and there are some who still feel, that a Hindu majority India is waiting for an opportunity to amalgamate and devour the state. On the other hand, the Kashmiri Pandits, who played a pivotal role in the administration of the state till Independence, suddenly felt sidelined and subsequently were forced to migrate from their homeland under duress and threat of death, at the hands of terrorists. Lastly, the people of Jammu and Ladakh also felt that it was the Kashmir valley which held the key to the state government in any future political alliance and that they would always play second fiddle, with the likelihood of continuous exploitation. Thus, the feeling of oppression and exploitation remained amongst all sections, with each fearing that a larger and more powerful entity was waiting to subjugate it. The Pandits want their homeland back; demands of some groups vary from greater autonomy to independence, while other

elements of Jammu and Ladakh want statehood. A feeling of being the oppressed and exploited infects all sections of people.

Second, the rise of Indian nationalism also gave a simultaneous fillip to sub-regional nationalism in certain parts of the country. It was realised that any attempt at gaining independence from the Indian Union, an idea which was taking shape prior to Independence, could only be achieved on the plank of religion and a distinct divide between the Hindu and Muslim people. Initial attempts of the leaders of the Muslim League failed to create this divide, with the Congress seen as the true representative of all sections of the people. However, the dream of a separate identity and country encouraged polarisation and deep chasms, which hundreds of years of brotherhood could not bridge. Thus the propaganda of the Muslim League, tacitly supported by the British government to further its own strategic interests, was ultimately successful. The propaganda basically played on Muslim fears of Hindu fundamentalism and dominance in a Hindu majority society after Independence. The suggestion was that the minority Muslims would be exploited post-Independence in a Hindu majority India. The propaganda worked, though only in Muslim minority regions, with majority regions still against the idea of Partition. These feelings also developed in Kashmir, where the Muslim League was especially active in the Jammu region. The divide created by the League was a political necessity aimed at Partition. Sadly, in achieving its aims, it permanently fractured and poisoned the minds of certain sections of the population, a situation that has continued after Partition. It is also pertinent to mention that while some Muslim leaders created this divide, Hindu hard liners also contributed to the problem, by actively encouraging militant Hinduism in the Jammu region and clandestinely distributed weapons during the Hindu-Muslim riots after Partition. They also instigated and led an agitation against Sheikh Abdullah in an attempt to further isolate him, thereby increasing the divide.<sup>1</sup> Rising sub-regionalism led to clear divisions within the state, wherein Leh, Ladakh, the Valley and Jammu became isolated entities within the state despite the very best efforts to keep them united. The National Conference (NC) was seen as a party of the Valley. This sub-regionalism further isolated the Muslim community in Kashmir from Muslims elsewhere in India, who preferred not to regard Kashmiri Muslims as part of their community.<sup>2</sup>

Third, as briefly mentioned, the British also followed at this juncture what was becoming an increasingly characteristic policy of divide and rule. The potential of this strategy dawned upon them after the revolt of 1857, when they realised that Hindus and Muslims provided a potential volatile mix, which could be exploited

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<sup>1</sup> Despite growing nationalism or ethno-nationalism in the case of Kashmir, a strong, respected and accepted leadership both at the state and at the Centre served to control any feelings of separatism. The fissures were subsequently widened by encouragement of these tendencies by personalised and selfish political manoeuvring at the state level, and a weakening of the political structure at the central level.

<sup>2</sup> Ganguly 1997: 39–41.



and divided along communal lines, by selectively encouraging and promoting one or the other of the communities. The results of this deceitful and divisive tactic became fully apparent just prior to Partition, when Jinnah and the Muslim League encouraged every opportunity to bring about the partitioning of the country. The British policy stemmed from their own strategic interests. They wanted to prevent the spread of communism, and required an ally to check the growing strength and influence of China and the USSR. Pakistan fitted the bill perfectly, whereas a strong India was likely to prove an impediment to their aims. The subcontinent fell for the bait, because the British ambitions and motives in encouraging Partition coincided with the personal ambitions and interests of certain personalities involved.

Fourth, whatever the external factors and influences, LIC in Kashmir has been further aggravated by partisan politics. Leaders like Sheikh Abdullah had a hypnotic grip on the people, especially during the earlier part of his political career. However, he also succumbed to the politics of the power struggle in the state, failing to perceive the larger picture and the interests of the country as a whole in the bargain. His fear of being engulfed by Hindu forces, coupled with his attempts at raising the bogey of a loss of identity of the Kashmiris, only resulted in a widening of the divide already created by Partition. At the time of Partition, a temporary arrangement in terms of Article 370 had been signed, giving the state considerable autonomy. The demand post-Partition was for a continuance of this special status, and this led to the isolation and alienation of the state and its people. In a bid to keep the issue of autonomy alive, constant veiled threats of independence were unleashed, which affected the psyche of the people, who found it more and more difficult to accept accession to India under these circumstances. Moreover, this supposed threat to Kashmiri autonomy was continuously reiterated and passions stirred up in an attempt to sideline more important issues of slow and tardy development, corruption and nepotism in the state. All these pressures led to the decay of political institutions in the state coupled with a similar situation subsequently arising at the central level.

The singular political tragedy of Kashmir's politics was the failure of the local and national political leaderships to permit the development of an honest political opposition.... As a result of local chicanery the national *laissez-faire*, every election except two (in 1977 and 1983) since the very first, in March 1957, was marked by corruption and deceit. Over the years, any opposition to the National Conference was steadily driven out of the institutional arena.<sup>3</sup>

Fifth, J&K is the only state in the country with Muslims in the majority. Even at the time of Partition, the feeling that they should be given a separate status was very strong. This stemmed from the impression that unless stringent measures were taken and checks and balances maintained in the Constitution, J&K would lose its identity and strength, which it derived from this distinct feature. There was

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.: 39–40.

always the impression that Hindus would engulf the state, leaving the Muslims as a minority. This feeling was further accentuated with the passage of time, and it strengthened the resolve of its leaders and certain sections of the state's population, as steps were suggested to integrate the state into the national mainstream. On the other hand, the Hindu hard line view as articulated by the Jan Sangh,<sup>4</sup> later followed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led lobby, advocated the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, thus bringing the state at par with the other states in the country. This encouraged a continuance of the psychological divide in the minds of the Kashmiri people. It needed a mere spark to turn the simmering discontent and disillusionment into a separatist movement, which is exactly what happened. Jagmohan, one of the critics of Article 370 who was subsequently a part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by the BJP, says:

One of the strongest roots of Kashmiri separatism and alienation lies in Article 370 of the Constitution of India, which gives special status to the State of Jammu and Kashmir. It is an issue, which involves not only historical, constitutional, political, social and economic considerations of far-reaching consequences, but also psychological and emotional ones.<sup>5</sup>

Sixth was the large-scale corruption prevalent in the state of J&K. Besides official reports, this malaise was clearly visible to any visitor to the state. Each case, each file, each contract and each appointment had a price fixed for it. Families of influential people benefited from contracts, which were allotted on the orders of influential leaders rather than on merit. Roads and developmental projects were executed on paper, while the suffering of the poor continued unabated. Once again the state was milked of its wealth: forests were indiscriminately felled; and the so-called fair price shops sold rations at astronomical prices, even as supplies never reached their intended beneficiaries, the poor. The state government's complicity in all of this was undeniable, yet the blame for this lack of development and poverty was always placed on the central government. It is not necessary to go into the interior regions of the state to understand the role corruption has played. A brief inquiry into the ownership of prime property in Srinagar is sufficient to understand the role corruption has played in the state, enriching a few to the detriment of many. It is a state where all are supposedly equal, but where some have always managed to remain more equal. At the time of Independence J&K had the potential of developing into a strong economy. In addition, it also received considerable aid from the Centre to help tide it over various financial problems, yet corruption ensured that the benefits of this aid did not reach the people, and did not bring about any marked social, infrastructural or economic development. 'The transformation of the political circles in Jammu and Kashmir particularly the valley into

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<sup>4</sup> Both the Jan Sangh and BJP are often described as Hindu Nationalist parties by certain sections of the press, especially the foreign media.

<sup>5</sup> Jagmohan 1992: 230.

religious extremism, was as a result of misgovernance by a series of governments in Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>6</sup> Matters were made worse by the attempt to apportion blame and the trading of charge and counter-charge between the Centre and the state government. In all of this the ultimate sufferers were the common people, who gained little from this sad state of affairs.

Seventh, as has already been explained, the state is known for its moderation, liberalism and the rich traditions of the Sufi and Rishi movements. However, in the first half of the twentieth century, fundamentalist organisations took root in India and later spread to Pakistan, with some remnants remaining active in Kashmir. Among these, the Jamat-i-Islami, which was formed in 1938 by Sayed Abdul A'la Moudoodi, is the most prominent. He later moved to Pakistan, remaining a religious fanatic for the rest of his life, and at one time he was even sentenced to death for his role in the anti-Ahmadi riots in Pakistan in 1953, only to be freed later. The organisation he founded became the Jamat-i-Islami in Pakistan, while after 1947 the Indian group took over the original name and also India's secular credentials and secular spirit. However, the Jamat-i-Islami of J&K retained a distinct and separate entity, favouring a hard line approach, rejecting the secular line followed by its Indian sister organisation. It favoured a Kashmiri society to be modelled on the Shariat and the enforcement of 'strict fundamental norms'. The organisation was responsible for the mushrooming of a number of religious schools or *madrassas*, which were instrumental in spreading its fundamentalist message of hate. Syed Ali Shah Geelani, by far the most well known face of the organisation, openly favours Kashmir's merger with Pakistan and the rejection of the state's accession to India. The organisation is in fact often regarded as the political mouthpiece of Hizbul Mujahideen (HM)—one of the oldest terrorist groups in Kashmir, with a sizeable local Kashmiri following among its ranks. Thus, the message of hate and secession preached by Jamat-i-Islami of J&K along with other organisations like the Plebiscite Front and Al Fateh as discussed, influenced Kashmiri society, encouraging the sowing of the seeds of separatism. It is also pertinent to note that it was the lack of modern educational facilities in the far flung areas of the state that forced its poor people to send their children to heavily subsidised schools run by such organisations and financed by countries like Pakistan, which preached fundamentalism.

Eighth, there was a sudden upsurge in the number of *madrassas* in the State. This shift from the traditional method of teaching to more fundamentalist teachings had a perceptible impact on the people and the polity.

As the opportunities and availability of education diminished, the young people moved over to the *madrassas*. Funding was received for the *madrassas* from various Islamic countries and inside India. Once you have two generations of Kashmiri youth going through *madrassa* education, in seventies and eighties—that is the prescription of what we are facing today. And once that somewhat

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<sup>6</sup> Dixit 2002.

orthodox, extremist, Islamist intellectual orientation seeped into the consciousness of the youth, Pakistan took full advantage of it.<sup>7</sup>

There was also the well-established philosophy of militants and their mentors to bring about a shift from traditional learning to fundamentalist learning to ensure the propagation of instruction in tune with their philosophy. In order to achieve this there were a number of cases of the burning of schools in the state, with a view to destroying educational institutions not in tune with the fundamentalist philosophy. Thereafter, there was a discernible change in the attitude of the youth brought up on fundamentalist teachings. Another factor that contributed to the rise of fundamentalism was the emigration to Kashmir of *maulvis* of Bangladeshi origin from Assam after the rise of ethnic violence in that state.<sup>8</sup> The growth of *madrassas* and other educational institutions had yet another impact on the people, a growth in political awareness with a rise in literacy levels.

The growth in educational facilities at a variety of levels meant that increasing numbers of Kashmiris were becoming literate. Theoretically literacy enables individuals to have a better comprehension of the social and political forces that affect their lives. Consequently, they gain an increased awareness of politics at local, national and international levels.<sup>9</sup>

Ninth, over the years the number of educated youth in Kashmir had increased. However, there was no corresponding increase in job opportunities in the state. Private investment and industries did not come to the state—had this happened it would have given a boost to enterprises other than those related to the tourism industry. This led to growing disillusionment of the youth, who saw limited avenues for advancement, despite their having been educated. These educated youth became the target of anti-national propaganda, and they subsequently took up arms, in utter and complete frustration—an act many of them regretted on surrender.

Tenth, there was another problem, linked in many ways to the aforementioned problem of lack of opportunities for advancement. The state government as a last resort started creating new government jobs for the people in an effort to provide them with employment. This was, however, a considerable burden on the state exchequer from which these people were paid. Over the years, this resulted in the non-availability of funds for developmental work and provision of social security for people of the state, which further affected the government's image.

Eleventh, the setting up of new television and radio stations gave the government and leaders with different leanings an opportunity to spread their various messages among the people. More important in this respect was the sudden proliferation in newspapers—especially in the local languages—which were able to penetrate deep into the interior regions of the state: 'In 1982, total newspaper

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ganguly 1997: 32.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

circulation in Kashmir was estimated to be around 119,000. Two years later, the circulation had risen to 192,000. In another five years, the figure was 369,000.<sup>10</sup> With this media boom came political, social, economic and linguistic awareness. It was now possible to argue and propagate ideas and issues, uniting the people on subjects and thereby preparing a consensus on important issues. A number of the issues highlighted included corruption, unemployment, lack of industrial development and political poverty. The people were thus getting lessons in political awareness—lessons which they swiftly imbibed, becoming increasingly politically aware and active.

Twelfth and last, one of the most important factors which has contributed to the rise of conflict in Kashmir, is the blatant and comprehensive support from Pakistan. Ever since Pakistan made the blunder of pushing tribal raiders into J&K in 1947 to forcibly take over the state, and was defeated in the process by India, it has maintained that it provides only moral, diplomatic and political support to the 'Kashmiri struggle for independence'. For Pakistan, Kashmir is 'an unfinished agenda of partition'. It is a legacy of Partition that never fails to ignite the sentiments of the Pakistani people. It is a symbol of Pakistani defeat that rankles in the mind of its leaders. Numerous attempts have been made by Pakistan to salvage its lost prestige, till date these have all resulted in further defeat and humiliation. The first among these attempts was the 1947–48 operations and the permanent and, what is more important, legal loss of J&K. After this came the failure in 1965, and the 1971 Indo-Pak War that resulted in the dismemberment of Pakistan. Siachen proved to be yet another costly and bitter defeat, which saw Pakistan outwitted and outdone. And finally, there was Kargil, which was supposed to avenge the Siachen fiasco, but instead caused Pakistan's alienation in international fora, even as traditional allies found it difficult to support this misadventure. Thus, Pakistan has a long history of humiliating defeat at India's hands, which has deeply wounded the Pakistani psyche and self-esteem. This is all the worse for a people who pride themselves on being a 'martial race' and look down upon the Indians as being soft. Gauhar Ayub Khan in a conversation with J.N. Dixit makes a far-fetched though interesting comparison. J.N. Dixit writes, 'The Muslims, according to him, were religiously committed, they were warlike and aggressive, and they were not given to softness and compromises, whereas the Hindus were exactly the opposite: submissive, manoeuvring and clever.'<sup>11</sup> Leaders perpetuated and publicised such wrong notions time and again, attempting to motivate and fool the common people in an attempt to hide their own mistakes and follies. They tried to distort facts or use religion and Kashmir as a rallying point. Under such circumstances, the Pakistani military elite was, has always been and is likely to remain, in eternal quest for ways in which to bring about India's dismemberment and humiliation, in an attempt to wreak revenge on India. With this background, Kashmir served as the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.: 35.

<sup>11</sup> Dixit 2002: 362.

ideal low-cost option for Pakistan, as it allows it to avoid a full-scale conventional war with India, but at the same time allows it to bleed India in a slow yet continuous manner. It also diverted the Pakistani people's minds from the repeated and successful attempts of the armed forces at seizing power, making money and establishing personal fiefdoms. The Pakistani military machine recruits, trains, finances, supports, plans and leads cross-border terrorist operations, especially after the initial phase of indigenous insurgency died down in the state. There has been recruitment in Pakistan, Afghanistan and certain other countries, which have traditionally supported fanatic struggles in the name of *jehad*, of mercenaries who are then termed 'freedom fighters' and are pumped into Kashmir to carry out terrorist activities. Sudan, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Chechnya, etc., are some of these recruiting centres. It is in these places that fundamentalists are recruited and then sent into Kashmir. Students coming to Pakistan for advanced Islamic studies are another fertile recruitment bank, they are brainwashed and sent into Kashmir to help 'liberate' it. It is also important to understand Pakistan's motives, while analysing its role in Kashmir. Pakistan feels that a strong and united India will always remain a threat to its regional ambitions of becoming the centre of the Muslim world. Moreover, it seems more and more probable that natural gas and not oil will be the answer to the world's energy needs. Gas pipelines from Central Asia would perforce have to pass through Pakistan. This would give Pakistan the economic leverage necessary to propel it to its rightful place as a regional power, if not a global power. However, in Pakistan's perception, a strong and united India has been and is likely to remain a threat, with the capability of neutralising it. Therefore, Pakistan's ambitions are not limited to snatching Kashmir, which certainly is the biggest psychological prize, it very probably hopes to see a dismembered India split into smaller insignificant states, so that it can achieve its ambition of becoming the largest and most powerful country in the region. It has been highlighted earlier that the basis of Pakistan's creation was Jinnah's 'two-nation theory'. This ideological baggage continues to haunt subsequent generations of Pakistan's leadership, as they endeavour to substitute secularism with fundamentalism. Further, Pakistani leaders suffer from a sense of perceived irredentism in the case of Kashmir, with little basis for their claim. Thus, keeping in view these long-term aims of Pakistan, the reasons for its support to secessionist forces in Kashmir and, for that matter, to unrest in general in India becomes more understandable. Thus Pakistan's assertion that 'Kashmir runs in the blood of every Pakistani' does not come as a surprise. However, for that matter neither does the Indian reply to this statement, that, 'Kashmir runs in the bone marrow of every Indian.'

## Importance of Kashmir

Having analysed the reasons for emergence of an LIC in J&K, what still requires analysis and explanation is the desperation that seems to drive the two contending sides.

First, Kashmir's importance to India is related to Pakistan's desperation to seize it. Kashmir is the cornerstone of India's policy of being a secular nation. The Indian leaders were always against the 'two-nation theory' even prior to Partition. A sizeable proportion of India's Muslims elected to remain in India after Partition, and today India's Muslim population exceeds that of Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> This and the fact that J&K willingly and legally acceded to India, underlined the failure of the 'two-nation theory'. The last nail in the coffin of this theory was the dismemberment of Pakistan, with East Pakistan seceding to form the separate nation of Bangladesh as an expression of differing linguistic and social principles, rather than electing to remain united on the basis of religious affinity. This is where the case of J&K assumes importance in the Indian context. For India, J&K is a test case for its secular credentials, which stand challenged if dissatisfied elements supported by Pakistan-sponsored terrorism succeed in their separatist endeavour. It is also a test of India's resolve and future unity, in its phenomenal and incomparable diversity.

More than a hundred million Muslims would not still be living in India today if the two-nation theory advanced by Pakistan's founder Mohammed Ali Jinnah, really had been the ultimate truth. They would have migrated en bloc to Pakistan like the exchange of population between Greece and Turkey under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. The emergence of Muslim Bangladesh, and the plight of 50 million Mohajirs (as migrants from India are called) in Pakistan, further destroyed Pakistani pretensions to providing the sub-continent's Muslims with their only and legitimate sanctuary.<sup>13</sup>

Second, J&K is not the only state in the country facing an LIC. Yet it is certainly the state to get the maximum publicity and global attention. India's actions and decisions in J&K thus have the potential of setting a precedent for the handling of other regions making similar demands. Weak responses and indicators on Kashmir, more so than any other region of the country, can harm India's case. Therefore, yet again, Kashmir becomes the test case of Indian unity, albeit from a different perspective.

Third, the location of J&K on the northern periphery of India holds special strategic significance. Its proximity to China, the erstwhile USSR and present day Central Asian Republics, Afghanistan and Pakistan means that it has the potential of functioning as a link to trade and commerce in the region, connecting the rest of the Indian landmass to these countries. This is of great significance in relation to the vast reserves of natural gas in the region and the opening up of nascent markets in Central Asia.

Fourth, the economic aspect is further cemented by India's vital security concerns in the region. The region represented by Pakistan, Afghanistan and certain other countries bordering these has become the hub of terrorist activities, the effects of

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<sup>12</sup> Incidentally India's population of Muslims is the second largest in the world after Indonesia.

<sup>13</sup> Datta-Ray 1999: 215.

which are being felt in many distant corners of the world. Politically the region is volatile, with fundamentalist governments encouraged terrorist groups and their activities. Terrorism incubated in this area, being exported to various countries in far-flung regions of the globe, and India has proved no exception, as a recipient of such cross-border terrorism with Kashmir bearing the brunt. In fact if India were to lose control of J&K, there is every possibility that it will become an extension of this region of perpetual turmoil, posing a grave danger to the rest of the country, and becoming yet another centre of global terrorism. It is for this reason that putting a stop to cross-border terrorism in the region and retaining control over it has become imperative for India.

Fifth, the major rivers, which are the main water resource in northern India, flow through J&K, feeding the rich plains of Punjab. In the event of a war, especially in view of the increasing water requirements of both countries, it is likely that this resource will play a pivotal role if India is willing to employ the leverage that the possession of this resource gives it in the national interest. India has not sought to abrogate the Indus Water Treaty that it has with Pakistan, under which water from these rivers goes to Pakistan. However, the threat of such an eventuality does play on the minds of Pakistani strategists, and is yet another reason why they are so desperate to gain possession of Kashmir, and why India is all the more determined to retain her control over it.

Sixth and last, Kashmir acts as a natural barrier, protecting the Indian mainland from any infiltrating or invading force. It may not be an impregnable obstacle, yet its terrain, being in many places mountainous and inhospitable, serves as an important deterrent. The area remains snowbound for most of the year, with the only means of access being the passes that are open for a short period of time during the summer months. It, therefore, provides the country with natural protection, which can be invaluable for its defence strategy.

## The Fuse is Lit

The rumblings in Kashmir's polity and in its society were well and truly audible in 1988. The short periods of peace that followed these disturbances were conspicuous, representing as they did a lull before the storm, rather than the return of peace. Peace, in fact, did not get even a semblance of a chance to prevail in the state, as the second half of 1988 erupted in bomb blasts, riots, clashes with police, public processions, symbolic display of blatant disregard for national sentiments and, for the first time, planned acts of terrorism. Starting from August 1988, the state saw a number of clear indicators of discontentment, wrath and finally, emergence of insurgency from what had till date been a campaign of sustained subversion. The very first day of August witnessed two bomb blasts, with the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) claiming responsibility, thus formally marking the beginning of a violent struggle. This was accompanied by Amanullah Khan, the head of the organisation, formally declaring in an interview the start of what he termed



an 'armed struggle' from an 'uprising'.<sup>14</sup> Similar incidents followed on 4 and 12 August 1988, while a number of Pakistani flags were on display on 14 August 1988, followed by a display of black flags on 15 August. This was immediately followed by police clashes with crowds of demonstrators the very next day, which resulted in the death of one civilian and injured 50 others. In another indicator of the stark reality of the situation, large-scale riots took place in Srinagar, after the death of President Zia-ul-Haq of Pakistan on 17 August 1988. Similar incidents followed throughout the rest of the month, clearly indicating the mood of the people and the shape of things to follow.

In an attempt to explain the reason for this seemingly inexplicable behaviour, Jagmohan writes:

In regard to the disturbances, a number of basic questions arise. How is it that on Pakistan Day green flags were hoisted and on India's Independence Day black flags were brought out? Why did General Zia's death become an occasion for large-scale rioting in Srinagar, Baramulla, and other towns, when there was no such rioting anywhere in Pakistan.... The answer, in broad terms, to all these questions lies in the deep-rooted disposition of local Kashmiri leadership to exploit religion and whip up pro-Pakistan sentiments. Whosoever has been out of power has found it expedient to talk of 'opening the Rawalpindi Road'; of 'all Kashmir rivers flowing towards Pakistan'; and of 'resettlement of brethren who have gone to the other side'.<sup>15</sup>

The acts of violence, the civil disobedience and the increasing terrorist strikes continued into 1989, with the civil administration in what seemed to be a state of total paralysis. On 11 February 1989 a major demonstration was organised to commemorate the death anniversary of Maqbool Butt. Intermittent incidents of violence in the state led up to the next Independence Day celebrations. It was a repeat of the previous year's incidents. The anniversary of Pakistani independence, 14 August 1989, was celebrated, while 15 August 1989, the anniversary of Indian independence, was boycotted with black flags being flown at a number of places. This was followed by large-scale violence ending with the killing of Mohammad Yusuf Halwai, an NC leader, on 21 August 1989. On 14 September 1989, two unidentified gunmen killed Tikka Lal Taploo, a Kashmiri Pandit of repute, who was also the Vice President of the J&K BJP unit. On 4 November, N.K. Ganjoo, an ex-judge, who had sentenced Maqbool Butt to death, was killed.

The effect that these killings would have was appreciated and in fact counted on when they were planned by secessionist organisations. The aim was to reiterate

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<sup>14</sup> The JKLF, which was formed in 1965, has been demanding independence from both India and Pakistan. It has however been sidelined by Pakistan, which preferred to support pro-Pakistan groups like the Hizbul Mujahideen. The declaration by Amanullah Khan seems to have been well timed with general disillusionment with the electoral process in the state, accompanied by the arrival of trained cadres to launch an armed struggle.

<sup>15</sup> Jagmohan 1992: 114.

the central and state governments' inefficiency by causing the breakdown of the administrative machinery in the state. Victims included officials of the police, judiciary, the state executive, politicians of the ruling party and members of the press, besides the common man on the street. This wide cross-section represented the most influential sections of society, thereby destroying any semblance of government control. It was probably felt by the secessionists and their mentors in Pakistan that this state of affairs would either result in the breakdown of the government machinery, to the extent that it would result in the state's secession, or that the secession would be expedited by terrorists being trained and exported from across the LoC.

This condition was only worsened by the state's administrative machinery, which was on the verge of collapse. Serious differences between the ruling alliance of the NC and Congress(I) made decision-making difficult, and the faith of the people was eroded by contradictory and derogatory remarks made by both parties against each other.<sup>16</sup>

The conditions were well exploited by both Pakistan and JKLF, who began a media blitz in both Pakistan and Kashmir, with the aim of projecting the Indian central government and the state government of J&K as the root cause of all its (J&K's) problems. This further fanned secessionist sentiments as the common people of the state were given to understand that salvation and prosperity lay in the state's independence from India. Posters and pamphlets flooded the streets and people demonstrated against the government's inability to deal with the situation. It was made to look as if the writ of the state government no longer ran in the state, and that the Central Government had lost the will to hold on to the reigns of power in the region. Religion was used yet again, as a means of whipping up communal passions, with Kashmiri Pandits bearing the brunt of the growing polarisation between the Hindus and Muslims in the state.

The state government's gross inability to run day-to-day administration, and carry out the constitutional role assigned to it, was further exposed when elections to the Lok Sabha were held in November 1989. The total lack of control of the administration resulted in an abysmally low voter turnout, where people did not turn out to vote more out of fear of reprisals from the JKLF cadres, rather than due to an absolute lack of interest. It was a stark reminder to the country of the deep-rooted malaise in Kashmir's polity, and the utter lack of confidence of the population in the governing authority. It was also an indicator of the strength of subversive organisations like the JKLF, which had successfully sabotaged the electoral process before the eyes of the world at large. This apparent failure of the state government had a deep impact on the psyche of the people of the state and also on the state's administrative machinery. Kashmir was falling deeper and deeper into a quagmire of subversive and secessionist activity that threatened to unhinge it from the national mainstream.

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<sup>16</sup> See Jagmohan (1992) for an assessment of the political situation in Kashmir during this period.

Another incident, which took place immediately after the failure at conducting successful elections in the state, was the kidnapping of Dr Rubaiya Sayeed, the daughter of the then Union Home Minister, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. The kidnapping took place on the 8 December 1989. It was a cowardly, though extremely intelligent, ploy on the part of the terrorists, who visualised weaknesses in the Indian polity and governing machinery. They probably expected the state administration to wilt under the pressure of death threats to a high profile citizen. They also expected to derive not only political mileage from the act, but also hoped to succeed in getting some of their arrested comrades released in a blaze of national and international publicity. Unfortunately, this plan of the JKLF militants succeeded, with the state government giving in to the pressure of increasing threats. Five militants were released in exchange for the release of Rubaiya Sayeed.<sup>17</sup> This single incident proved to have a lasting impact on the policies of future governments in the state, and on the people's mindset, and they saw this incident as a precedent. Subsequent governments continued to give in to terrorist demands, projecting the country as a weak and soft target. Kidnapping thus became an effective instrument of subversion.

The compromise on Mufti's daughter on the one hand and Jagmohan's harsh rule on the other was fully exploited. There are still arguments by the Pakistanis that this is a weak government, which does not have the guts to really resist terrorist activities. Secondly, it is a government, which kills the Kashmiri people; it has no feelings for the common people of Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>18</sup>

These two factors proved to be the bane of counter-insurgency operations in the Valley, where weakness on one hand and highhandedness on the other were successfully used by Pakistan and militant organisations as examples to show the common people how they were being exploited and also to play on their sentiments of having been aggrieved.

The beginning of the 1990s further heightened insurgency in the state, with secessionist elements within and outside the state regarding independence from India as just around the corner. The paramilitary forces and the police were increasingly targeted, along with those few amongst the media and administration who dared to stand up to the militants. While there may not have been professional, motivated, well-planned strikes by the insurgents during this period, the people's growing disenchantment and frustration took the form of a popular movement, in which they came out into the streets shouting slogans and waving flags to show their support for the insurgency. The JKLF had successfully completed the first stage of insurgency, building up secure bases in Pakistan and taking subversion to a level at which there no institution in the state administration remained unaffected by their calls for *hartals* (strikes) and blackouts. The insurgency was made to look

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<sup>17</sup> The five militants released were, Hamid Sheikh, Sher Khan, Javed Ahmed Zarger, Mohammad Kalwal and Mohammad Altaf Butt.

<sup>18</sup> Dixit 2002.

all the more widespread and effective by this complete failure of the state's administrative machinery, and it was widely believed that 26 January 1990 would be the day Kashmir would achieve independence. A report received from Jamil Qureshi by Jagmohan—the Governor of J&K during this period—states:

In fact, January 26 was promised by the militants to be a day of supposed deliverance when the new People's Republic of Independent Kashmir was going to be declared and foreign correspondents invited to be witness to the birth of the new State.<sup>19</sup>

## Operation Topac

This sudden collapse of the state's administration, coupled with rising public anger and overt expressions of dissatisfaction, came as a shock to many in the state government and at the Centre. However, it was no surprise to Pakistan, which was following the progress of Operation Topac. The reader would be familiar with repeated Pakistani attempts at wresting Kashmir from India through both LICs and MICs. However, time and again, their efforts failed because of their inability to read the situation and feel the pulse of the population. After the attempt in 1947–48, followed by the 1965 misadventure, Pakistan still felt that the population of Kashmir was up in arms against the Indian government and was waiting for an opportunity to rebel. They also felt that all that was required now was a kindling of the flames of separatism followed by attacks to bleed Indian forces and a final blow in the form of full-scale attacks aimed at crippling the state and the country as a whole. This broad strategy formed the basis of Pakistani thinking, and it was this reasoning that caused a sharp increase in the tempo of the agitation in the Valley. Operation Topac was the brainchild of General Zia-ul-Haq, who saw in it the culmination of Pakistan's quest to gain Kashmir. It will be interesting to read a three-phase projection of this operation, prepared by an Indian Defence Review (IDR) team, which may not have succeeded in its entirety, yet the forces that it set in motion continue to bleed the Indian state and its armed forces.

In the first phase, which may, if necessary, last a couple of years, we will assist our Kashmiri brethren in getting hold of the power apparatus of the State by political subversion and intrigue. Power must apparently remain with those whom New Delhi favours. We must therefore ensure that certain 'favoured politicians' from the ruling elite be selected who could collaborate with us in subverting all effective organs of the State.

### Phase 1

A low level insurgency against the regime, so that it is under siege, but does not collapse, as we would not yet want Central rule imposed by Delhi. We plant

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<sup>19</sup> Jagmohan 1992: 342.

our chosen men in all key positions; they will subvert the police forces, financial institutions, the communication network and other important organizations. We whip up anti-Indian feelings amongst the students and peasants, preferably on some religious issues, so that we can enlist their active support for rioting and anti-Government demonstrations. Organise and train subversive elements and armed groups with capabilities, initially to deal with para-military forces located in the Valley. Adopt and develop means to cut off lines of communication between Jammu and Kashmir and within Kashmir and Ladakh by stealth, without recourse to force. The road over Zojila up to Kargil and the road over Khardungla should receive our special attention. In collaboration with Sikh extremists, create chaos and terror in Jammu to divert attention from the Valley at a critical juncture and discredit the regime even in the Hindu mind. Establish virtual control in those parts of the Kashmir Valley where the Indian Army is not located or deployed. The Southern Kashmir Valley may be one such region.

### Phase 2

Exert maximum pressure on the Siachen, Kargil and Rajauri-Poonch sectors to force the Indian Army to deploy reserve formations outside the main Kashmir Valley. Attack and destroy base depots and HQs located at Srinagar, Pattan, Kupwara, Baramulla, Bandipur and Chowkiwala by covert action at a given time. Some Afghan Mujahideens by then settled in Azad Kashmir, will then infiltrate in selected pockets with a view to extending areas of our influence. This aspect will require detailed and ingenious planning. The fiasco of Operation Gibraltar (1965) holds many lessons for us here. Finally a Special Force under selected retired officers belonging to Azad Kashmir, with the hard core consisting of Afghans, will be ready to attack and destroy airfields, radio stations, block Banihal Tunnel and Kargil-Leh Highway. At a certain stage of the operation Punjab and adjacent areas of Jammu and Kashmir will be put under maximum pressure internally by our offensive posture.

### Phase 3

Detailed plans for liberation of Kashmir and establishment of an independent Islamic State in the third phase will follow.<sup>20</sup>

Operation Topac failed, a prime reason behind this failure being that once again, just as in 1965, Pakistan had failed to gauge its own capability vis-à-vis that of India's. Yet, it is interesting to note that Pakistan did succeed to a very great extent in the first phase and not only did it succeed that time, the forces it put into play continue to create conditions of instability marred by subversion till this date. What is it that caused the failure of the implementation of the plan in its entirety?

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<sup>20</sup> *Indian Defence Review*, July 1989.

Was it Pakistan's inability to achieve the stage of critical mass, or did India's ability to thwart any such attempt finally dawn on them? Very probably it was a mix of the two. Nevertheless, Pakistani dreams of launching the second phase of Operation Topac came true when they were finally able to infiltrate into the Kargil sector in Kashmir in 1999. This, of course, did not occur under General Zia-ul-Haq's regime. In fact, it occurred several years after his death, under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The prime mover behind it was the then chief of the Pakistani armed forces, General Parvez Musharraf. Given the benefit of hindsight, Zia-ul-Haq was probably shrewd enough to realise the dangers of launching a Kargil-like intrusion despite the much more favourable *Afghanistanised* atmosphere that prevailed at the time. By the time the intrusion was finally launched by General and later President Musharraf, the international mood had changed, and the plan backfired, leaving Pakistan once again defeated and humiliated with another embarrassing and costly moral and military disaster.

## A Period of Struggle

The period between 1991 and 1994 can be termed a period of struggle. After the 1989–90 active insurgency, which saw militancy on the rise and increasingly in control of the struggle in the state, it became relatively difficult for the militants to garner support from the people who had started suffering in the face of punitive measures taken against them, on suspicion of collusion, by both the militants and the security forces, as also in the face of deprivations brought about by the militant upsurge paralysing the state. Growing frustration on the part of the militants at not having succeeded in their immediate aims resulted in their unleashing a further reign of terror.

However, it must be mentioned that though large-scale active support of militancy had abated, the militants did still receive the support of certain sections of the people. A factor that contributed to this was certain cardinal mistakes committed by the security forces, and the lack of a long-term solution to the problem evolved by the government. Some of these incidents played a vital role in alienating the population and keeping temperatures on the boil in J&K.

The security of Srinagar, and of certain other politically active towns in the Valley, was in the hands of the paramilitary forces. Some of these forces did not have the requisite training or extensive experience for counter-insurgency operations. Given their sudden deployment in the area, the result was a number of unfortunate incidents, which were highlighted and used to stir up the people by both opportunistic politicians and militant organisations. This led to a polarisation of the security forces, even as they came under greater scrutiny and criticism from various human rights groups. One of the first of such incidents took place on 19 January 1990. During a search operation conducted by Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in the Chota Bazaar and Guru Bazaar areas of Srinagar they were fired upon by militants, and in the ensuing firefight, 50 civilians were

killed.<sup>21</sup> Allegations and counter allegations were traded between the newly appointed Governor, Jagmohan, and the former Chief Minister, Farooq Abdullah, with respect to the orders for the search. However, irrespective of responsibility for the operation, the incident served as a motivating and rallying point for anti-national elements, who had every intention of using such mishaps to incite the people and embarrass the administrative machinery. It also demonstrated a deep divide between the governor and former chief minister and exposed the true face of politics in the state at that time, where such mishaps were being used by all concerned to meet their own ends. Farooq Abdullah at one end of the spectrum, had had an unenviable past record as chief minister, he was however determined to reins the reins of power in the state. Jagmohan, on the other end, had been newly appointed governor of J&K, and was an able and efficient administrator. He was, however, in a hurry to eradicate militancy from the state, and in doing so was at times riding roughshod over people's feelings and the political structure. The mix of these two elements on the J&K political scene was for the most part volatile, and the ultimate sufferers in all of this manoeuvring were the people of the state.

The beginning of 1990 saw Pakistan's well-coordinated plan, to destabilise and eventually take over Kashmir, on its way. There are some 'independent' and 'unbiased' authorities of international repute on the Kashmir issue who term it a 'disputed legacy'. It is pertinent to debate some of the contentions of one such authority. Commenting on the role of Pakistan, Alastair Lamb writes, 'Pakistan could not be expected to go on for ever ignoring events next door which touched so deeply upon its sense of national identity...'<sup>22</sup> The author is probably justifying one country's interference in the internal affairs of another, because of self-professed ideals of national identity. The author further goes on to state that:

In the Vale of Kashmir the Indian Army reinforced the existing security police, notably the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), in imposing an increasingly severe regime of curfews and the usual measures of house searches, arbitrary arrests and retaliatory punishment of the civil population in the Vale of Kashmir, accompanied by rapes and looting common in such situations, as well as the punitive destruction of houses, indeed of entire neighbourhoods. The process continues...in what is now to all intents and purposes an Indian Military occupation of conquered land.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Bhattacharjea 1994: 262.

<sup>22</sup> Lamb 1992: 322.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*: 338. It would not be appropriate to dismiss the charges levelled by the author off hand. However, it may have been more appropriate (like many of his other well-documented and researched evidences present in the book) if such statements were supported with some form of evidence. The casual use of phrases, such as, 'in imposing an increasingly severe regime of curfews and the usual measures of house searches, arbitrary arrests and retaliatory punishment of the civil population in the Vale of Kashmir, accompanied by rapes and looting common in such situations'; and the casual attribution of heinous crimes such as rape to the Indian security forces, without

It may be worth quoting from the report of an American-Russian Study Mission titled, 'Afghanistan and Kashmir'. It says, '...the leader of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front, Amanullah Khan, disclosed in January 1990 that the protest in Kashmir had been carefully planned and supported by well-trained armed insurgents coming from Pakistan territory'.<sup>24</sup> This proxy war was orchestrated on a number of fronts. One of these was an attempt at ethnic cleansing, where the Hindus (Kashmiri Pandits) in the Valley were specifically targeted, resulting in their exodus from Kashmir. What should be noted is that such targeting of Hindus was not a spontaneous outburst on the part of an angry Muslim population, it was a well thought out plan, executed by a handful of militants on the orders of their Pakistani masters, their aim being to expel the remnants of a Hindu presence from the Valley, to facilitate its subsequent merger with Pakistan.

The action was also aimed at creating and in some cases widening the divide between Hindus and Muslims both in J&K and also in the rest of India. It also aimed at killing whatever remained of the Kashmiri liberal ethos of *Kashmiryat*.<sup>25</sup>

Migrations of the Hindu population out of Kashmir commenced in the beginning of 1990, and had turned into a deluge by April of that year. While the migrants complained of crowds threatening them to leave the Valley, it subsequently turned out that these 'crowds' were actually recordings played over loudspeakers at the behest of militants. However, the situation took on a more menacing turn, when select killings of prominent Hindus were systematically carried out by the terrorists.<sup>26</sup> On 13 February 1990 Lassa Kaul was kidnapped and killed. H.L. Khera, General Manager, Hindustan Machine Tools was kidnapped on 6 April 1990 and subsequently murdered on 10 April 1990. There were many more similar cases. These killings led to the eventual exodus of Hindus, who were forced to leave their homeland, becoming refugees in the process (see Figure 6.1).

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the support of any evidence, is unexpected from a scholar with such a distinguished academic record. In this context a comparative study of the track records of the Indian and Pakistani armies, would be illuminating, though in no way a justification for any atrocities that may have been committed. Also very illuminating in this context is the report of the Hamoodur Rehman Commission, which contains various pertinent comments on Pakistan Army's role during the 1971 Indo-Pak War. Moreover, it must be mentioned that Lamb's views are to a large extent negated by the more authoritative accounts of authors such as Hodson (1969) and Khan (n.d.).

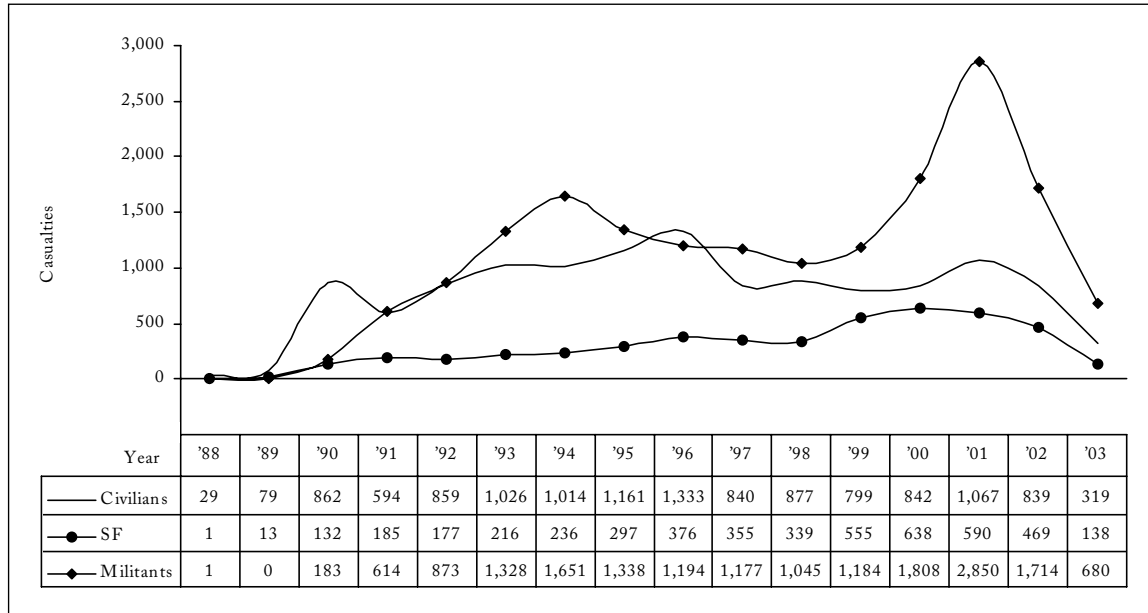
<sup>24</sup> Lieutenant General (Retd) Javed Nasir, 'Calling the Indian Army Chief's Bluff', *Defence Journal*, February-March 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Pakistan did succeed in its endeavour, to a certain extent, with some migrant Kashmiri Pandits asking for 'Panun Kashmir', and with the demands of late from certain political parties for the division of the state into Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. However, such demands have not found favour with any of the major political parties at the Centre, and are unlikely to get a sympathetic hearing.

<sup>26</sup> The terms 'insurgents' and 'terrorists' have been used interchangeably in the text. When insurgents have carried out acts of terrorism, they have been referred to as terrorists and their actions termed, terrorist acts. It must be borne in mind that terrorist acts may be employed in an insurgency—a movement with mass appeal—thus requiring the use of the term 'terrorism' to describe them.



Figure 6.1  
Casualty Details—J&K



Source: www.satp.org.

Note: Figures till 22 June 2003.

Even this grave and sad chapter in the history of Kashmir, which has been compared by some authors to the time of Sultan Sikander Butshikan's reign,<sup>27</sup> was immediately politicised. Local politicians accused Jagmohan, the governor of the state, of encouraging Kashmiri Pandits to migrate out of J&K. This was not all. He was also accused of providing them with government transport for the purpose. It is a sad commentary on the state of affairs in J&K, where the only reaction to the well-planned proxy war unleashed by the Pakistan-backed militants was a series of disjointed and knee-jerk reactions, with vested interests in getting political mileage from the tragedy. Commenting on the political attitude during the period Jagmohan writes:

I was sad at the manner in which the serious affairs of the State were being handled, sad at the absence of mature and incisive thinking, sad at the unconcern shown by political parties about the real problems and their roots. Could a system that reared such superficialities, really fight the grim battle of terrorism whose fangs had spread....<sup>28</sup>

While there was adequate and irrefutable evidence of Pakistan's role in the overt insurgency in Kashmir at this stage, it is another irrefutable fact that efforts at both the state and central levels were far from being either cohesive or coherent and were indeed far from being constructive. The swift spread of insurgency was not viewed with the necessary seriousness, and worse still was made use of by political opponents to score points off each other at great cost to peace and stability.

As insurgency spread, the degree, frequency and precision of militant acts increased; a reign of terror began in the state, wherein the writ of gun-wielding insurgents prevailed. In a gradual manner, the strength of the army and paramilitary forces in the state also went up, as they attempted to restore a semblance of order and confidence amongst the population. Slowly but surely the tide turned against the militants, as is apparent from various estimates and figures available from that time. Most of these militants were locals. The two main outfits which spearheaded the movement were the JKLF and HM. Of these, the JKLF favoured independence and was primarily engaged in an indigenous struggle for Kashmir's independence from India, albeit with Pakistan's support. On the other hand, the HM, whose cadre was primarily local, was headed mainly by Pakistani nationals. Moreover, it differed from the JKLF on another vital point, in that its aim was the ultimate merger of Kashmir with Pakistan. After a brief period, during which it enjoyed considerable support from Pakistan, the JKLF saw this support fade, with the result that the HM became the most powerful militant group in the state.

This shift in support from the relatively well-accepted and established JKLF to the HM was presumably because the latter was willing to toe the line and help swing public opinion in Pakistan's favour. This gave Pakistan the requisite toehold

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<sup>27</sup> Raza 1996: 83.

<sup>28</sup> Jagmohan 1992: 443.

in the Valley, and helped it exploit the propaganda machinery of the HM at a crucial time, when separatist passions and disillusionment were at their peak in J&K. However, the HM cadre's relative inexperience and lack of will to stand and fight, in relation to local militants in the early 1990s, was probably not factored into the equation by the Pakistanis. Despite the best attempts of their Pakistani mentors, the HM militants preferred to fire from stand-off positions well out of the way of the effective range of weapons, rendering their various attacks and ambushes ineffective. The militants also preferred to give up, surrendering rather than standing and fighting. This was in sharp contrast to the Indian Army, which had been blooded in its fight against the hardy Nagas, the militants in Punjab and the LTTE in Sri Lanka. The Indian forces reported hauls of large caches of weapons and the capture of many militants. Thus, the Pakistanis were forced to change tactics.

At this stage of the struggle, it will be worth highlighting that Pakistan had by now become a production unit of terrorism. Waves of *mujahideen*, so-called religious warriors, came out of its *madrassas*, which were the religious schools that preached a message of hate, calling terrorism a *jehad*, or holy war. These 'terrorist factories' received their support, in the form of finance and fresh recruits, from a number of countries, that harboured like-minded fanatics, namely, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Algeria and Afghanistan amongst others. The initial crop of terrorists was the indirect produce of USA. They had been trained and armed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the USA to fight in Afghanistan against the Soviet invasion of that country. Pakistan became a ready and willing partner of the USA, in the induction of these terrorists into Afghanistan. The Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (the ISI) took over the role of shaping the struggle against Soviet intervention and their success in driving out the Soviets won them much support in the corridors of power in Washington, D.C.<sup>29</sup> Terrorism has, historically, always rebounded on its sponsors, and the USA, Egypt and more recently Pakistan are likely to agree with the truth of this statement. General V.P. Malik, ex-Chief of Army Staff, makes a telling observation in this regard when he says, 'State sponsored terrorism, due to the nature of socio-politics on the sub-continent, is a double-edged weapon. It is like a wicked dog, which often bites the hand that feeds it.' He further adds:

India experienced it with Bhindranwale, a Sikh cleric who took to politics, and later joined hands with the Pak ISI to collect weapons and equipment in 1983–84. Militancy spawned by him in India's Punjab with the assistance of Pak ISI lasted nearly a decade. India had a similar experience with the LTTE of Sri

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<sup>29</sup> Ironically, the very same terrorist factories, which had been financed and supported by the USA in Pakistan, bit the hand that had fed them on 11 September 2001. This was terrorism at its most spectacular and horrible, it was the worst terror attack against the USA, in which commercial aeroplanes were hijacked and flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre, a symbol of the economic might of the USA, in New York bringing them crashing down. Another hijacked aeroplane was flown into the Pentagon, a symbol of the military might of the USA, in Washington, D.C. and the fourth crashed in a field in Pennsylvania, killing all on board.

Lanka in 1980s. After obtaining training from India, the LTTE went against the Indian forces when, at the request of the Sri Lankan Government, they were inducted for peace keeping in Sri Lanka. Pakistan is facing that situation now after sponsoring Afghan Mujahideen and Taliban in the 1980s and 1990s. These organisations were raised during the military government of General Zia-ul-Haq. Since then, elements from these organisations have been sponsored and used by the ISI for proxy war or covert actions in Afghanistan and India. This genie has now grown so big that the Pak Government is finding it difficult to rein it in and reform the Madrassas that are a breeding ground for extremists and terrorists.<sup>30</sup>

With the Afghanistan struggle over, and the Taliban emerging victorious, the terrorists being trained in Pakistan were rendered jobless. Thus it was now India that became the prime target of *jehad*, wherein the self-proclaimed *jehadis* could be utilised. The time of their induction coincided with the loss of momentum of insurgency in J&K. They were thus used by Pakistan as a means of giving a fresh impetus to the upheavals in J&K. Pakistan created pure *tanzeems* (groups) of foreign militants with a majority of Afghans and a sprinkling of other equally motivated cadres from other countries. These groups were almost always controlled and led by Pakistani commanders. The terrorists were battle hardened and highly motivated, fighting for what they perceived to be just and righteous principles of *jehad*. Moreover, they were mercenaries who were being paid handsomely for their tenure-based incursions into J&K, with additional perks and rewards for getting high-value targets. One of the first groups to surface and begin a reign of terror in the region was the Harkat-ul-Ansar (HUA). Names do not, however, mean much as the names of many terrorist outfits operating in the region were changed overnight after their deeds had attracted widespread international attention and condemnation.<sup>31</sup> These groups dominated by foreign militants surfaced in late 1992, and till date they continue to hold sway over the movement in J&K, having pushed indigenous groups into the background.

Another important factor, which developed simultaneously with the increase in militancy in the State, was the aggression of Pakistani regulars along the LoC. This probably had a two-fold aim. First, was the need to keep the Indian troops engaged along the border while terrorists were infiltrated across the LoC to perpetrate their acts of terror in J&K with impunity while the Indian forces were otherwise engaged. Second, was the aim of bleeding the Indian forces by keeping up the pressure on them along the LoC, ensuring that they suffered fatigue and casualties. It was also ensured that optimum strength was maintained given Pakistan's heavy artillery shelling during this period. Thus, there was an overall sense of *déjà vu* in the

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<sup>30</sup> General (Retd) V.P. Malik, PVSM, AVSM, 'Indo Pak Security Relations in the Coming Decade—Lessons from Kargil for the Future', an article on [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

<sup>31</sup> Again, ironically, widespread condemnation only followed post 11 September, after the life, property or interests of countries like the USA were threatened by terrorism. Till that time their activities were viewed as remaining well within the limits of 'civilised conduct'.

Pakistani camp, as, after 20 years, they once again smelt the opportunity to get even with India for the repeated humiliations they had suffered at its hands. On one hand was the rapidly increasing militancy in J&K, and on the other, was the LoC that had been set alight by increasingly offensive displays of military belligerence on the part of Pakistan.

Slowly but surely, with the failure of indigenous militancy in J&K, militant groups based in, financed, controlled, and led by Pakistan—like the HUA—gained the upper hand, while the JKLF was pushed into the background. However, the influx of foreign militants had a negative impact on the locals in the Valley. They soon understood that the shift in power from local to foreign militants spelt the doom of any dreams they may have had of Kashmir's independence. Moreover, they also came face-to-face with professional and cold-blooded killers, who did not care about the Kashmiri cause, but were there to perform a job for which they were being well paid. Favours were initially asked and subsequently extracted from the locals by these foreign militants. This proved to be a heavy burden both in terms of the financial cost involved and in terms of implications of loss of honour if they were not provided. Support, which at one time was spontaneous, was now provided under threat and coercion. Fear rather than respect became the means of extracting support. The influx of foreign militants who had no linguistic or ethnic affinity with the local Kashmiris, further alienated the locals. The selfish, brutal and mercenary behaviour of Afghans, who had emerged in the hierarchies of foreign militant-based organisations like the HUA, increased this divide. Increased pressure from the Indian security forces also began to tell on the morale of local militants, who were not mentally prepared either for deprivations or the life and death situations that militancy entailed. The romance of being militants soon faded in the face of the harsh realities and the difficulties involved in leading such lives.

In the political arena, pressure began to build on the central government to replace the governor Jagmohan, who was eventually, after a very brief tenure in office, replaced by Girish Chandra Saxena on 24 May 1990. This was not only a political embarrassment for the government; it also proved to be an indicator of the directionless and short-sighted approach followed.

The year 1991 saw the government giving in time and again to the dictates of the militants. After Rubaiya Sayeed kidnapping episode, which ended in her release after a costly bargain had been struck with the militants who had kidnapped her; a precedent had been set which enabled the militants to use this ploy to bargain with the government time and again. A number of similar incidents took place during the year, which proved to the militants, their mentors and the world at large that India was willing to give in at the slightest pressure, whatever the cost. On 27 February 1991, Nahida Imtiaz, the daughter of Saifuddin Soz, was kidnapped and subsequently freed after the release of a terrorist. On 28 June 1991 K. Doraiswamy, a senior executive of the Indian Oil Corporation, was kidnapped and subsequently released on 20 August 1991 in exchange for four terrorists. On 13 August 1991, S.L. Khosla, an insurance executive, was kidnapped and released in exchange for a terrorist. In September of the same year, K.C. Gupta, a bank

executive, was kidnapped and released in exchange for a top Hizbullah terrorist. During the same month, the brother-in-law of the then Union Minister, Ghulam Nabi Azad, was abducted by Al-Umar, a terrorist group, and set free in exchange for some terrorists. There was also a case of a number of teachers and doctors in Srinagar being kidnapped by Al-Umar. They were subsequently released in exchange for seven terrorists.<sup>32</sup>

After a seesaw battle of wits in 1992, which saw both sides attempting to establish their supremacy, 1993 came as a watershed year. This year saw an increase in the army presence in the state as also an increase in pressure applied on the militants. The results of this policy soon began to show. However, the pressure of foreign militant groups also began to tell on the security forces. This was specially the case with the paramilitary forces, which did not have the nature and degree of experience which the army had—a factor that was exploited by the militants on a number of occasions when they incited these forces to react to their sniping actions in public places. The results of some of these incidents, which went out of control, were catastrophic and unfortunate, and were no solution to an already disturbed situation. Instead, they brought untold misery to innocent victims among the common people, humiliation and shame to the soldiers and embarrassment to the government of the day. These lapses cannot be condoned in any way, as there is no means of justifying mistakes precipitated by a lack of training and incorrect reactions to tense situations, even in the light of the difficult conditions under which troops operate in LICs.

An example of one such unfortunate incident took place on 6 January 1983 at Sopore. 'Border Security Force (BSF) men indiscriminately fire and kill 40 persons in Sopore; also burn down a part of the town in retaliation for the killing of two colleagues.'<sup>33</sup> This incident not only sullied the reputation of the BSF in the Valley but also of the security forces at large.

## The Tide Turns

In March 1993, two incidents occurred which were to have far-reaching consequences. The first was the formation of the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) on 9 March 1993, and second the nomination of General (Retd) K.V. Krishna Rao as the Governor of J&K on 11 March 1993. The APHC brought together the various faces of the Kashmir struggle under a single umbrella, giving a semblance of unity to the political struggle of a number of factions in Kashmir. However, it also brought into the open the sharp differences that existed between various members of APHC. These differences manifested themselves in demands varying from a merger with Pakistan as one extreme, to a more traditional line of self-determination at the other end of the spectrum. Despite the predominantly political nature of the organisation, it has consistently refused to participate in elections held

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<sup>32</sup> www.satp.org.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

under the Indian Constitution. The nature and approach of the organisation will be dealt with in a subsequent section of the book.

The second incident was a watershed in the putting down of insurgency in the state. General Rao's advent on the scene gave the movement against terrorist violence boost it desperately needed. Lieutenant General V.K. Nayar describing the situation says:

The situation started turning around during the summer of 1993 with the appointment of General Krishna Rao as the Governor. He outlined a somewhat more comprehensive policy in four major fields of: militancy; revamping of administration; revival of political activity; and dealing with alienation of people. The anti militancy drive centred around the formulation of a unified concept at the state and field level to plan, co-ordinate and execute CI operations, establishment of a counter insurgency grid, strengthening and better management of LC, improvement of intelligence and rebuilding of Police Force.<sup>34</sup>

This is a clear and concise description of the effort, which brought about a change in the state.

The first major challenge that General Rao faced after being appointed governor was the Hazratbal Crisis.<sup>35</sup> A number of militants (figures vary from 40 to 12) taking advantage of the respect and reverence that the security forces show to shrines associated with any religion, took shelter in the mosque at Hazratbal. Having received information of this, the security forces surrounded the mosque on 15 October 1993. Thus commenced the long haul, with the militants holed up inside the shrine, and the security forces surrounding it, while the Government played a waiting game, not wanting to enter the religious shrine, intent on treading very carefully, especially in view of the media blaze surrounding the affair. International opinion shapers also hovered at the fringes as interested observers. The siege finally ended on 16 November 1993, after protracted negotiations and the use of various tactics aimed at ending the crisis. These varied from cutting off electricity and stopping water and food supply to subsequently restoring the same after an order from the High Court. Negotiating agencies were also represented by a wide cross-section including the governor, IG Police and the Hurriyat leaders.

The incident was complicated by frenzied mobs threatening to march on the shrine. This led to firing on one such mob at Bejbehara on 21 October 1993 killing 60 people.<sup>36</sup> It can logically be presumed that these frenzied marches were part

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<sup>34</sup> Nayar 2000: 33.

<sup>35</sup> The Hazratbal Mosque is sacred not only to the Kashmiri Muslims, but for others too in the rest of India. The Mosque houses the *Moe-e-Muquaddas*, or a strand of hair said to be from the beard of the Prophet Mohammad. This relic is embedded in a quartz and is kept in the Mosque. The Mosque also happens to be the location, which has witnessed a number of momentous and historic speeches from its precincts by leaders such as Sheikh Abdullah.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted from [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

of a larger game plan to subvert the already tense atmosphere prevailing in the region. It is likely that a majority of the people were coerced and misled by militants who hoped to gain mileage from either the inability of the security forces to control the mobs resulting in their embarrassment, or an incident of the kind that did finally occur at Bejbehara. The final outcome of the Hazratbal incident was to a great extent due to the restraint and maturity of the Indian response, and the Indian authorities were commended for their tactful handling of the situation. However, it brought into the open certain harsh realities, which were subsequently exploited by the militants. The first was the confusion prevalent in negotiations with the militants. There were a number of means, measures and parties involved including the Hurriyat. Their participation became a source of embarrassment for the authorities. Second, the cutting off of food, water and electricity came under the watchful eyes of world media and human rights organisations and was criticised. Third, protracted negotiations again gave the militants the idea that the Government was unwilling to act boldly because of its reluctance to provoke popular outrage, especially in cases where religion was involved. Finally, incidents like the one at Bejbehara did little to ease tensions in the state. The increasing pressure from security forces led to yet another subsidiary impact, which could not be effectively controlled. This was the spread of militancy beyond the Valley, as both Pakistan and the militants felt that the situation had become too difficult in this restricted area. This resulted in the spread of militancy to the mountainous districts of Jammu, where there was some degree of support for the insurgency. This included the areas across the Pir Panjal range in the Doda district and in Poonch and Rajauri. Though the fact that militancy was spreading in these areas must definitely have been known and appreciated, why there was a delay in deployment of the security forces is not entirely clear.<sup>37</sup> It was during this phase of operations that the author happened to be located in the Doda district of the state. The situation could have been vastly improved, had there been early and adequate deployment of forces in the areas where there had been a spread of militancy. It would have also stalled a second wave of migrations, though of a smaller magnitude, of Hindus from the Gundoh area, for reasons similar to those which had forced the Pandits out of the Valley.

The next major incident that took the government by complete surprise was the occupation of Charar-e-Sharif by mercenaries in 1995. This town was home to yet another shrine that holds a place of reverence in the heart of every Kashmiri, both Hindu and Muslim. The shrine is dedicated to the renowned Sufi Saint Hazrat Noorani or Nand Rishi (see Chapter 2, under the section entitled 'Historical Study')

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<sup>37</sup> Lieutenant General (Retd) V.K. Nayar PVSM, SM, an authority on the subject, says:

During the summer of 1991, I visited the Valley for a study tour and shared my impressions with the Government and also made a reference to it in outline under the heading 'Action Plan' in my book *Threat From Within...* I also made a categorical recommendation for Kishthwar and Bhadarwah areas particularly Doda District to be sanitised and to consolidate Poonch and Rajauri areas.



as he is also known. Unlike the Hazratbal Mosque, this shrine was located in a congested town with little to separate it from the residential areas. To make matters worse, the shrine was made of wood. Again, unlike the Hazratbal siege where the militants had incidentally been ethnic Kashmiris, this time the militants were Afghans who had little reverence for the shrine. After surrounding the shrine on 7 March 1995, the siege continued till 11 May 1995. It was a patient game of wait and watch that the government preferred to play rather than take the risk of storming the shrine. It was a repeat of the Hazratbal episode. However, this time the Afghan mercenaries led by Mast Gul had different plans:

A sixty six day stand followed until the 8th of May when the militants—in radio contact with Pakistan and under instructions not to cave in—set fire to a residential colony some 200 metres from the shrine. Although the strong fire spread the fire to the shrine, the shrine itself remained intact until past midnight of 11th May.<sup>38</sup>

The Indian Army finally stormed the shrine on the same day but it was too late to save it. Twenty mercenaries were killed in the ensuing gun battle.

The episode was an embarrassment, and it was clear that its roots lay in the similar siege that had taken place at Hazratbal. The weak and indecisive response during the Hazratbal episode and in its aftermath had emboldened the militants and the results were apparent. Maroof Raza writes: ‘The indecisiveness of the Indian Government and Governor Rao led to the tragic operational failure that could irrevocably alter the course of the secessionist movement in the Valley.’<sup>39</sup>

Yet another incident, which made the ugly face of terrorism truly apparent to the world at large, was the abduction of four foreign tourists on 3 July 1995 followed by two more on 8 July 1995. One of the hostages, John Childs, an American, managed to escape. It was revealed that HUA and a relatively unknown group Al Faran were responsible for the incident. This particular incident made the world realise that terrorism in Kashmir was not limited to or against India alone, it was in fact without boundaries. It also proved that there was no value in the labels ‘good terrorist’ and ‘bad terrorist’ applied from time to time by parties in pursuance of their own short-sighted strategic aims. There were only bad terrorists—irrespective of the nation that bore the brunt of their activities. The terrorists who had kidnapped the tourists demanded the release of 21 HUA terrorists lodged in Indian jails. However, this time around, the Indian government took a tough stance, refusing to negotiate with the terrorists. This led to the beheading of a Norwegian hostage Hans Christian Otto. The rest of the hostages were never rescued. Some sources believe that the terrorists killed the other hostages on 13 December 1995 in retaliation for the killing of Al Faran’s Commander, Turki, in an encounter in the Anantnag district of J&K on 4 December 1995.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Maroof Raza, *India Today*, 31 May 1995, p. 31, quoted in Raza (1996: 85).

<sup>39</sup> Raza 1996: 86.

<sup>40</sup> www.satp.org.

## Pakistan Changes Stance

At this stage of the LIC Pakistan had started in J&K, it would be relevant to discuss Pakistani involvement in Kashmir and the insurgency there. India's former Foreign Secretary, J.N. Dixit, summarises these on the basis on his experience. He writes:

...Pakistan had adopted a three-pronged approach to explain the Kashmir issue. Through this approach Pakistan had hoped to:

1. conduct a proxy war on the ground, aimed at the fragmentation of India. If Pakistan achieved success in this regard, it would weaken India, and serve the purpose of conveying to the Pakistani people that Bangladesh's separation and Pakistan's military defeat in 1971 had been avenged;
2. mobilise Islamic countries against India on the Kashmir issue on the basis of the tenet that 'Islam was in danger' and that 'Muslims were being persecuted in India'; and
3. mobilise international opinion in support of Pakistani political and territorial objectives, using the argument of self-determination, the violation of human rights, and the possibility of nuclear war.<sup>41</sup>

It had also become apparent to Pakistan that the situation in Kashmir gave it the best opportunity to avenge itself against India for past defeats. It realised that it was in its interests to keep up the proxy war in Kashmir, as a full-scale conventional war was unlikely to achieve the aims that it had outlined for itself: namely, the annexation of Kashmir. From this strategic and geo-political reality emerged Pakistan's policy centred on Kashmir. In a clever ploy, Pakistan offered India the 'No War Pact' repeatedly at international forums, enabling it to score diplomatic points against India and also to snatch away from India the right to react in an appropriate and judicious manner given the increasingly grave provocation from Pakistani side.<sup>42</sup> It was a farsighted and important decision of successive Indian prime ministers to see through this façade of diplomatic finesse, openness and a so-called 'spirit of accommodation', behind which were shrouded more sinister aims.

Pakistan had understood well the various ploys to swing international opinion in its favour, and it employed the same repeatedly at various international forums. The first was shrill propaganda highlighting human rights abuses by the Indian government and security forces in Kashmir. The second, and probably of much more concern to the USA and the international community, was the likelihood of a nuclear war over the issue of Kashmir. This worked on a twin front for the

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<sup>41</sup> Dixit 2002: 296.

<sup>42</sup> The ploy of playing to the gallery and proposing 'No War Pacts' goes back to 1981, when, during Gen Zia's tenure, it was proposed on 15 September 1981. It has subsequently been revived to ensure that Pakistani attempts at launching proxy wars are not interfered with. This proposal was again put forward by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, on 22 September 1997 while addressing the UN General Assembly.

Pakistanis. The first ploy ensured that the Kashmir issue was kept alive, and the second, that is, stressing the nuclear capabilities of both countries, never failed to send diplomats the world over scurrying down the corridors of power trying to cool tempers and acknowledging the 'dispute' over Kashmir. This strategy reached an all-time high in 1993, with the publication of a lopsided account of the Kashmir conflict by Alastair Lamb (and Robin Raphael, who headed the bureau for South Asian Affairs in the Clinton Administration made statements in the media, questioning the legal accession of Kashmir to India in 1947).<sup>43</sup> The second and more important aspect from India's point of view was the indirect threat from Pakistan, of enlarging the scope and intensity of the conflict, if India decided to undertake a conventional offensive in retaliation to Pakistan's proxy war against India.<sup>44</sup>

Thus, at this stage of the LIC in Kashmir, Pakistan made a subtle shift in its diplomatic offensive, casting aside its contention of a merger of Kashmir with it on the basis of religion, to raising the issue of human rights abuses, and the dangers of a nuclear war between the two countries over Kashmir.

## Elections and After

Security forces continued to successfully control militancy in the state, despite its spread to the mountainous districts outside the Valley. There was a concerted effort to ensure better coordination between various agencies under a unified command, and this brought a renewed impetus to conduct of operations. Police and paramilitary forces also benefited from the experience in tackling the proxy war and gained an upper hand in towns in the state. The civil administration, which had been bullied into submission, slowly re-established itself, and recommenced the day-to-day administration of the state.

The security forces had also established themselves well in the state. Intelligence reports started to flow in, once the common people had realised the futility of the ongoing struggle. Large-scale cordon and search operations gave way to clinical operations based on specific intelligence reports, with results improving with every passing year. One of the major operations conducted by security forces on 30 March 1996 largely rendered the JKLF (Amanullah) group ineffective. The operation resulted in the killing of 33 JKLF militants, virtually eliminating the group in a single day.

As a test case of improving conditions and acceptance of principles of parliamentary democracy, even though partially, elections were successfully conducted for six parliamentary seats in April of the same year. These were followed by the

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<sup>43</sup> Dixit 2002: 311.

<sup>44</sup> This aspect of Pakistan's policy became all the more relevant after both India and Pakistan decided to go nuclear. The relation of this important milestone to the LIC in Kashmir, and to the balance of power between the two countries will be discussed later while analysing the Kargil conflict.

successful conduct of elections to the state legislative assembly in September of the same year. Farooq Abdullah's NC was victorious and he took over as the chief minister, after a span of approximately seven long years of President's rule.

It is important to analyse the political atmosphere in India and Pakistan during the two years following the elections in the state. It was evident from the past that any semblance of peace negotiations would only be possible if a government was in place at the Centre that was confident of its own stability. Unfortunately, during the next two years this was not the case in India, with quick shuffles taking place time and again in the corridors of power. The year 1998 did not start with much hope as terrorists stepped up their campaign of undertaking selective large-scale killings of Hindus in the state. Eight such incidents took place during the year and this led to further distancing of the two governments. It was probably these killings that put Pakistan on the defensive on the international stage. This may have prompted the Pakistani government to re-think its strategy and try and go in for a meaningful dialogue, rather than merely playing to world opinion.

The second major incident was the Indian government's decision to finally go nuclear. India conducted its nuclear tests on 11 and 13 May 1998 and Pakistan followed suit on 27 May of the same year. The tests were followed by avoidable sabre-rattling by India through statements by senior leaders in the Vajpayee Government despite the fact that the Prime Minister professed the principle of 'no first use'.<sup>45</sup> The tests were immediately followed by sanctions and immense pressure from the USA and all other major nations capable of influencing India to hold talks and negotiations on the issues of Kashmir and prevention of any nuclear misadventure. This pressure seems to have had the requisite effect and after hastily preparing for a dialogue at the highest level, Prime Minister Vajpayee responded to an invitation from his counterpart in Pakistan, and the historic 'bus diplomacy' got underway.

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<sup>45</sup> These statements virtually challenged Pakistan in view of India's declared nuclear status. Coming from Home Minister L.K. Advani and Dr Murli Manohar Joshi, they ruffled Pakistani feathers, and they proceeded to respond in the same tone and tenor.

## Chapter 7

# Kargil

### Preceding Events

The Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, undertook a bus trip to Lahore in Pakistan on 20 February 1999, as a symbolic gesture of friendship, while simultaneously commencing a peace initiative between the countries. There was the expected media hype, and the event was touted as the foundation of a lasting peace initiative, which had all the makings of a breakthrough in solving the Kashmir issue. It was regarded as the biggest milestone after the Shimla Agreement. At the end of the trip both leaders signed the Lahore Declaration (see Appendix F), which reinforced the spirit of the Shimla Agreement. The text of the declaration may not have provided a solution to many of the problems plaguing relations between the two countries, however, it did seem to re-affirm a number of India's recognised and established positions on a wide variety of issues. It will be worth emphasising some of these here.

First, the spirit of Shimla Agreement was accorded recognition. Pakistan had persistently attempted to sideline the importance of bilateral dialogue, however the Lahore Declaration re-emphasised this. It said, 'Reiterating the determination of both countries to implementing the Shimla Agreement in letter and spirit;<sup>1</sup> Going further to address pending issues the agreement stated that both countries:

Have agreed that their respective governments

- shall intensify their efforts to resolve all issues, including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir;
- shall refrain from intervention and interference in each other's internal affairs;
- shall intensify their composite and integrated dialogue process for an early and positive outcome of the agreed bilateral agenda.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lahore Declaration signed by the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan on 21 February 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

These resolves further went on to cement India's position, when they laid emphasis on solving all issues including Kashmir, making it a composite dialogue. Similarly, the aspect of non-interference made it as obvious as possible in diplomatic language that Pakistan's meddling in Kashmir was best avoided.

The Lahore Declaration contained the necessary ingredients to send the Indian media and moderates on a dramatic and optimistic journey of hope. Solutions to the ongoing killings in Kashmir and an end to the low intensity conflict (LIC) there seemed to be in sight. However, subsequent events were to prove otherwise.

Was there a genuine desire on the Pakistani side to solve the Kashmir tangle? Was it pressure from USA, which had facilitated the Lahore Agreement? The events immediately succeeding the Agreement did seem to give this general indication.

It will also be interesting to briefly analyse the man who is widely considered to be the chief architect of the Pakistani intrusion into Indian territory in Kargil: General Parvez Musharraf. Born in pre-Partition India his family subsequently moved to Pakistan. He is reputed to be highly religious and has a hard line view on many religious and political issues. He was hand-picked to raise a Special Services Group (SSG) and subsequently to head it. His prime assignments, which brought him face to face with India, included the task of trying to evict Indian troops from the Siachen Glacier, a task in which he failed. He was also given the responsibility of suppressing the Shia uprisings in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, which he did with characteristic precision and ruthlessness. Finally, General Musharraf superseded two of generals senior to him, and was nominated, Chief of Army Staff, by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who he was subsequently to unceremoniously remove and imprison in a bloodless coup, after Nawaz Sharif attempted to evict him as he had his predecessor. General Musharraf is as adept at handling the media as he is at politics.<sup>3</sup> He is a *mohajir*, a tag which in Pakistan frequently makes one the recipient scorn and discrimination. Therefore, his reaching the highest rank in the army, despite this disqualification, is all the more commendable. It is therefore a reasonable deduction that at times Musharraf may have gone out of his way to prove his ability, patriotism, commitment to Islam and equality with the Punjabi elite. Kargil seems to have been one of these occasions.

An eminent Pakistani writer, Altaf Gauhar, has suggested that a plan for a Kargil-type operation had been formulated as far back as 1987, during the regime of the military dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq. The plan was, however, vetoed by the then Foreign Minister Sahibzada Yakub Khan as being militarily untenable and internationally and politically indefensible.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> General Musharraf's initial interaction with the media and world leaders saw all those who interacted with him coming back duly impressed and more importantly believing all that he had to say. The General had the media 'eating out of his hands' with his 'frank', 'straightforward' and 'deeply committed' attitude, in contrast to the diplomatic and heavily-worded nothings the media was used to. This initial impression was only till they realised that the General could mislead people with equal finesse. This was proved by his claims of the Pakistani army not being directly involved in Kargil inside India across the LoC—a fact that subsequently proved untrue.

<sup>4</sup> *From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report*, p. 77, quoting Altaf Gauhar.

However the decision to revive this plan and launch an intrusion into India in Kargil was probably the result of the 'insurance policy' Pakistan had procured by 'going nuclear'. Of course, this policy had been procured at a high price, since international sanctions had been imposed on Pakistan after its conduct of nuclear explosions. It was however, probably felt that given Pakistan's overt nuclear capability, India's response would be muted and indecisive giving Pakistan an opportunity of avenging itself on India for the humiliating loss of Siachen—a personal score that General Musharraf was probably eager to settle, having been in charge of the task of evicting the Indian forces from Siachen, and having failed in this endeavour.

## The Geography of Kargil

The LoC runs from Manawar in Jammu to Gurez for a distance of 740 kilometres. The Kashmir valley lies to the east and south-east of this line. As one travels north and then east from Manawar, the height of the mountains steadily increases, and the terrain is barren and menacing. The Kargil sector of the LoC is 168 kilometres long from Kaobal Gali till Chorbat La. This stretch is characterised by the worst possible terrain for any kind of military operations. The average height of peaks in this region is almost 5,000 metres, and depending on the season, these peaks are lashed by icy cold winds, with temperatures in places like Dras plunging way below the freezing point, giving Dras the dubious distinction of being one of the coldest places on earth. This area has limited communications and its lifeline is the road running across it from Jammu, Banihal Tunnel, Srinagar and through Kargil onto Leh. Kargil can also be accessed from the anti-clockwise route, starting from Manali in Himachal Pradesh and further towards Leh and then to Kargil. These roads have some of the highest motorable passes in the world, and their maintenance and keeping them open is in itself a feat of both engineering and endurance.

The Kargil sector can further be divided into the following sub-sectors. These are Mushkoh Dras, Kaksar, Batalik, Chorbatla and Hanif. It is vital to understand that these sub-sectors have been divided and demarcated, so that they effectively cover the main approaches from the Pakistani side in consonance with the overall defensive plan and appreciated threat likely to develop in each sub-sector. It is also pertinent to understand that while each sub-sector looks excessively threatened when viewed in isolation, its actual importance and its threat perception can only be gauged when a troops-to-task analysis is carried out at each level. Thus, when the geography of Kargil sector is analysed, it is also important to keep this vital aspect in mind.

The two main approaches to the Kargil sector from the Pakistani side are along the two major rivers flowing into Pakistan. These are the Indus and Shingo rivers. If these two approaches are regarded as the primary routes of possible enemy ingress, the inhospitable and tactically less likely areas remain as gaps. They are,

‘at Mashkoh Valley (36 km), Marpola to Bimbat LC (9.5 km), Bimbat LC to Kaksar (9 km) and Yaldor (25 km from Batalik to Chorbat La).’<sup>5</sup>

While discussing the geographical layout of the Kargil sector, it is also pertinent to understand its position vis-à-vis the Siachen Glacier. This is relevant because one of Pakistan’s aims was to cut off Siachen, by interdicting the road passing through this sector. In Chapter 5 dealing with the Siachen Glacier the geographic layout of the region was described, which is a pointer to the difficulty of holding Siachen if Kargil sector was cut off.

## Why Kargil?

As has been discussed, the plans for infiltrating Kargil were prepared in the early 1980s. They were, however, never put in effect because of obvious military, political, diplomatic and associated reasons. However, success in the elections and Pakistan’s newly acquired nuclear status had made the Nawaz Sharif government overconfident. It would be interesting here to analyse Pakistan’s motives for finally infiltrating across the LoC in Kargil, as suggested by the Kargil Review Committee Report.

### Politico-Strategic Motives

- to internationalise Kashmir as a nuclear flash point requiring urgent third party intervention;
- to alter the Line of Control (LoC) and disrupt its sanctity by capturing unheld areas in Kargil; and
- to achieve a better bargaining position for a possible trade-off against the positions held by India in Siachen.

### Military/Proxy War Related Motives

- to interdict the Srinagar–Leh road by disrupting vital supplies to Leh;
- to outflank India’s defences from the South in the Turtuk and Chalunka sectors through unheld areas thus rendering its defences untenable in Turtuk and Siachen;
- to give a fillip to militancy in J&K by military action designed to weaken the counter-insurgency (CI) grid by drawing away troops from the Valley to Kargil. It would also give a boost to the morale of militants in the Valley;
- to play to the fundamentalist lobby and the Pakistani people by bold action in Kashmir which continues to remain a highly emotional issue.<sup>6</sup>

Pakistan’s presumed aims have to be read and understood, while appreciating the assumptions it seems to have made. It is on the basis of these assumptions; that

<sup>5</sup> *From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report*, p. 86.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*: 89–90.



the logic or the lack of it can be appreciated. The Kargil Review Committee considers these to be:

- Its nuclear capability would forestall any major Indian move particularly across the international border involving use of India's larger conventional capabilities. It appears to have persuaded itself that nuclear deterrence had worked in its favour from the mid-1980s.
- Confidence that the international community would intervene at an early stage, leaving it in the possession of at least some of its gains across the LoC, thereby enabling it to bargain from a position of strength.
- China would adopt a favourable posture in the light of its anti-Indian stand in the post Pokhran II period.
- A weak and unstable government in India would be incapable of a quick and firm response and would not be inclined to open a new front.
- The Indian Army would not be able to respond adequately due to its heavy CI commitment in J&K.
- Due to an inadequacy of resources east of Zojila, India would not be able to react effectively against the intrusions before Zojila opened for traffic by end May/early June.
- The Indian Army would not be able to muster adequate forces with high altitude training and acclimatisation to fight on the Kargil heights.
- Rapidly returning normalcy in J&K needed to be thwarted in order to sustain its 'cause'.<sup>7</sup>

The assumptions, that Pakistan is likely to have made, make an interesting study. However, at no stage of this study is even a casual reader of the subcontinent's history, likely to agree with any of them. As General V.P. Malik states:

...my statement in late 1998 that 'space existed between the proxy war and Indo-Pak nuclear umbrella, wherein a limited conventional war was a distinct possibility', generated a strong reaction in Pakistan. A part of the vernacular media in Pakistan mis-presented the statement as if it was a military threat/challenge to Pakistan. In February 1999, Lieutenant General Javed Nasir, former head of the ISI, then Chief Intelligence Advisor to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, a well-known Islamic hawk, wrote a highly publicised article, 'Calling the Indian Army Chief's Bluff'. The crux of that article was that the Indian Army was incapable of undertaking any conventional operation. This was not only a gross underestimation of a possible adversary but also a poor assessment and misperception.<sup>8</sup>

It is not the first time that Pakistan seems to have fooled itself into believing certain assumptions that it has made on the basis of a fragile edifice of what it regards

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.: 90–91.

<sup>8</sup> General (Retd) V.P. Malik, PVSM, AVSM, 'Indo Pak Security Relations in the Coming Decade—Lessons from Kargil for the Future'.

Article to be found at [www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/idr/vol\\_17\(1\)/vpmalik.html](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/publication/idr/vol_17(1)/vpmalik.html).

as the ideal situation, without the least degree of understanding of the ground realities. This deduction will become apparent on analysis of each of these assumptions.

The first, and by far the most, potent insurance Pakistan imagined it had purchased, albeit at a heavy cost, was its nuclear capability. Pakistan felt that this capability would deter India from any conventional reaction to the low intensity proxy war it had unleashed in J&K. This assumption seems to have gone awry for certain extremely elementary reasons. The first and most important of these was Pakistan had made a grave miscalculation when it had gambled on the nuclear deterrent to restrain India.

Presumably, and it was this supposition that Pakistan gambled on, Pakistan would have exercised the nuclear option if its sovereignty or territorial integrity was threatened. In the case of Kargil, this situation could only have arisen if India had decided to enlarge the scope of the war by employing its strike formations further towards the south to threaten strategic and politically sensitive Pakistani targets. Even if one were to assume the likelihood of such a scenario, in the event of India's inability to achieve its desired aims in Kargil, it would still have necessitated a full-scale conventional war prior to Pakistan employing its nuclear arsenal. It is unthinkable to conclude that India would have accepted loss of territory without a suitable response. Therefore, given a viable threat to its territorial integrity, such as the Kargil intrusion, India was likely to enlarge the scope of the conflict irrespective of the existence of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. Moreover, India also had nuclear capabilities and was in a position to respond in the event of Pakistan's having recourse to nuclear warfare. General (Retd) V.P. Malik, Chief of Army Staff during the Kargil conflict says:

A proxy war or a sub-conventional war is part of the spectrum of conflict, which can easily escalate into a conventional war; nuclear capability notwithstanding. There may be several situations where both the 'initiator' (of the proxy war) and the 'affected' nation, are tempted to use conventional weapons and forces. The 'initiator' is tempted to give it a greater push with conventional forces to achieve the desired results. Such a situation occurred in 1947–48, 1965, and again in the Kargil War in 1999. On the other hand, the 'affected' nation, when pushed to the wall, may use its conventional forces to bring the proxy war into the open rather than fight with all the limitations of a 'no war no peace situation'. Pakistan did so in 1971, and India was prepared to do so in 1990, and after the terrorists' assault on its Parliament on 13 December 2001.<sup>9</sup>

Second, though Pakistan's actions in Kargil were well concealed and its plan of deception excellent, what had happened was not lost on those who mattered in the international community. There was international acceptance of India's right to feel aggrieved, and of Pakistan as the aggressor, with even the USA accepting India's

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

right to react with suitable force. This only resulted in the Indian reaction being swifter and many times greater in strength than what Pakistan had either imagined or bargained for. The result was that India immediately deployed its armed forces with speed and ferocity on the LoC against Pakistan.

The reader by now will be familiar with the record of all the conflicts that have taken place between India and Pakistan. In the 1947–48 Indo-Pak conflict, Pakistan sponsored, aided and abetted raiders invading J&K after the state's accession to India. Despite this blatant infringement, when the matter was taken to the United Nations it was transformed into an Indo-Pak dispute bringing both countries on to a level playing field. Again, after the 1965 Indo-Pak War, wherein Pakistan had resorted to similar tactics before launching a full-scale war, status quo ante was finally restored by the major powers. Therefore, Pakistan probably felt that it was safe to assume a repetition of this situation after Pakistan had made significant gains. However, Pakistan's assumption failed to take into account the fact that world opinion had become very stringent about overtly supporting either India or Pakistan in any kind of misadventure. The reasons for this were simple. While Pakistan continues to enjoy the support of the USA, it no longer enjoys the special status conferred on it by virtue of being a frontline state and a US base during the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. In contrast, India's position has changed. First, in the post-Cold War era, India is no longer regarded with suspicion by the USA as the ally of its arch-enemy, the erstwhile Soviet Union. Second, the continued threat posed by China makes India a natural ally to check its rising influence in the region, which the USA views as a potential threat to its interests. Third, the opening up of the Indian market after the initiation of economic reforms in 1991 has made it one of the most lucrative markets after China—a market USA cannot afford to ignore in these times of global recession. Fourth, terrorism for the USA is no longer a distant threat. It sees the threat of terrorism as a global phenomenon. In fact, no country, and specially the USA, can afford to condone acts of terrorism, territorial aggression or triggers to transnational conflicts. Pakistan sponsored *mujahideen* (even if one chooses to accept the Pakistani description of the terrorists inducted into Kashmir) do not, therefore, stand much chance of getting world sympathy for their cause, such as it may be. Fifth and last, acts of omission and commission of valuable allies can be ignored. Pakistan having lost the advantage conferred on it by its strategic position, after the withdrawal of the erstwhile USSR from Afghanistan and its subsequent break up, ceased to be so for the USA. Now its status is that of just 'another' one of the USA's many allies. Therefore, the relationship with Pakistan becomes too expensive in a diplomatic sense, and the USA cannot extend its unconditional support, in circumstances such as those that Pakistan created by intruding into Kargil. Sunanda K. Datta-Ray says:

But the willingness this time of the Western allies (and perhaps even of China) to listen and respond to what India had to say demonstrated the truth of Lord Palmerston's famous dictum that nations have no eternal allies or perpetual

enemies, but their interests are eternal or perpetual and they have a duty to follow them.<sup>10</sup>

He further adds, 'Kargil indicated that the Americans, too, are seeking to improve ties with a stable, democratic and potentially dynamic nation of more than a billion people that might boast one of the biggest world markets.'<sup>11</sup>

The third assumption, that of getting substantive support from China, also proved to be wrong. First, it is a well-known and established fact that China is itself threatened, even if to a lesser degree, by Islamic fundamentalism. China can ill afford to overtly support Pakistan or any other country without causing a negative and harmful fallout within its own simmering domestic cauldron of fanaticism. Second, it is a fact well known that China is on a major economic and military restructuring exercise. Its priority at present is to emerge as the second pole in world affairs. Therefore, at present it is not in its interests to involve itself in a military and diplomatic wrangle against India, the other major power emerging in Asia, especially for no tangible economic, military or diplomatic gains. Therefore, in China's case as in the case of the USA, offering Pakistan overt military support in its fight against India in Kargil was ultimately deemed an exercise that was too costly to justify.<sup>12</sup>

The fourth assumption that the government in India was weak and that in the event of an incursion it would be unable to take decisive steps to stem it, was again a miscalculation. This assumption was reminiscent of a similar one made in 1965, when Pakistan attempted to initially test the waters in Kutch and, thereafter, send raiders into Kashmir. They followed this up with declaration of war hoping that a weak Indian government, still reeling under the defeat at China's hands, would be unable to stand up to Pakistani aggression. India not only disproved the assumption, and despite Pakistan having the advantage of being the aggressor, captured far greater territory in the Kashmir sector than Pakistan could. It was not only a moral defeat for Pakistan, but also a military one, even though, in purely military terms, it is considered minor in comparison to the defeat it suffered in the 1971 Indo-Pak War. What Pakistan cannot understand is that India's diversity in terms of the number of religions followed, languages spoken and lifestyles followed, may give the idea of a deeply divided and fragmented country, yet a long history of 5,000 years has a certain unifying effect. Despite, internal squabbles and repeated fragmentation the country continues united. Moreover, in spite of the much trumpeted 'two-nation theory' that was the basis for Partition and the formation of Pakistan, it was East Pakistan, which ceded from the Pakistani nation to form Bangladesh. On the other hand, India has only gone from strength to strength in terms of its unity and growth.

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<sup>10</sup> Datta-Ray 1999: 209.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> China did provide tacit support to its 'all weather' ally by increasing activity along the disputed border with India to demonstrate its alignment with Pakistan. However, this did not appreciably alter the military balance of power during the conflict.

Pakistan's fifth assumption, as we shall see was equally ill-informed, and as proof of this the Kargil Review Committee Report quotes certain senior Pakistani defence officials. One of them is quoted as saying, 'the Indian Army is incapable of undertaking any conventional operations at present, what to talk of enlargement of conventional conflict'.<sup>13</sup> Without going into the exploits of the Indian Army vis-à-vis its adversary, it is hoped that the limited conflict in Kargil has brought home a reality of warfare to the Pakistani political and military elite. Which is that, bravado and boasting is all very well, and in fact desirable if it lifts the morale of soldiers, but only if it can be backed up with deeds equal to the words uttered. Empty words do not, ultimately, build reputations.

The sixth and seventh assumptions the Indian response, if any would only come in late May or in June after the snow had melted in the area, and that the response if any would be limited, given that India had a paucity of units with the high altitude training and acclimatisation necessary for the task, also proved to be wrong and ill-informed. It is unfortunate from the Pakistani point of view that snow melted early in the summer of 1999. Moreover, while the second assumption may have been correct in theory, it should be kept in mind that conflicts are not always fought purely on the basis of theoretical assumptions. It is only when a side decides to go beyond the obvious, that it achieves the seemingly impossible. Pakistan's decision to opt for large-scale violation of the LoC and occupation of Indian territory, had been analysed and rejected by the Indian side, as improbable and impractical, given the terrain in question, and the political and diplomatic implications and maintenance of logistics. Nevertheless, Pakistan managed to surprise India. This, it achieved not by doing what was obvious but by doing what was unexpected. Similarly, India too rose to the occasion to defeat weather, cold, altitude and the enemy to achieve victory and glory. Siachen should have been a lesson to Pakistan, where despite a task that is far more difficult, India continues to defeat every design of Pakistan to dislodge its forces.

## The Aggression

There was widespread speculation during the Kargil conflict that the misadventure in Kargil was solely the brainchild of the then, Chief of Army Staff, General Parvez Musharraf. It was also speculated that Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was kept in the dark about the entire operation, and when he did come to know of it, the plan was already in a belated stage of execution. This theory was supported by some senior members of the Cabinet when in, 'a statement made by the Defence Minister George Fernandes in the early stages of the conflict stating that Pakistani armed forces had launched the aggression without the prior knowledge or endorsement of

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<sup>13</sup> Lieutenant General Javed Nasir, 'Calling the Indian Army Chief's Bluff', *Defence Journal*, SS-346 (February–March), 1999.

Article available at [www.defencejournal.com/febmar99/contentsfebmar99.html](http://www.defencejournal.com/febmar99/contentsfebmar99.html).

Prime Minister Sharif.<sup>14</sup> However, it seems likely that the Prime Minister was aware of the plan and was in picture throughout.<sup>15</sup> It can nevertheless be said with reasonable degree of certainty that General Musharraf, after taking over as Chief of Army Staff, was responsible for resurrecting the plan and convincing the Prime Minister of its military feasibility and political logic. It becomes difficult to assume that a prime minister with a strong majority in Parliament, who had strengthened his position by cutting the judiciary to size and removing the, then Chief of Army Staff and placing a man of his choice in the chair, and in the process superseding two other senior officers, was unaware of the Kargil plan.

The Pakistanis carried out initial reconnaissance in November–December 1998. Parties moved in for detailed reconnaissance in February–March 1999. The movement of the advance body of Pakistani forces is likely to have taken place in early April 1999, followed by the subsequent buildup in the latter part of the month. It is also appreciated that by end May, intrusions into the Batalik, Kaksar, Dras and Mashkoh sectors, was complete.<sup>16</sup>

Another impression that was initially created by Pakistan was that the intrusion was the handiwork of *mujahideen* or religious warriors, which is what it prefers to call the terrorists in conformity with its propaganda of a *jihad* (religious war) in the region. This was of course stage managed by Pakistan. Pakistani army regulars belonging to the Northern Light Infantry (NLI) battalions were required to wear clothes traditionally worn by the Pathan tribals of the area, so that they looked similar to the terrorists in J&K. The deception continued with the induction of a very small force in addition to the battalions available with the Force Commander Northern Area (FCNA). This figure has been estimated to be initially 13 battalions by the Kargil Review Committee Report, which according to it was then augmented to 15. In addition the force had adequate artillery and other support. The force also included men from the Special Services Group (SSG), so as to provide the cutting edge for specialist tasks. However, of this entire force it has been estimated that a total of 1,500–2,400 troops were employed in a ratio of 70:30 of regular and irregular forces.<sup>17</sup> Pakistan had another advantage in that the troops it was deploying were fully acclimatised and accustomed to the terrain and the temperature they faced there. The Indian Army received initial reports of intruders in a fairly unorthodox manner:

On the morning of 3 May Tashi Namgyal, Manup Tsering and Ali Raza Standba of Garkhun village had moved some 5 kms up the Banju heights with their flock of goats and sheep. As Namgyal scanned the flanking mountains with Tsering's binoculars, he saw groups of men in dark-coloured clothes, putting up shelters and make-shift *sangars* (stone emplacements). It was not possible for the party of shepherds to establish the exact numbers or their strength.... Ironically,

<sup>14</sup> J.N. Dixit, in a personal interview with the author, p. 65.

<sup>15</sup> *From Surprise to Reckoning: The Kargil Review Committee Report*, p. 95–96.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*: 96–97.

earlier, sometime in 1997, it had been Namgyal who had reported the presence of unarmed Pakistani persons in Yaldor Sector.<sup>18</sup>

At this stage itself, it will be pertinent to point out the gross intelligence failure of the various agencies involved in providing the country an intelligence shield. It is a matter of conjecture and debate as to whether Kargil could have been avoided if intelligence had been received in time. Undeniably, however, losses could certainly have been minimised.

At this stage, before discussing the methodology adopted by Pakistan to launch its aggression in the Kargil sector, it will be pertinent to understand the significance of India's winter posture. It has already been seen that both armies are operating in one of the worst terrains in the world for conducting warfare. The altitude, cold climate, related logistics problems and the extensive loss of life likely to occur due to avalanches and climatic conditions make it tactically prudent to withdraw and vacate certain posts, as the threat of enemy ingress becomes minimal. Both sides, over the years, have been following this strategy and have their winter and summer deployment postures based on these considerations. However, keeping in view the threat perception, the Indian Army did not vacate the posts prior to Pakistani action, with the exception of untenable posts because of heavy snowfall. Thus, the Pakistani plan was based on the occupation by stealth of the gaps not held by troops between the posts during the early part of the summer. The Pakistani NLI battalions executed this to perfection and they were in position, effectively altering alignment of the LoC in consonance with their plan. There was only one aspect of the plan, which could not be fully executed. This was the extent to which the Pakistani regulars came towards the National Highway and while doing so, were unable to establish themselves effectively. Both the aims could not be met because of the early onset of summer and melting of snow. This resulted in Indian patrols and air reconnaissance being able to pinpoint Pakistani locations, after initial information was made available. This brought the ability of Pakistan to interdict the road and augment its staying power at the forward posts under severe strain, once the heavy barrage of fire from air as well as artillery was unleashed on the intruders.

At the beginning of the conflict, it is estimated that the strength of Pakistani intrusion was:

- |                      |                        |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| • Batalik sub-sector | 200–250.               |
| • Kaksar sub-sector  | 80–100.                |
| • Dras sub-sector    | 60–80.                 |
| • Mashkoh sub-sector | 200–250. <sup>19</sup> |

Immediately after the intrusion took place, there was an angry and violent reaction from the Indian side. This was as much because of a military embarrassment, as it was because of the political disaster, given the fact that the euphoria of the Lahore

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<sup>18</sup> Verma 2002: 95.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*: 97.

Declaration was still very much in the air. The Indian side felt as if it had been stabbed in the back yet again, despite its genuine attempts to bring peace to the sub-continent.

## Indian Reaction

Kargil was the first war to enter Indian homes through the medium of television. Images of martyrs' coffins being received with full honours flashed into living rooms across the country, igniting a spirit of nationalism that united Indians in service to the country. This very spirit also shaped the response of Indian soldiers, as they eagerly and resolutely climbed the icy slopes of mountains—at times straight into the jaws of death; yet never once relenting; never once flinching and never once yielding despite the cost. Before going into details of the Indian response, it will be pertinent to make one observation, which can assess the extent and magnitude of the achievement of the Indian Army and its soldiers. It is assumed that it will also be a suitable answer to one of the assessments made by the Pakistani strategists regarding ability of the army to respond despite the army's protracted deployment in operations. The deployment and advantages enjoyed by the Pakistani army; more specifically the NLI battalions can be compared to the deployment of the Indian Army on the Salto Ridge. Since 1984, the Pakistani army has made numerous efforts including those by its present Army Chief to dislodge the Indians. The results are well known to the reader and the world at large. The Indians were faced by a similar situation as a result of the Pakistani intrusion. Again the results are evident. Within a period of four months the Indian Army led by its young leaders and soldiers had cleared the area with zeal and commitment. This adequately illuminates and illustrates this issue, which has been raised by Pakistan, a number of times in the last five decades. It will also be interesting to emphasise that some of the battalions that participated in the operations were inducted after a difficult and mentally sapping tenure in Siachen and from operations in counter insurgency environment. The achievement of soldiers needs to be seen in light of these circumstances. History of low intensity conflicts will remain a stark and harsh reminder of the related ability of soldiers of the two armies for coming generations to read and draw lessons and inspiration from.

Once news of intrusions started to filter in from patrols in all the sub-sectors and was further augmented by helicopter reconnaissance flights, the formation headquarters swung into action. The first step after initial information from all sectors by 11 May 1999 and its confirmation by 17 May, was to ensure that the enemy was not allowed to further expand and enlarge his bridgehead into the Indian territory. This was critical, as any further ingress was likely to threaten the National Highway. The actions, which followed addressed this very issue and battalions were side-stepped from other sectors to augment existing resources. By 1 June, most of this activity had been completed. It is also important to understand some more relevant actions, which were taken at this stage.



Though the army was not very sure of the character of intrusions at this stage, it had nevertheless become quite clear to the higher commanders that this was not merely an infiltration by a small group of militants as was being touted by Pakistan through its media. This became apparent from the battle drills of the intruders and subsequently by captured documents of the regulars. The information led to a much more wide spread and broad-based response from not only the army but also from the other services. Army units were mobilised and movement of artillery and dumping of ammunition took priority to enable adequate support to assaulting troops. It was ensured that a balanced defensive posture was maintained to thwart any attempts by Pakistan to launch subsidiary thrusts. Large-scale mobilisation by India also resulted in Pakistan being forced to dissipate its resources to counter any perceived Indian attempts at enlarging the scope of the conflict. In addition to deployment of the army, the Indian Air Force was brought into action from 26 May onwards to give the Indian response a cutting edge and a clear moral and tactical superiority over its adversary. The Indian Navy too mobilised its Western Fleet by 22 May, followed by augmentation of the force with the Eastern Fleet by early June. Thus by early June, India's resolve, determination and ability to go to the required extent to take back its territory was made amply clear to Pakistan.

The first major success came in the Batalik Sector at Chorbatala, when Major Sonam Wangchuk of the Ladakh Scouts, in a daring and death defying action, moved behind enemy positions closing in towards the LoC after infiltrating along the Junk Lung. This had a cascading effect on operations, with achievement of a series of successes by the Indian Army in all sub-sectors. Caution and co-ordinated planning took over from hurtling parties of soldiers pushed into combat with inadequate reconnaissance, planning and preparation. Initial reading of the situation, had misled planners, based on Pakistani propaganda. This influenced planning of operations based on incorrect intelligence and analysis. The result was operations based on counter infiltration and counter insurgency based tactics leading to heavy casualties. From a situation where Pakistani intruders sat on vantage points with the advantage of height, visibility and observation deep into Indian territory, the situation was slowly reversed by infiltrating behind enemy lines, operating under the cover of darkness and employing artillery as an offensive weapon. After a spate of casualties, while trying to locate enemy positions by costly means such as drawing enemy fire and launching hurriedly planned operations, the Indian Army settled down to a more practical pace as governed by the weather, terrain and advantages the enemy possessed.

Without going into the details of specific operations conducted in Kargil, which have adequately been covered in a number of books, a brief sequence of events in each sub-sector will be enumerated to give continuity to the incidents.

### Mashkoh–Dras Sub-sector

Amongst the most important initial successes of the Kargil conflict, was the capture of the Tololing feature and its surrounding areas. This group of features gave the

enemy the advantage of being able to dominate the national highway (NH 1A) in the area and rain artillery fire down on the Indian forces using it inflicting heavy casualties. One of the initial aims of the Indian forces was, therefore, to secure movement of their own vehicles on the highway and to evict enemy detachments from their current positions from which they were able to interdict it with artillery fire. On 13/14 June 1999 Tololing was captured. After this initial success, the battle raged on in the areas surrounding the feature. These areas were finally cleared of the enemy presence on 29 June 1999. Another major feature of the battle in this sub-sector was the capture of Tiger Hill. This feature had become a national obsession, and media hype had created a feeling amongst the population at large that the entire Kargil conflict hinged on its capture. Images of shrieking artillery shells lighting up the conical face of the feature had become the favourite news clip used to portray the Indian advance. The attack on Tiger Hill, built up from the third week of May and ultimately the feature was finally captured on 11 July 1999.

Contrary to popular belief, most attacks were built up over long periods of time. While some units were tasked to do the initial spadework and create a favourable situation, others were tasked to exploit this opening and capture the feature involved. It needs to be emphasised at this point that awards, citations and accolades do not always give the complete picture of an entire operation. There are innumerable unsung heroes of Kargil, who have laid down their lives in the true traditions of the armed forces, without so much as a fleeting mention of them in the annals of history. The battles fought in the Kargil conflict are testimonial to the spirit of sacrifice, the grit and the determination of the soldiers who fought there against fearful odds. Another important feature, which was captured subsequent to the capture of Tiger Hill was Point 4875 on 5 July 1999. This feature was considered very critical, as it linked Tiger Hill and the areas of the Mashkoh valley in its vicinity. The feature also gave the Pakistani forces a much-needed buffer, safeguarding their administrative base at Point 4833. With the capture of Point 4875, the enemy had effectively been pushed back from critical areas in this sub-sector.

### **Batalik Sub-sector**

The Batalik sub-sector represented a relatively de-linked area vis-à-vis the other sub-sectors. The area did not lie directly on NH 1A, but was detached along a track north of the river Indus. This caused a delay in the build up of forces in the area, as compared to other areas where their presence on NH 1A helped immensely. It is likely that this relative delay may have given the enemy that little bit of extra time needed to consolidate his defences making its capture that much more difficult. Heavy casualties suffered by units, which moved in initially to reconnoitre the area and subsequently to dislodge the enemy in difficult frontal attacks, proved the degree of enemy preparation. Subsequent build up of forces in the sub-sector and readjustment of the formation boundary gave the area the much-needed boost in terms of availability of troops and supporting fire.

Before discussing operations in the sub-sector, it will be pertinent to describe the main features in the area. Three main features dominate the area. The first, which is in the west, is the Jubar Ridge followed further to the east by the Kukarhang Ridge. The Kalubar Ridge and finally the Charubar Ridge follow the first two. The enemy had established himself on these ridges and was thus blocking all routes towards the LoC.

Initial attempts, on 25 May 1999, aimed at cutting off the enemy from the western flank failed. These attempts were followed by frontal attacks on 29 May 1999, which had to be given up due to heavy losses. It was soon realised that unless the enemy positions were dealt with piecemeal and cut off from their logistics base, given the terrain there was little scope of the operations progressing. With this in mind, a corridor was cleared between the Kalubar and Charubar Ridges along the Junk Lungpa Nala. From this relatively safe passage, troops were infiltrated to secure the eastern flank, which they achieved with the capture of Point 5203 by 8 June 1999. Fierce counter attacks followed and it took a bloody seesaw battle till 22 June 1999 before the Indians could finally capture the feature. Subsequent attacks commencing on 30 June 1999 facilitated the capture of Point 5287 and Kalubar by 7 July 1999.

It would be relevant here to state that enemy forces in the area were being maintained from a base at Muntho Dhalo. It was the accurate and devastating Indian aircraft fire, commencing from 20 June 1999 that caused heavy damage to this base. This occurred in combination with the attacks on the ridges mentioned earlier. Jubar Ridge was captured by 8 July 1999 and finally success was also achieved on the western flank opening up avenues for the multi-directional progress of operations. Thus, within the space of a few days, following the principle of maintenance of momentum, vital gains were notched up in the area, including the capture of Muntho Dhalo and Kukarhang Ridge. Victory did come relatively late in the Batalik Sector given the inherent difficulties faced there, however, in the final analysis the Pakistani resistance could not match up to the determined advance of the Indian forces.

### Turtuk Sector–Sub-sector Haneef

The Turtuk Sector lies straddled between the eastern fringes of the Batalik sub-sector and the southern part of the Siachen Glacier area. This makes the area one of vital importance, as its capture threatens the southern flank of Indian forces in the Siachen area. Infiltration in this area has the potential to turn the flanks of Indian forces and in a worst-case scenario, of cutting it from areas to the south.

The area has Chorbatla on its southern fringe, which is occupied by troops. The Shyok valley on the southern fringe of the Siachen Glacier flanks the area to the north. This too remains occupied by Indian forces. There is a wide gap of 15 kilometres between these two areas, which presents a good route for infiltration. The enemy made use of this gap to infiltrate its forces and establish defences in the area.

Operations commenced in the area after the ambush of an Indian patrol by Pakistani forces on 6 May 1999. This was the first indication of enemy presence in the area. Subsequent actions were able to pinpoint the location of the enemy by 19 May 1999. Successful operations in the areas of Points 5720, 5590 and the area below Point 6041 followed. There was another operation conducted north of Shyok river area, at Point 5770 on 27 June 1999. This operation required a high degree of mountaineering skill to occupy and hold the area, which was held despite enemy efforts to dislodge the Indian forces.

## Pakistani Defeat

Indian advances in all areas of operations had a telling effect on Pakistani morale. This problem was further compounded by a total lack of diplomatic support from any quarter on the international front. It became evident to Pakistan, as losses and reverses mounted that it was only a matter of time before their forces would be evicted from the entire area. It was also evident that this military defeat would once again bring humiliation and disgrace to their armed forces and simultaneously have disastrous consequences for the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Thus, as the Pakistanis faced mounting military defeats, Pakistan decided to work out a face-saving formula at the behest of the USA. On 4 July 1999 a joint declaration emphasising respect for the existing LoC and a settlement of the dispute in accordance with the Shimla Agreement was signed by President Bill Clinton and Nawaz Sharif. This was followed by a meeting of the two Director Generals of Military Operation of the Indian and Pakistani sides at the Wagah Border. The Pakistani director general informed his Indian counterpart, that Pakistan had already commenced the withdrawal of its forces and that this was likely to be completed by 16 July 1999. However, this deadline was extended by two or three days. It was later revealed that the Pakistanis had employed this period to plant booby traps and mines while withdrawing from their positions. It is a sad commentary on an army, which despite a humiliating loss stooped to small ways of making its frustration known.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to discuss the role played by the Indian Air Force during the entire conflict named Operation Safedsagar. The air force was asked to provide helicopter-based support from 11 May 1999 onwards. However, the full might of the force was incorporated in the conflict from 26 May 1999. The initial phase of operations did not bring much cheer to the Indian camp, with the loss of one fighter and one helicopter to enemy fire and one aircraft due to failure. Subsequent operations brought out certain significant and interesting features regarding the employment of the air force. According to experts:

The severe degradation of aircraft and weapon performance is difficult for the layman to completely appreciate. No aircraft has yet been designed to operate

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<sup>20</sup> A detailed account of the Kargil conflict is available on the official site of the Indian Army, <http://www.indianarmy.nic.in>.

in a Kargil-like environment.... Due to the very different attributes of the atmosphere, even weapons do not perform as per sea-level specifications. Variations in air temperature and density, altering drag indices and a host of other factors (which have never been calculated by any manufacturer for this type of altitude) cause weapons to go off their mark; for the same reasons, normally reliable computerised weapon aiming devices give inaccurate results.

In the plains, a 1,000 pounder bomb landing 25 yards away from the target would still severely disable, if not flatten, it. In the mountains, however, a miss of a few yards would be as good as the proverbial mile, due to the undulating terrain and masking effects. In addition, due to the variation in elevation the 'miss' would be greatly magnified in the linear dimension, further exaggerating the 'inaccuracy' of the weapon/delivery.<sup>21</sup>

Besides the problems encountered due to the altitude and terrain, employment of Stinger missiles by the enemy made uninhibited employment of aircraft fraught with danger, despite Pakistan deciding not to employ its air force across the LoC. Another aspect was the vintage of the MIG 21s, which put them at a major disadvantage despite the requisite reserves of power they can develop. This robs the pilots of state-of-the-art avionics and fire control systems, making them look relatively ineffective because of these shortcomings.

Despite these shortcomings, the presence of the Indian Air Force provided a much-needed psychological lift to the troops on ground, which went a long way toward their achieving their objectives. The role of the air force in the capture of targets such as Muntho Dhalo and the Battalion Headquarter at Tiger Hill proved the efficacy of this vital arm of the Indian forces. Another aspect, which needs to be emphasised, is the clear diplomatic and political thinking of the Indian leaders, despite the fact that a caretaker government was at the helm of affairs during the Kargil conflict. From the very start of the Pakistani intrusion, it displayed a sense of purpose and clearheaded approach to the entire planning and execution of their eviction. There is no doubt that in its diplomatic offensive, launched immediately after it received information of the intrusion, it was successful in rightly projecting Pakistan as the aggressor, thus giving the Indian armed forces a high degree of independence of action. *The Nation* wrote, 'The compromise on Kargil inked in Washington is being seen as Pakistan's worst-ever defeat on the diplomatic, political and media fronts.'<sup>22</sup> The option to not cross the LoC was a concerted decision, which again paid dividends in terms of diplomatic and international support, bringing kudos for Indian maturity in handling the situation. Some quarters, both in the defence services and informed civilian circles suggest that this show of restraint was a major strategic failure, citing the decision as a lost opportunity to teach Pakistan a lesson. It is worth analysing at this stage the time frame required for preparing for a limited war across the LoC and

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.indianairforce.nic.in/airforce/afkargil/kargil-web.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> Datta-Ray 1999.

connected with it, the ability to take on a full-scale war, as was the case during 1965 Indo-Pak War. Though India's ability to stand up to any threat of this kind is not questioned, yet the ability to force a decisive victory in such a time frame certainly is. Considering that Pakistan was able to surprise India during the Kargil conflict, India's decision to go for limited action without crossing the LoC does have its merits.

On the other hand, Pakistan claims to have been successful in internationalising the issue. They also claim to have put the issue of Kashmir back on the centre stage of international diplomacy, from which it was at one time slowly fading away. India's gains include the level of credibility of the Indian Army, which has 'increased immensely in terms of operational skills and morale'. A message has gone out, 'internally to dissidents in Kashmir that they are not going to succeed easily'. Because soldiers who fought in Kargil came from all parts of India, it had acted to consolidate a feeling of nationalism and has underlined the idea of Kashmir's being an integral part of India. Finally, it has also sent a message to the world community that the integration of Kashmir with the rest of India will not be compromised at any cost.<sup>23</sup>

One aspect that continues to hurt the soldier's memory is the politicisation of the Kargil conflict. Five decades of independence should have taught us the dangers of internal politicising of any matter pertaining to national security.

## From Kargil till the Present

After the Kargil conflict, Pakistan turned to terrorism in an attempt to inflict further damage on India. The first incident to shake the international forum, in the aftermath of Kargil, was the hijacking of the Indian Airlines flight, IC-814, from Kathmandu on 24 December 1999. The hijacking resulted in death of one of the passengers on board, Rubin Katyal, who was murdered by the hijackers, and the diversion and landing of the flight at Kandahar in Afghanistan. After protracted negotiations, personally led by the then Indian Foreign Minister, Jaswant Singh, the passengers were released in exchange for three dreaded terrorists Maulana Masood Azhar, Mushtaq Zargar and Omar Sheikh on 31 December 1999.

All three were known and dreaded militants, held on charges of numerous terrorist offences committed in J&K. What is of relevance is that the Taliban government in Afghanistan gave the terrorists an opportunity to leave the country unhindered. Maulana Masood Azhar, subsequently surfaced in Baluchistan and thereafter in his hometown of Bahawalpur (both in Pakistan). There he was given a hero's welcome. He later went on to make a number of inflammatory speeches, unchecked in any way by the Pakistani government. This incident might have well been an eye-opener to many countries who were till then supporting Pakistan's cause, or who were, at the very least, turning a blind eye to activities of this nature.

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<sup>23</sup> Dixit 2002.

The next incident was the turning point in influencing the attitude of countries across the globe with respect to transnational and state-sponsored terrorism. On 11 September 2001 came the attack on the World Trade Centre, in New York, and on the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.<sup>24</sup> In a daring, simultaneous attack, terrorists hijacked American commercial aircraft and flew them into these symbols of the economic and military might of the most powerful nation in the world. The world and especially the USA were rudely shaken awake. The ills of terrorism and the pain associated with the loss of innocent lives dawned on them with a new reality. Almost immediately in the aftermath of the incident, the USA, supported by a number of other countries, declared war on terrorism. In the post-9/11 scenario, terrorism in any form in any part of the world is unlikely to receive much support. Suddenly, India's case was viewed with fresh interest and support was forthcoming.<sup>25</sup>

On 1 October 2001, in a daring attack on the J&K Assembly, 38 people were killed. A similar attack was repeated on 13 December 2001, this time against the Indian Parliament at New Delhi when it was in session. Eight security personnel and one staff member lost their lives in the attack. The Indian reaction was swift and unprecedented. It deployed its armed forces along the border and LoC in large numbers, and a war with Pakistan looked imminent. There was widespread condemnation of the incident, and Pakistan came under increasing pressure to put a leash on its *jehadis*. Such pressure was exerted even by the USA, despite the fact that Pakistan had emerged as the frontline state in the USA's war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

Pressure from the USA and India on Pakistan did have a temporary impact on the flow of cross-border infiltration into the country. However, as the pressure eased, infiltration was back to near normal levels. Despite this, the presence of the large force along the border did facilitate the holding of free and fair elections in J&K from 16 September to 8 October 2002 in four phases. The elections were widely acknowledged both within India and by observers from most major world powers to be free and fair. The turnout too proved that normalcy could only be achieved through the ballot, and not through the bullet. The results did not come as a major surprise to most keen political observers. People turned out in large numbers to reject the National Conference government led by Farooq Abdullah and indicated their support for Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's party in the Valley and for the Congress in Jammu. A coalition government led by Mufti Mohammad Sayeed came to power with a promise of bringing normalcy through its 'healing touch' policy.

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<sup>24</sup> This incident started the USA's 'War on Terror', its hunting down of terrorists and terror organisations, especially, the Al Qaida, led by Osama Bin Laden, the suspected mastermind behind the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks.

<sup>25</sup> While the US stance against terrorism in any form gained world wide acceptance, Pakistan yet again escaped international fury in a deft move in which they dumped the Taliban, who had virtually been raised by Pakistan, and sided with the USA against the Al Qaida and the Taliban.

Some interesting and also disturbing developments took place on the sidelines of the electoral process. There was a genuine and earnest effort by the Indian government at the Centre to get the Hurriyat Conference and some of its dissatisfied constituents to accept its invitation to participate in the elections. An initiative was also taken through various non-governmental organisations, though with the obvious support of the government, led by ex law minister Ram Jethmalani. While talks and parleys progressed for some time, nothing substantive could be achieved prior to the holding of elections in the state.

In an unfortunate incident, the moderate face of Hurriyat Conference, Abdul Gani Lone, was assassinated by terrorists, who suspected him of pushing for peace and elections in the state. This was a reminder of the ruthless motivation with which Pakistan had resolved to keep the state on the boil, till its agenda is achieved. Besides killing pro-peace leaders, a trend that has emerged over the last several years is the growing reliance on suicide or *fidayeen* attacks. This has become the signature strategy of terrorist outfits such as the Lashkar-e-Toiba, and they have achieved a remarkable degree of success in their attempt at gaining international attention.<sup>26</sup>

J&K continues to suffer from a proxy war, which has attained menacing proportions. More so as Pakistan frustrated in its attempts at instigating an indigenous insurgency uses every means at its disposal to keep J&K in a state of permanent upheaval. However, governments in the state and at the Centre and the people of J&K, have a responsibility to defeat the nefarious designs of a country, which is intent on following its selfish agenda at the cost of the common people of the state.

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<sup>26</sup> Besides the attacks on the J&K Assembly and Parliament, they had also successfully attacked the Red Fort in New Delhi on 22 December 2000, Badami Bagh Cantonment on 25 December 2000, Jammu Railway Station on 7 August 2001, and also a daring attack on the Tanda Army Camp at Jammu on 22 July 2003.





PART II

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PUNJAB



## Chapter 8

# Pre-Independence Period

Sikhism was born out of a wedlock between Hinduism and Islam after they had known each other for a period of nearly nine hundred years.

Khushwant Singh<sup>1</sup>

### Background

Punjab in many ways represents the very best that India has to offer.<sup>2</sup> It represents India's strengths—unity in diversity, the will to achieve excellence against all odds, agricultural self-reliance, the spirit of innovation and a brave people—all that is the essence of Indian nationhood. The medieval history of Punjab is often associated with the history of the rise of the Khalsa Panth. The early fifteenth century saw much social upheaval among both the Hindus and the Muslims. Whereas, for the Hindus, this upheaval was primarily religious and social in nature, for the Muslims, politico-religious aspects were involved.

Political turmoil affected the religious practices of the masses. For the Muslim, the most meritorious act became the conversion and destruction of infidels... Hindus reverted to the worship of idols, to washing away their sins in the holy rivers, to the wearing of caste marks and 'sacred' threads, as well as to fads like vegetarianism and cooking food in precisely demarcated squares. The caste system came back into its own.<sup>3</sup>

Social evils such as religious intolerance and discrimination on the basis of caste have, throughout the course of history, led to the emergence of various social movements aimed at cleansing society of its ills. It was in this manner that Jainism,

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<sup>1</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 17.

<sup>2</sup> The state has a higher life expectancy and per capita income than the national average. It is often referred to as the 'wheat bowl' of India.

<sup>3</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 28–29.

Buddhism, the Bhakti movement and subsequently Sikhism, came into being. Of the caste system, a feature of Indian society that divides people of the same religion and propagates a system of discrimination that benefits a few, Khushwant Singh has rightly said, "The caste system has been rightly described as Brahmanical Hinduism, for it was the Brahmins who moulded the pattern of social order to suit their needs."<sup>4</sup> The Brahmins gave the system religious sanction, thereby, eradicating any resistance to it that was likely to emanate from the lower strata of society.

As far as the Sikh religion is concerned, Guru Nanak is considered their first guru or religious teacher. He was followed by nine other gurus, some of whom took to arms becoming warrior saints, because they sought to redress through armed struggle the atrocities perpetrated against the Sikhs and their religion by the Mughals.

The Sikh tradition is that Guru Nanak attained enlightenment, at the age of 30, in 1499 A.D. It was at this time that he revealed the basic precept of the faith or the '*mul mantra*', which is the foundation of the most revered scripture of the Sikhs, the *Adi Granth* or the *Guru Granth Sahib*. A translation of this fundamental teaching reads as follows:

The Only Infinite One (1), the Only Supreme Being—God (*oankar*), the Eternal (*sati*), the Universal Spirit (*namu*), the Creator (*karta*), the All-pervading (*purakhu*), the Sovereign (*nirbhau*), the Harmonious (*nirvairu*), the Immortal (*akala*), the Embodiment (*murti*), the Un-incarnated (*ajuni*), the Self-existent (*saibhan*), the Enlightener (*guru*), the Bountiful (*prasad*).<sup>5</sup>

The essence of the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors was the equality of all before God. 'Guru Nanak's instituting the *langar*, common kitchen, and  *pangat*; sitting together in a row by all devotees irrespective of caste, creed or sex, was revolutionary in seeking to mitigate the prevalent taboos.<sup>6</sup> This was at variance with the corrupt form of Hinduism that prevailed at the time.

... it is Kaliyug the Dark Age of Hindustan, corruption and cruelty are the order of the day, charity is given from the looted wealth, they bother not where they go, with whom thy sleep, the Vedas are forgotten, only selfish motives prevail, the Qazi sits in judgement, he rolls his sacred beads and declares justice in favour of the one who bribes him, the Hindu has forgotten his sacred books, his courtyard is washed clean but his heart is polluted....<sup>7</sup>

Thus the Sikh belief, that challenged a system on which the power of the Brahmins was based, was bound to attract the animosity of the Brahmins. In the rise in

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: 19.

<sup>5</sup> Sangat Singh 1973: 41–53.

<sup>6</sup> Sangat Singh 1996: 22.

<sup>7</sup> Gill (2003: 67) based on Janam Sakhis and interpretations in the *Adi Granth*.

popularity of the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors, the Hindu priests saw a threat to their unquestioned and absolute hold over Hindu society—especially those of the lower strata whom they had till then exploited, unhindered by any challenges to their authority. There were numerous attempts by the Hindu clergy to use their religious and socio-political influence to suppress the rise of Sikhism. Their attempts, however, met with little success. The popularity of the message of universal brotherhood and equality could not be suppressed.

The places of worship, the houses of God had become dens of corruption, the sacred courtyards had become dwellings of the demons, he encouraged the farmer to sow the seed of good deeds, to plough the fields of truth and love, he asked the Hindus to wear the *jneu* of humility and honesty, he asked the Muslims to substitute their five prayers with truth, justice, charity, love and devotion, he told the merchants to deal in the business of truth, to meditate on the nature of honesty and generosity, he told men to be righteous and courageous, he told women to be true to their love and longings....<sup>8</sup>

These were the simple and effective teachings, which broke the barriers of all religions and endeared the Guru to the common man.

This spread of the Guru's message, received a fillip during the reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar. 'Emperor Akbar was impressed by the Guru's work, for it echoed some of the beliefs he held sacred.'<sup>9</sup> However, after the death of Akbar, in October 1605, who had encouraged and respected the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors, the Sikh religion began to face several challenges.<sup>10</sup> It is pertinent to point out that as the religion rejected the corrupt practices of Hinduism and preached a new awakening, this made it very popular with the common people, but invited the jealousy and animosity of the Hindu clergy. 'He (Guru Nanak) repudiated all the essentials of Hinduism... He highlighted the evils of Brahmanical domination and berated the cowardice of the people and many other evils of the contemporary society.'<sup>11</sup>

However, the new religion also invited the ire of the Muslim clergy, and certain of them, including the influential Sheikh Ahmed Sirhindi (1546–1624 A.D.), had written to the emperor Jahangir against the Sikh Guru. Events such as these in the years following Akbar's death served to create a chasm between the Hindus and the Muslims that was never really bridged, and this hatred and the covert rivalry that it bred would flare up periodically, an example being the terrible killings at the time of Partition. Thus it can be concluded that both Hindu and Muslim clerics were jealous of the popularity of the Gurus and the spread and acceptance of their

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.: 116–17.

<sup>9</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 59.

<sup>10</sup> Akbar is known to have visited Guru Arjan Dev at Goindwal on 24 November 1598, and was impressed by the 'bewitching and handsome appearance, sweet and melodious voice and fascinating and charming manners...and his singing of hymns'.

<sup>11</sup> Sangat Singh 1973: 19.

teachings.<sup>12</sup> It is evident that the seeds of religious intolerance had been sown which were further nurtured by fundamentalist elements.

After Akbar's death, the courtiers divided into two camps, with the hard line faction aligning themselves with Akbar's errant son, Jahangir, who had at one time revolted against his father but had been subsequently pardoned by him, and the more liberal minded, aligning themselves with Jahangir's son, Prince Khusrau. Prince Khusrau, however, in what was a short-sighted and immature decision, challenged Jahangir's authority. Jahangir's supporters led by Sheikh Farid Bukkari, challenged him, and he was defeated and captured on 27 April 1606 near the Chenab river. Subsequently, Jahangir was informed that Khusrau had received the blessings of the Sikh Guru, Arjan Dev. The Guru was summoned to Jahangir's court, imprisoned, tortured and finally killed.<sup>13</sup> Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom spurred a low intensity conflict of the Sikhs against the Mughal rulers. 'Arjun's blood became the seed of the Sikh church as well as of the Punjabi nation.'<sup>14</sup>

Guru Hargobind Rai, who succeeded Guru Arjan Dev, decided that *Deg* (the communal kitchen) should be accompanied by *Teg* (the scimitar). This brought about a major change in the thinking, strategy and attitude of the Sikhs towards the Mughals. It was thus Guru Hargobind who initiated the rise of militarism amongst the Sikhs.<sup>15</sup> He instituted a number of measures both practical and symbolic, which were to be the symbols of faith of the Sikhs. These included the wearing of 'two swords girded around his waist, one to symbolise spiritual power, and the other temporal'.<sup>16</sup> The Guru also started accepting gifts of horses and arms instead of money, and the training of warriors also commenced in earnest. Guru Hargobind did not immediately seek combat, preferring to prepare his army before challenging the Mughals. After a period of reorganisation, Guru Hargobind defeated the Mughal armies led by Mukhlis Khan in April 1634. He again defeated the Mughal armies led by Qamar Beg and Lal Beg in December 1634, followed by the defeat of the army led by Painda Khan on 28 April 1635.

A period of relative peace prevailed after the emperor Shah Jahan succeeded his father Jahangir to the throne. This was achieved by the Mughal's keeping away from the main Sikh centres of political and religious influence. However, with Aurangzeb ascending the throne, trouble once again started brewing. After a brief period of compromise during which Guru Har Rai and Hari Krishen respectively became the Sikh Guru, Guru Tegh Bahadur assumed religious leadership of the

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<sup>12</sup> See Khushwant Singh (1999) for a more detailed and elaborate account.

<sup>13</sup> A detailed description of the incident can be found in Khushwant Singh (1999) and Sangat Singh (1973).

<sup>14</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 62.

<sup>15</sup> Kapur 1986: 2.

<sup>16</sup> The two swords referred to as *miri* and *piri* are a symbolic confluence of religion and the executive, which can be seen even today in the perspective of the Sikh leadership as an authority combining religion and politics. Thus this mix was the legacy of Guru Hargobind. This was at the time a necessity born in part from the threat to the Sikh religion. However, this seems to have become symbolic practice thereafter and continues till this day.

Sikhs. Following an initial period of travel along the Gangetic plain and in Assam, he returned to Punjab to find the people suffering because of religious persecution. 'His exhortation to the people to stand firm could not have been palatable for the government.'<sup>17</sup> The Guru was arrested and beheaded on 11 November 1675.<sup>18</sup> Guru Gobind Singh succeeded Guru Tegh Bahadur, and under his leadership militant activities of the Sikhs against the Mughals recommenced. Thus the *Dharmayudh* (religious war) of the Sikhs against religious suppression and atrocities committed by the Mughals began. The Guru began his preparations with the training of his army and giving them the necessary equipment to wage war.

One feature of Guru Gobind Singh's reorganisation of the Sikhs into a martial entity was his order that they should no longer cut their hair. The grand finale of his ability to reorganise them occurred on 29 March 1699, when on receipt of his orders all the Sikhs congregated at Anandpur. Guru Gobind Singh addressed the gathering asking for volunteers willing to sacrifice themselves for the religion. Five men belonging to different castes, volunteered. The Guru proclaimed these five the 'Five Beloved Ones' (*Panj Piaras*), and baptised them into the Khalsa. Thereafter, he also took the oath and the title of 'Singh' meaning male lion. The Guru then declared the five Ks (*kakkas*) or symbols of the Sikh religion. These were, *kes* (unshorn hair), *kanga* (comb), *kachha* (short drawers), *kara* (arm bracelet) and *kirpan* (sword). Addressing the gathering the Guru said:

From now on, you have become casteless. No ritual, either Hindu or Muslim, will you perform and believe in superstition of no kind, but only in the one God who is the Master and Protector of all, the only Creator and Destroyer. In your new order, the lowest will rank equal with the highest and each will be to the other a *bhai* (brother). No pilgrimages for you any more, nor austerities but the pure life of the household, which you should be ready to sacrifice at the call of *dharma*.<sup>19</sup>

The significance of this ritual, in the context of the Sikh history, is apparent when viewed in terms of the overall perspective of the rise of Sikh nationalism. The five symbols of the Khalsa, easily identifiable and discernible, bound the Sikhs together. This gave a fillip to the emergence of a separate Sikh identity by creating a visible difference between them and the Hindus. This was important, especially since the distinction between the groups had become blurred over a period of time. It also gave a new meaning to Sikhism. The Sikh concept of divinity was reinterpreted, laying stress on the martial attributes of the divine being.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 72–73.

<sup>18</sup> This was the second murder of a Sikh Guru by the Mughals. It infuriated the Guru's followers, and is the likely cause of the increase in the divide between the two communities, Muslim and Sikh, which subsequently led to the outbreak of hostilities.

<sup>19</sup> Sangat Singh 1973: 71–72. This is a quote from a speech by Guru Gobind Singh

<sup>20</sup> Kapur 1986: 4.



From 1699 till the death of Guru Gobind Singh, the Sikhs progressed both militarily and in terms of the spread of their religion. He created a martial atmosphere and an expectancy of military action. His father's murder was still unavenged, and the persecution of religious minorities continued as before.<sup>21</sup> There were constant skirmishes between the Sikhs and the hill rajas. Towards the end of Guru Gobind Singh's lifetime, skirmishes with the Mughals had begun, leading to decades of unrest and bloodshed on both sides. The campaigns against Guru Gobind Singh also led to the killing of two of his sons in yet another inhuman display of hate and jealousy. Finally, in an act of deceit, a Pathan commissioned to kill the Guru stabbed him twice, fatally wounding him. Though he was able to kill the Pathan, the Guru, finding himself near death, passed on the spiritual Guruship to the *Adi Granth*, the religious scriptures of the Sikhs. Guru Gobind Singh died on the night of 7/8 October 1708.

Between the establishment of the religion by Guru Nanak and the death of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth and last Guru, was a span of 200 years. However, even though at the time of Guru Gobind Singh's death the Sikh religion had attained a certain degree of religious and social popularity, it was yet to achieve political clout. There are some reasons for this. First, the struggle started as a socio-economic movement with religious overtones, which enabled it to gain an identity and a following. The Guru's were not unaware of the importance of political power, yet the basic principles they preached as enumerated in the *Bicitra Natak* were, 'to uphold righteousness, protect the poor and uproot the evildoers'.<sup>22</sup> There was no underlying aim of carving out an empire for the Khalsa, which sets them apart from other religion-based conquests at this stage in history.<sup>23</sup>

In fact, it was the period starting with Guru Hargobind Rai's leadership that marked the beginning of a Sikh struggle against Mughal rule, and to this end they commenced an LIC in the Punjab against the Mughals. The Sikh *Dharmayudh* of this period is in essence at total variance with any other struggle in the history of LIC, as it was a struggle in the true sense: against the inability to express one's free will; an expression of dissatisfaction against social discrimination; and finally an expression of the collective will of the people to follow their beliefs and religion.

The contribution of the Gurus during this period cannot be understated. It was the strength of their teachings, which led to the emergence of a faith that taught and practiced equality in every sense of the term. 'I wish you all to embrace one creed and follow one path, obliterating all differences of religion.... Let men of

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<sup>21</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 82.

<sup>22</sup> *Bicitra Natak* written in 1692 is the autobiography of Guru Gobind Singh. It is a part of the Dasam Granth of the Sikhs.

<sup>23</sup> Contrasts can be drawn with both the Christian and Muslim conquests, which attempted conversion of the people of other religions using coercive means. The Sikh movement was different in this respect. Moreover, it possesses a distinct Bhakti and Sufi influence and has the distinction of remaining true to a large extent to the principles laid down in the Guru Granth Sahib. This is one of the major reasons why it was able to attract the lower classes and wean them away from Hinduism, which had become enmeshed in ostentation and Brahmanical exploitation.

the four castes receive baptism, eat out of the same vessel, and feel no disgust and contempt for one another.<sup>24</sup> It gave a sense of purpose and a sense of belonging to the people. Many of those who converted to Sikhism belonged to the lower strata of Hindu society and had experienced much discrimination.<sup>25</sup> A new-found equality changed the very complexion of the same class, giving them a social, religious and military shield. The relatively high rate of conversions of Jats to Sikhism took place during this period. This was despite the fact that all the Sikh Gurus were Khatris, whereas, Jats made up the majority of their disciples. The opportunity for 'upward social mobility' is seen as the 'main motive behind their adoption of Sikhism'.<sup>26</sup> This soon became evident, as the Sikh Empire grew in strength and they were recognised by the British as some of the best fighting men in the country. The faith also gave the people a firm foundation, which helped them stand up against the worst onslaughts of the British and the Muslim rulers with grit and courage.

It will also be pertinent to discuss the relations between the Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims at this point in time. Few examples of Sikh literature paint the Hindus in a poor light. Sangat Singh writes:

...the rise of Khalsa, mainly taking converts from the low and middle class Hindus, in the process making them self assertive and militant, had made the upper class of Hindus—mainly Brahmins, and clannish hill rulers, etc., rabidly anti Sikh.<sup>27</sup>

Further giving his impression of the Muslims, he says, '...Aurangzeb's policy of religious intolerance had brought about a schism between the Hindus and Muslims throughout the empire, the impact being mild or severe depending upon local circumstances.'<sup>28</sup> He goes on to say:

He [Guru Gobind Singh] had Muslims in his army, and did not mince words in calling a spade a spade, be it a Hindu oppressor or a Muslim one. And, at the height of the crisis, it was the Muslim friends who had helped him to escape both from Chamkaur and Machhiwara to Malwa!<sup>29</sup>

This conclusion needs to be taken note of. Though it will be discussed in detail subsequently when the rise of Sikh extremism is discussed, it is relevant to keep it in mind because it was opinions such as this that have shaped the Sikh psyche. It

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<sup>24</sup> Khushwant Singh (1999: 85) from Teja Singh and Ganda Singh (1950: 68). Their account is further based on the account of the Persian historian Ghulam Mohiuddin.

<sup>25</sup> Guru Gobind Singh also changed the system of leadership, which was transferred from the Khatris (Kshatriyas and Vaishyas) to the Jat peasants who were more amenable to change.

<sup>26</sup> Kapur 1986: 6.

<sup>27</sup> Sangat Singh 1973: 87. This contention of authors like Sangat Singh represents more the extremist point of view among the Sikhs who live in constant fear of being overwhelmed by Hindu culture and religion.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*: 87.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*: 86.

seems that the Sikh ideologues, in so far as a threat to the Sikh identity was concerned, feared the Hindus more than they did the Muslims. While Muslim fundamentalists were an open and overt threat, which they planned to deal with militarily, it was the Hindu ideologues and commoners alike who considered Sikhism to be very much a part and parcel of Hinduism. They very probably viewed the Sikh as a minor aberration and felt that they (the Sikhs) would return to the Hindu fold with the passage of time. This feeling negated the very foundation on which the increasing consolidation of Sikh thought was based. Hinduism was a real threat to Sikhism as it threatened to submerge its newly emerging identity, not with weapons of war and military extermination but with the usual flood of oneness and principles of brotherhood and the argument that both had arisen from the same root.

### Sikh Power Frittered Away

Guru Gobind Singh had handed over the reins of Sikh political power to Banda Singh Bahadur. Banda followed the principle of attracting people into the Sikh fold by addressing their day-to-day concerns. For example, he promised land to landless peasants. 'Since Banda promised land to the landless and loot to everyone, there was no dearth of recruits.'<sup>30</sup> During his reign Sikh power grew. He was able to overcome resistance in the regions stretching from present-day Karnal, Saharanpur and right up to the gates of Lahore. Finally by 1710, the areas between the rivers Ravi and Yamuna came under control of the Sikhs. The Mughals, worried by the spread of the Sikh kingdom, entered into alliances with Hindu rulers of the areas surrounding Punjab and commenced a counter attack against Banda. The Sikh juggernaut, which had threatened to reach Delhi was not only stopped but in 1715 A.D. Banda Singh Bahadur was forced to surrender, Sikh power had thus been curtailed to a very great extent. It is interesting for a student of the history of LICs to analyse Banda's failure. Much against sane advice, Banda, probably overestimating his power, preferred to fight conventional battles rather than pursue guerrilla tactics. This led to his defeat, as he was unable to match the Mughal army either in terms of strength or in force of arms. Despite his eventual downfall Banda succeeded in unifying and encouraging the peasantry to revolt against the Mughals, thus completing the work set in motion by Guru Gobind Singh. It also marks a period during which agrarian influences were added to religious and social ones to cement the growth of Sikhism. 'In seven stormy years Banda changed the class structure of land holdings in the southern half of the state by liquidating many of the big Muslim zamindar (land-owning) families of Malwa and the Jullundhur Doab.'<sup>31</sup>

The period that followed saw the Sikhs being persecuted by the Mughal armies, though they resolutely held on to their religious beliefs. A brief peaceful interlude was effected by the Mughals by granting the Nawabi (governorship) of the parganas

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<sup>30</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 105.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*: 118.

(districts) of Dipalpur, Kanganwal and Jhabal to the Sikhs in 1733. Zakaria Khan, the son of Abdus Samad Khan, an officer in the Mughal army, who had been given instructions to kill Banda Bahadur, facilitated this and Kapur Singh became the chosen recipient. However, this arrangement did not last long and the turning point in relations between the Muslims and Sikhs became the gruesome killing of Bhai Mani Singh, who was in charge of the Harimandir, near the Delhi Gate in Lahore.

In 1738, the Persian invader Nadir Shah attacked Delhi, destroying any semblance of Mughal power in the region. Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Afghan marauder, also invaded and plundered Punjab seven times between 1748 and 1765. This struggle for supremacy between the Afghans and Mughals benefitted the Sikhs who took advantage of the weakening power of the Mughals. In 1757 the Sikhs defeated the Afghans for the first time at the battle of Amritsar, repeating this feat again in 1762. The Sikhs moved into Lahore in 1765, striking coins to signal their ascent to power.

However, control over the Punjab was still a distant dream for the Sikhs. They continued being harassed by the Afghans and Lahore was again lost in 1796. The war at Amritsar in 1797 finally saw the rise of Ranjit Singh who was given the task of defending the city, which the Sikhs regarded as holy. It was only a matter of time before Ranjit Singh captured Lahore in 1799. 'On 7 July 1799 the massive gates of the fort were opened and its eighteen year old conqueror entered the citadel to the boom of guns firing a royal salute.'<sup>32</sup> He thus started anew the rise of Sikh power in the region. Ranjit Singh's proclamation as Maharaja was held on, 'the first of Baisakh [12 April] 1801, Sahib Singh Bedi daubed Ranjit Singh's forehead with saffron paste and proclaimed him Maharaja of the Punjab'.<sup>33</sup> Ranjit Singh's reign is known for the consolidation of the power of the Khalsa. However, it is also known for its separation of the political arena from the religious. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's realpolitik was aimed at gaining and retaining power and in this he disregarded the cherished aims of his predecessors. 'Ranjit Singh's political acumen is well illustrated in the compromise he made between becoming a Maharajah and remaining a peasant leader.'<sup>34</sup> Whereas, the initial focus of the Sikh religion had been religious and social reform, his focus was on political expansion according to the well-established principles of statecraft laid down by Chanakya. Ranjit Singh is probably the only Sikh leader who, despite his weaknesses, understood the requirements of being a successful ruler. He was one of the few rulers to keep religion separate from politics or the state—an ideal, which is still being advocated. He realised that playing the percentage game in Punjab would not have allowed him to conquer and control an area, as large as he eventually did.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.: 197.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.: 200.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.: 201.

<sup>35</sup> Drawing a comparison between Maharaja Ranjit Singh's political finesse and subsequent leaders prior to Partition and till date, one finds this kind of a political vision absent in the latter. Sikh politics continues to remain enmeshed with religion to the detriment of both.

Before his death in 1839, Ranjit Singh had carved out an exceptionally large empire, which spread till the Khyber. This was the first time that the kingdom of any Indian ruler had spread this far north. However, in spite of this, one school of thought is of the opinion that it was he who sowed the seeds of destruction of the Sikh empire. Instead of laying the foundations of a strong dynasty which would rule after him, he had as his advisors and ministers, including his Prime Minister, either Dogras or Hindu Brahmins. As he was too powerful they intended to wait till after his death to assert their independence. The example of Raja Gulab Singh, a Dogra general in the service of Ranjit Singh, is a case in point. It was he who collaborated with the British to bring about the downfall of the Sikh empire. However, a contrary viewpoint asserts that in a multi-religious state like Punjab, it was impossible to achieve the kind of territorial expansion and political power that Ranjit Singh did, without taking the entire population into account. This was achieved by a secular policy towards all religions.

Within a short period of time Ranjit Singh convinced the people of Lahore and the Punjab that he did not intend to set up a Sikh kingdom but a Punjabi state in which Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs would be equal before the law and have the same rights and duties.<sup>36</sup>

It is interesting to note that the foundations of the Sikh empire and the Sikh state were based on Punjabi-speaking people rather than solely on people who were Sikhs. This is the dilemma, which the Sikh leaders faced in the post-Independence period (the details of which will be covered in Chapter 9). The Dogras and the British exploited this apparent weakness in the Sikh polity to bring about the defeat of the Sikhs in the Battle of Sabraon on 10 February 1846. After this defeat, the Sikhs signed the Treaty of Amritsar on 9 March 1846 and Jalandhar was handed over to the British. This treaty also gave Kashmir to Raja Gulab Singh, as a reward for his assistance to the British against the Sikhs.<sup>37</sup> Sikh subjugation was finally complete on 29 March 1849.

## Commencement of British Rule

The initial British period (1845–50) saw the amalgamation of Sikh territories into the rest of British India. Sikh territories in the north became important to the British because of their increasing interest in Afghanistan and their tussle with the Russians in the famed 'Great Game'. The British had witnessed the martial abilities of Sikh soldiers during wars fought against them. This encouraged them to create Sikh regiments, an investment that brought in rich dividends during the Revolt of 1857.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 203.

<sup>37</sup> This has been discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

<sup>38</sup> The British prefer to call it a mutiny, thereby suggesting that it was a revolt by a handful rather than an expression of mass uprising.

At this point it will be important to mention the role played by the Sikhs in the Revolt of 1857. While the Hindus and Muslims had sufficient reason to revolt during this period,<sup>39</sup> the Sikhs were relatively unaffected. Their sympathies lay more with the British than with the Hindu sepoy (soldiers), who 'disdained to mix with Sikhs as men of low caste'.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, while the injury to their religious sentiments was the primary reason for the revolt of the Hindu and Muslim soldiers, the Sikhs, having been allowed to retain their religious symbols, for example, the wearing of turbans and beards, did not have any reason to feel aggrieved. In addition, John Lawrence, the Chief Commissioner, proved to be an able administrator ensuring peace and prosperity in the region thereby enhancing the people's satisfaction. These factors resulted in the Sikhs keeping aloof from the revolt and much to the frustration of the revolting soldiers they also actively participated in subduing the uprising.

The creation of Sikh regiments and their famed loyalty to the British helped them save their religious identity. It was also done with an aim of giving tacit, if not open, support to the idea of a distinct difference between Hindus and Sikhs—a difference, which was becoming blurred by the day. This led to Lord Dalhousie's remark, that:

Their great gooroo Govind sought to abolish caste and in a great degree, succeeded. They are, however, gradually relapsing into Hindooism, and even as they continue as Sikhs, they are yearly Hindooified more and more; so much so, that Sir George Clerk (Governor of Bombay 1847–48) has said that in 50 years the sect of Sikhs would have disappeared.<sup>41</sup>

This trend was strengthened by *kesdbari*:<sup>42</sup> Sikhs reverting to the fold of Hinduism, as a result of the political decimation of the Sikhs. Their uncertainty and fear of being identified with a defeated power also weakened the position of Sikhism in Punjab. 'Uncertain of British attitude towards their recent foes, those who had earlier adopted the garb of the Khalsa in their thousands, now deserted it with the same vigour.'<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> These included policies like the 'doctrine of lapse', agreement to take over the Red Fort after Bahadur Shah's demise, measures to 'eliminate large estates', social reforms like abolition of *sati*, forbidding wearing religious marks for soldiers and finally the notorious cartridge grease episode. The problem of low pays and humiliation at the hands of the British too added to the discontentment.

<sup>40</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 102.

<sup>41</sup> Khushwant Singh 1992: 33.

<sup>42</sup> Sikhs are often referred to either as *Kesdbari* or *Sabajdbari*. *Kesdbaris* were the ones who 'accepted the baptism of Guru Gobind Singh', while the *sabajdbaris* continued to follow the teachings of Guru Nanak and the other Gurus prior to the tenth Guru but did not accept baptism and were seen to be 'slow converters'. With the passage of time, the position of the former strengthened, even as that of the latter weakened both in Sikh politics and religious forums.

<sup>43</sup> Kapur 1986: 8.

## Resurgence of Hinduism and Christianity

There was also a growing Hindu and Christian movement in Punjab, which had been successful in converting a number of Sikhs to either of the two religions. However, the official British policy of non-interference in religion in the country, and British officers enforcing a strict religious code of conduct in the Sikh regiments further reinforced Sikh faith in their roots.

This trend was, however, to be threatened by a chain of events in the not too distant future. This chain of events was to have a far-reaching impact on the psyche of the traditional and deeply religious elements in Sikh society. First, was the conversion of Sikhs either back to Hinduism or to Christianity. While one of the reasons for the Sikhs reconverting to Hinduism was the decline in Sikh power, another major cause was the growing influence of the Arya Samaj, a reformist movement started by Swami Dayanand Saraswati.<sup>44</sup> The Swami visited Lahore in 1877 and commenced the spread of the sect, which found many followers. Second was the spread of Christianity, with its most famous Sikh convert being the Sikh Maharaja, Dalip Singh. A number of people followed suit, especially the untouchables who were despised and discriminated against by the high class Sikhs. Census figures of the period throw light on the degree to which conversions took place during this period. 'In 1881 there were 3,976 Christians in the Punjab. By 1891 their number had increased to 19,547, by 1901 to 37,980, by 1911 to 163,994 and by 1921 to 315,931 persons'<sup>45</sup> (see Figure 8.1). However, the Sikhs were more alarmed when some of the high caste families started converting.<sup>46</sup> Thus it can be seen that at this time the Sikhs once again started feeling threatened by the Hindus and, to a much smaller extent, by the Christians. This fear of Hindus and Christian conversions was further accentuated by the attempt of Muslim kings to convert Sikhs under threat of putting them to the sword and their interference with their religious practices. The cumulative effect of all of this was a hardening of the Sikh attitude to safeguard their religious and social identity. It was the influence of such factors that very probably had a profound impact on the Sikh psyche, giving rise to fundamentalism in certain sections of Sikh society.

## Sikh Resurgence

The slow but sure weakening of their hold over the Sikhs became apparent to their leaders. Besides the factors mentioned earlier, it was also attributed to growing

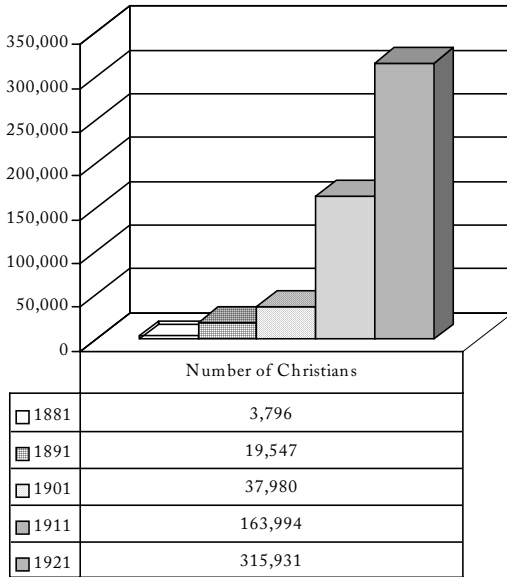
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<sup>44</sup> Arya Samaj was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati. He spread the virtues of the Vedas and emphasised the concept of one invisible and formless God and abolition of the caste system, thus combining the virtues of Hinduism and Sikhism. For a more detailed account of the teachings refer to his *Satyarth Prakash*.

<sup>45</sup> Kapur 1986: 14. Quoted from Government of India, Census of India (for the period from 1891 to 1921).

<sup>46</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 138–39.

Figure 8.1  
Rise in Christian Population in Punjab



Source: Government of India, Census of India, 1921.

ostentation among the leaders, an increasing divide between the high and low classes and an increase in ritualistic tendencies.<sup>47</sup> This was coupled with the rise of a number of reformist movements in the Sikh religion similar in nature to reform movements like Bhaktism in Hinduism and Sufism in Islam. Some examples are the Nirankari sect<sup>48</sup> started by Baba Dyal Singh (1783–1854) and the Namdhari Sect started by Bhai Balak Singh (1799–1862). However, the most noteworthy of the effects of this renewed religious zeal that was emerging among the Sikhs was the formation of the ‘Singh Sabhas’.<sup>49</sup> These bodies or societies aimed at distilling the essence of the Sikh faith, discarding distortions that had crept in over the years. The first Sabha was formed more as a reaction to Sikh conversions to Christianity in Amritsar in 1873. This was followed by the formation of a similar organisation at Lahore in 1879. The following years witnessed their steady proliferation,

<sup>47</sup> Kapur 1986: 7. See also Khushwant Singh (1999: 196).

<sup>48</sup> The Nirankaris stressed on the formless nature of God and opposed idol worship. *Nirankari* is a derivative of the word *nirakar* or shapeless. They also opposed ostentation and avoidable rituals. The *Namdhari* sect taught that the ‘*nam*’ or name of God should be repeated and religious rituals should be avoided.

<sup>49</sup> Various Singh Sabhas worked with different perspectives and at times comprised of different sections of the population. Examples of the Lahore Singh Sabha, which opposed high class Sikhs to the Bhasaur Singh Sabha, which became a centre of Sikh militancy under Babu Teja Singh.



however, these Sabhas were not closely linked in either their charter or goals at this stage. In order to effect this, in 1902 a body was established called the 'Chief Khalsa Diwan' to coordinate the working of the Singh Sabhas.<sup>50</sup> It is revealing to read some of the aspects stressed in the charters of some of the Singh Sabhas. They reveal that their aim was to raise the religious and social standards of the Sikhs. A professed aim stated in the charter of the Amritsar Singh Sabha was to 'arouse love of religion among the Sikhs' and to 'propagate the true Sikh religion everywhere'.<sup>51</sup> Further, the charter categorically stated that the members were to 'not discuss matters relating to the Government'. Thus they aimed at a separation between religion and politics—this divide was, however, bridged at a later date. 'The society's objects included the revival of the teachings of the gurus, production of religious literature in Punjabi, and a campaign against illiteracy.'<sup>52</sup>

The role and aims of the Singh Sabhas and the Arya Samaj soon brought them into confrontation with each other, as both aimed at similar goals but for their respective religions. A clash of interest was thus inevitable. While the Singh Sabhas were instrumental in uniting and converting a large number of people to Sikhism, the Arya Samaj achieved the opposite, reconverting Sikhs to Hinduism. All this produced a hardening of the stance of either side, which became especially relevant since the two movements had their strongest following amongst the educated middle class.<sup>53</sup> The Arya Samaj through the teachings of Swami Dayanand Saraswati, not only aimed at the reformation and revival of the Hindu religion, it also laid the foundations for a political revival and Hindu supremacy through Hindu nationalism. Dr Griswold makes an interesting observation in this regard. 'The watchword for Pandit Dayanand was back to the Vedas. With this religious watchword, another watchword was implicitly, if not explicitly, combined, namely India for Indians...in other words Hindu religion for the Indians and Indian sovereignty for Indians.'<sup>54</sup>

It is vital to understand the role of the Singh Sabhas in bringing about a religious revival among the Sikhs and giving rise to Sikh nationalism. This was achieved through numerous meetings of the organisations and subsequently through the media. There was a sudden proliferation in the literature supporting and propagating their views. The effectiveness of this propagation is revealed by the census figures of this period as given in Figure 8.2. The Singh Sabhas subsequently became enmeshed in a fight for Punjab's right to an enhanced political standing, especially in the aftermath of the First World War, as will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

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<sup>50</sup> The first secretary of the Khalsa Diwan was Sunder Singh Majithia, a prominent and wealthy landowner.

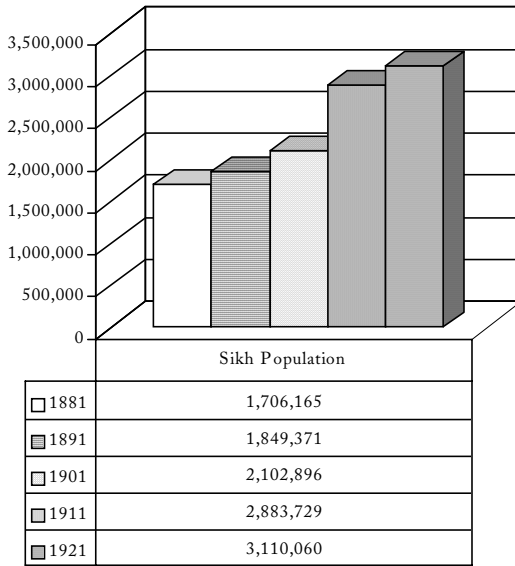
<sup>51</sup> Kapur 1986: 16–17.

<sup>52</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 141.

<sup>53</sup> There were a number of instances where Arya Samaj speakers slighted Sikh Gurus. See Ganda Singh 1949: 8; and Khushwant Singh 1999: 141–44.

<sup>54</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 147.

Figure 8.2  
Comparative Figures—Sikh Population



Source: GOI, Census of India.

## Sikh Militarism

There were two major movements, the Ghadr and that of the Babbar Akalis', which heralded the rise of Sikh militarism in Punjab. Though these movements were ultimately not very successful in the achievement of their objectives, yet they did set a precedent in Punjab for the use of violence as a means of solving religious and political issues. These violent traditions are likely to have had an influence on subsequent movements in the post-Independence period.

The Ghadr Movement had its origins outside the country, in Stockton in the USA. It first took shape in Vancouver, Canada, as the Khalsa Diwan Society, formed to protect the interests of Indian immigrants.<sup>55</sup> It subsequently spread to other areas of Canada and the USA. The immigrants in the USA started a party called the Hindustani Immigrants of the Pacific Coast and purchased premises at San Francisco from where the affairs of the party were run. It started a weekly newspaper called *Ghadr* and in this manner got its name, the Ghadr Party. The first issue of its newspaper came out on 15 November 1915, and in it were outlined the party's objectives as follows:

<sup>55</sup> Most Indian immigrants were Sikhs who migrated from Punjab to Canada to work in the lumber mills, mines and on the railway tracks.

Today, there begins in foreign lands, but in our country's language, a war against the British Raj.... What is our name? Ghadr. Where will Ghadr break out? In India. The time will soon come when rifles and blood will take the place of pen and ink.<sup>56</sup>

The leaders of the movement organised the people, exhorting them to carry out terrorist acts in India.<sup>57</sup> The *Ghadr* was circulated in all countries where Indian immigrants were present. Thus in a few months it had gained tremendous circulation and became the rallying point for Indian immigrants. The first batch of volunteers sailed to India in August 1914 on the *Korea*. Though, British intelligence came to know of the move and was successful in arresting the leader on the *Korea's* docking at Calcutta, yet a deluge of volunteers did manage to succeed in getting to Punjab.<sup>58</sup> By December 1914 more than 1,000 volunteers had entered India.<sup>59</sup>

The Ghadr revolutionaries attempted to wean soldiers away from the Sikh regiments that the British had established, and also tried to use the *gurdwaras* to spread revolutionary ideas amongst the people. However, in their call for violent revolution, these revolutionaries faced the apathy of the Sikh leaders and the antipathy of nationalist leaders to their exhortations, who expressed a 'strong disapproval' of their activities. British intelligence and its moles accomplished the remainder, and the plan for a violent upheaval failed with the movement fizzling out by the summer of 1915.<sup>60</sup> Sir Michael O'Dwyer writes:

By August 1915, that is, within nine months of the first outbreak, we had crushed the first rebellion. Nearly all the leaders and many of their most active adherents were in our hands awaiting trial or were brought to justice later, internal order was restored and, above all, the Sikh community had proved its staunch loyalty.<sup>61</sup>

This was yet another instance of Sikh loyalty to the British, which had stood them in good stead from the time it was first tested in the Revolt of 1857.<sup>62</sup> However, the movement did set an example of violent struggle as a means of attempting to achieve political and religious aims in Punjab, and the fallout of this has coloured Sikh politics since that time.

The second struggle took place after a period of about eight years after the Ghadr

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<sup>56</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 176–77.

<sup>57</sup> The main leaders of the organisation were Jwala Singh, Hardayal and Sohan Singh. Though the movement aimed at stirring up a rebellion in the entire country, its focus remained Punjab probably because of the background of most immigrants and their leaders.

<sup>58</sup> Jawala Singh was arrested in Calcutta along with certain other leaders and the others were sent under surveillance to Punjab.

<sup>59</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 182.

<sup>60</sup> The *Ghadr* cadres were able to carry out a few incidents of looting, kill a constable and one village official. Besides this they were not able to succeed in their plan primarily because of a lack of the support that they had expected.

<sup>61</sup> O'Dwyer 1925: 206, quoted in Khushwant Singh 1999: 185.

<sup>62</sup> This aspect and its possible causes will be discussed when covering the political scene prior to independence under the section 'Sikh Factionalism'.

failure. This organisation was called the Babbar Akalis and consisted of cadres who were old Ghadr activists and army personnel on leave. Their decision to resort to violence as a means of expressing their dissatisfaction, stemmed from the Guru Ka Bagh episode.<sup>63</sup> However, the results of this movement were similar to that of the Ghadr Party. A number of activists were arrested and some died heroically in encounters with the security forces. However, by the summer of 1923 the resistance was over with little tangible results to show, except for keeping alive the spirit of violent resistance as a tradition of Sikh nationalism.

## Rise of Sikh Political Activism

A major incident, which brought the issue of Sikh identity into intellectual circles and made it common knowledge, was a court case regarding the inheritance of a certain Dayal Singh Majithia, which he had left to a trust. This was contested by his wife who challenged the Hindu inheritance law on the grounds that it was not applicable in this case as she and her husband were both Sikhs. The issue, which took the shape of interpretation of Sikh identity as distinct from that of the Hindus, was taken up by both sides, and gave rise to a sharp divide especially among the hard line elements on both sides.<sup>64</sup>

Yet another issue, which broadened the divide between the Hindus and the Sikhs, was the issue of representation in the Provincial Legislative Councils. Before analysing the main issue of contention, it will be relevant to understand the background of the Sikh demand. During the First World War, there was a growing requirement for troops to fight for the Allied forces. This requirement led to the British recruiting soldiers in India in numbers that were probably larger than was earlier planned. The heroism of the valiant Sikhs had already been witnessed during the Anglo-Sikh wars. This led to an increased recruitment drive in the Punjab. The Sikhs responded eagerly to this recruitment drive, and 'though the Sikhs were 12 per cent of the population of the province, they contributed 22 per cent of the combatants recruited in the Punjab during the war'.<sup>65</sup> And not only did they participate in the war effort with great gusto; they also performed admirably in the fighting, etching a permanent place for themselves in the annals of military

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<sup>63</sup> The Guru Ka Bagh was a piece of land near a certain *gurdwara*, which was used by it as a source of firewood. A clash between a *mabant* of the *gurdwara* and the Akalis took place here. The *mabant* reported that the Akalis were stealing wood from the area. Finally the police intervened and a clash took place between the Akalis and the police as well. This led to protracted non-violent protests by the Akalis, which resulted in the arrest of 5,605 and the hospitalisation of 936. However, the British government finally backed out and the Akalis described this as their 'second victory' after their taking over of the Golden Temple.

<sup>64</sup> Incidentally the court ruled that Dayal Singh was a Hindu. This was a major setback for the Sikh leaders who had made this a prestige issue.

<sup>65</sup> Kapur 1986: 61.

history. Sikh religious and political bodies did not want this contribution to go unrecorded, and when the issue of representation in the provincial councils came up they, making an indirect reference to the Sikh contribution, submitted a memorandum, which was given to the British by Sunder Singh Majithia. It asked for representation, 'proportionate to the importance, position and services of the community, with due regard to their status before the annexation of the Punjab, their present stake in the country and their past and present services to the Empire'.<sup>66</sup>

Sikh leaders also asked for separate representation in the legislative council of Punjab when the Montague Chelmsford Committee went about the task of effecting a devolution of power. They claimed a share of one-third for the Sikhs, a claim contested and refuted by the Hindu leaders. '... Consistent with their position and importance the Sikhs claim that a one-third share in all seats and appointments in the Punjab is their just share and should be secured to them as an absolute minimum'. In response to this demand, in November 1917 the Punjab Provincial Congress Committee, '... rejected Sikh demands for separate representation on the ground that the Sikhs were the part of a larger Hindu community and as such were not entitled to separate electorate'.<sup>67</sup>

The Montague-Chelmsford Indian Constitutional Reforms Report, which was published in July 1918, furnished the Sikhs, who had been asking for separate representation for their community, with a major political victory. The report said:

The Sikhs in Punjab are a distinct and important people, they supply a gallant and valuable element to the Indian army, but they are everywhere in a minority and experience has shown that everywhere they go virtually unrepresented. To the Sikhs, therefore, and to them alone we propose to extend the system already adopted in the case of the Mohammadans.<sup>68</sup>

The Sikhs were elated at the acceptance of their claim in February 1919, when the recommendations were made public. However, they were disappointed, when they finally received a reservation of only 15 per cent, instead of the one-third that they had demanded. It is interesting to understand the politics behind this incident. It is also relevant to comprehend the likely aims of the British, which was the furthering of their policy of 'Divide and Rule' through separate representation for Muslims and Sikhs—a policy which was further cemented in 1935.

The Hindus and Muslims had been content each with a 50 per cent representation in the provincial legislative council of Punjab, and neither wanted representation for the Sikhs. This was especially true in respect of the Hindus, as they feared that reservation for the Sikhs would eat into their share. On the other hand, the British in pursuance of their usual policy of 'Divide and Rule', played the Sikhs

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.: 73. Quoting from the memorandum given to the British by Sunder Singh Majithia.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.: 73.

<sup>68</sup> Montague-Chelmsford Report, Indian Constitutional Reforms Report, 1918, p. 150.

against both the Hindus and Muslims, sympathising with them over the 'discrimination' that they were facing. Satyapal Dang writes:

In his essay on Ethno-Nationalism, K.R. Bomball has pointed out that in Cunningham's famous, *History of Sikhs*, written in the early years of the present century, a prominent theme is the growth of Sikhs from 'a sect to a people' and from 'a people to a nation'.<sup>69</sup>

Given the fact that the Hindus found it convenient to absorb the Sikhs both politically and socially within the fold of Hindu society, and that the Muslims also found it advantageous to keep them off the political stage; it was inevitable that the Sikhs would fear a loss of identity and political clout and thus fight for their very identity and political survival. '... The growth of Sikh fundamentalism and the separatist demand is not as sudden as it may seem. Both have deep social and historical roots, linked to the development of a distinct Sikh identity, community and organisation...'<sup>70</sup>

The issue of defining the Sikh identity also became the focus of events during this period. The Southborough Committee was entrusted with this task and their much-awaited decision made matters worse, at least from the Sikh perspective, by their inability to come up with a definition. In fact the committee had found such a definition hard to come by, especially since past judgements had come up against similar difficulties and were thus no real help.<sup>71</sup> Instead, the committee defined a 'Sikh' as one who had declared himself as such at the time of preparation of the electoral rolls. This in effect included both *kesdhari* and *sabajdhari* Sikhs. This, as per the Sikh leadership, defeated the very purpose of what they had been fighting for. Compounded by the meagre 15 per cent representation they had been granted, they felt that the committee's decision was likely to totally undermine the effectiveness of the Government of India Act of 1919. Despite having won the battle for special representation, the Sikhs had in effect lost the war. This aspect went a long way towards alienating them from the Hindus. They saw in all of this a concerted effort to keep them out of the decision-making cycle and to sideline them in Punjab's polity.

This setback forced the Sikh elite to review their strategy. It was widely felt that a lack of political representation had resulted in the loss. Thus on 30 March 1919 a political party called the Sikh League was launched to 'represent the community'. The Sikhs had thus emerged as a political entity in Punjab.

Another important aspect, which had a major impact on widening the Hindu-Sikh divide, was the agitation by the Sikhs aimed at gaining control of the *gurdwaras*. Traditionally, from the eighteenth century onward followers of the Udasi sect of Sikhs had control over the *gurdwaras*.<sup>72</sup> The *mahants* and *granthis* virtually

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<sup>69</sup> Dang 1988: 2.

<sup>70</sup> Kapur 1986: xii.

<sup>71</sup> The case of Dayal Singh Majithia has already brought out this aspect earlier.

controlled all the affairs of the *gurdwara* and with the passage of time their control became hereditary. This hereditary control over the *gurdwaras* may have been prompted by the large sums of money that the *gurdwaras* had started generating and the lure of estates, which were granted to the *gurdwaras*. Soon, the *mahants* were accused of acts, not becoming to those in their position. 'In some instances the *gurdwaras* became resorts of bad characters who kept concubines and indulged in drinking and gambling on the strength of *gurdwara* income.'<sup>73</sup> Thus, after an increase in Sikh religious and political clout, the dual impact of being sidelined when it came to the administration of the *gurdwaras* and from their financial management led to rising dissatisfaction in certain Sikh circles. They thus commenced a strong tirade against the existing management of specific *gurdwaras* to begin with, and subsequently the rising pitch of the agitation overwhelmed the entire state with its fury. One of the first targets of the agitating Sikh masses was a *gurdwara* at Nankana in 1885. The agitation was however not successful but was followed by a more concerted effort to take over of Babe-de-Ber shrine in Sialkot after the death of its *mahant* in September 1918. However, expensive and protracted litigation again thwarted the attempt. The next attempt was at the seat of Sikh religious power and symbolism—the Golden Temple at Amritsar. The matter was precipitated when reformers took affront to 'non-Sikh' customs being followed and discrimination being practiced against low caste Sikhs. This was further accentuated by Arun Singh's act of honouring General Dyer of Jallianwallah Bagh infamy and the perceived 'anti-Sikh' statements of the priests. Finally in October 1920, a *shuddhi* ceremony was conducted to baptise low caste Sikhs into Sikhism. This was followed by escorting them to the Golden Temple against the dictates of the *mahant*. Following a theological dispute, the existing *mahants* were forced to leave the precincts and the agitating group established a new management. Thus began a series of forced takeovers of *gurdwaras* in the state despite the specific order of the British administration to the contrary. The Sikhs, who saw this as a fight against injustice and British interference, supported the hard line approach of the Khalsa *biradri*. It also made the existing divide between Hindus and Sikhs larger as the caretakers of the *gurdwaras* were *sabajdhari* Sikhs or even Hindus—a divide that was further accentuated by the passage of the Sikh Gurdwara and Shrine Act of 1925 on 8 July 1925. This Act finally defined the term 'Sikh' the decision going in favour of the *kesdhari* Sikhs as had been demanded through the years of agitation. After professing the Sikh faith, an individual was required to provide a written declaration stating the following, 'I solemnly affirm that I am a Sikh, that I believe

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<sup>72</sup> The Udasi sect was established by Sri Chand who was the eldest son of Guru Nanak. The management of the *gurdwaras* fell into their hands more by default than by design. After the bitter enemy between the Mughals and militant Sikhs, a large number of *kesdhari* Sikhs went into exile to escape persecution. This enabled *sabajdhari* Sikhs, who faced less harassment because they were cleanshaven, to take over the management of the *gurdwaras*. This included both the jobs of *granthi* and *mahant*, i.e., the scripture reader and the manager.

<sup>73</sup> Kapur 1986: 44.

in the Guru Granth Sahib, that I believe in the Ten Gurus and that I have no other religion.<sup>74</sup> This declaration virtually implied that all individuals who saw Sikhism as a sect of Hinduism could not be termed ‘Sikhs’. This included the *sabjdharis*—who constituted a large percentage of the Sikhs at that time. The Act further clarified that a member of the management committee or central committee designated to look after the gurdwaras, could not be a *patit*. Though the word *patit* was not defined in the Act, its provisions ensured the following:

...in the eyes of the Tat Khalsa,<sup>75</sup> all non-keshdhari Sikhs, in as much as they deviated from the rules prescribed for the Khalsa, were *patits*, or fallen men. The rules laid out under the bill thus ensured that the control over all Sikh religious institutions would effectively pass to the Khalsa Sikhs.<sup>76</sup>

The division between the Khalsas and Hindus, which also included the *sabjdharis*, was thus complete. ‘The most serious outcome of the four years of intense agitation, in which the Hindus supported the Udasi mahants against the Akalis, was to widen further the gulf between the two communities.’<sup>77</sup> The seeds of militant nationalism had thus been laid, which were to further germinate as Sikh religious and political leaders endeavoured to maintain their distinct identity—an identity they had finally created after much strife and sacrifice.

This success was given concrete shape with the formation of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC)<sup>78</sup> on 15 November 1920 with the following aim to, ‘reform forcibly mismanaged *gurdwaras* and eject corrupt *mahants*’. The SGPC instituted the Shiromani Akali Dal to ‘direct the activities of the Akali *jathas*’.<sup>79</sup>

## Sikh Factionalism

Factionalism, lack of leadership and unity, these were the banes of the Sikhs, and caused several internal divisions amongst them. One of the first instances, that occurred after they had emerged as a separate political entity, when this was visible was during the Civil Disobedience Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi to protest against the promulgation of the Rowlatt Act in 1919.<sup>80</sup> The movement

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<sup>74</sup> Sikh Gurdwara and Shrine Act, 1925.

<sup>75</sup> The *Tat* (true) Khalsa were a group of Sikhs who strived for the cause of a separate Sikh identity. They led the Singh Sabhas and later were responsible for the fight for a distinct identity of the Sikhs.

<sup>76</sup> Kapur 1986: 187.

<sup>77</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 213.

<sup>78</sup> The SGPC was formed to manage the Sikh shrines, after a proclamation to that effect from the Akal Takth.

<sup>79</sup> The Akalis were ‘reckless soldiers’ owing their origin to Guru Gobind Singh and were the ‘self-appointed’ guardians of Sikh faith (Kapur 1986: 92).



attracted widespread support, which included large sections of the Sikh population. However, prominent Sikh leaders continued to support the British, warning the Sikhs against going against the British and participating in the movement. The Chief Khalsa Diwan's spokesmen said that they should, 'beware of the attempts of agitators to seduce them from their loyalty'.<sup>81</sup> After General Dyre's notorious act of firing at a gathering of people at the Jallianwallah Bagh, killing 379 people; an action termed a 'monstrous event' by Prime Minister Churchill and 'a mistaken conception of duty' by the British committee investigating the incident, General Dyre was asked to retire prematurely in March 1920. However, surprisingly, pronouncements from the most revered and holy shrine of Sikhs shocked the community at large. 'The manager of the Golden Temple, Arur Singh, invited General Dyre to the shrine and, as a token of Sikh appreciation of his services, invested him with the five symbols of the Khalsa.'<sup>82</sup> Despite, this endorsement, and the symbolic value of this action, a majority of the Sikhs supported the nationalist movement. The actions of some of the political and religious bodies at the time was probably an attempt to gain British sympathy and through it political patronage. While this never became a reality, the sweeping winds of nationalism caught up the Sikh League, and while the mood was largely non-violent in the country, the Sikh League organisations at the district level did focus on violent means of struggle against British rule. 'The evolution of Sikh communal consciousness had led to political organisation. The political expression of communal aspirations and grievances bred militancy and saw the emergence of a Khalsa nationalism.'<sup>83</sup>

This became more than apparent with the commencement of the process of political reform and decentralisation preceding Independence. The following years till Independence saw the Sikhs led by the Akalis split into two schools of thought. The first wanted a separate region for the Sikhs called 'Azad Punjab' and the other, and more dominant faction, aligned with the forces of nationalism putting their full weight behind the movement for Independence. The demand for a Sikh homeland was more a result of the demand for Pakistan. The Sikh demand for a separate region became more vociferous after the Muslim League leaders started demanding Pakistan in the early 1940s.<sup>84</sup> The Sikhs feared that the formation of

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<sup>80</sup> The Rowlatt Act of 1919 was promulgated by the British after the lapse of the Defence of India Act of 1915. The latter was promulgated during the First World War to guard against 'political terrorism' in India. After its lapse, the government felt the need for a similar law and Justice S.A.T. Rowlatt suggested two bills, the Indian Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill No. 1 and Criminal Law (Emergency Powers) Bill No. 2, both of which later took the form of the Rowlatt Act. The first aimed at giving the government powers to counteract activities 'prejudicial to the security of the state' and the second aimed at bypassing the long legal procedure in cases of political crime.

<sup>81</sup> Fortnightly Report, 15 October 1919, GOI, Home (Political), Deposit, no. 14 of November 1919. Quoted by Kapur (1986: 86).

<sup>82</sup> Kapur 1986: 86.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*: 92.

Pakistan would divide their homeland between present-day Pakistan and India and was likely to result in large-scale loss of their landholdings, property and political strength. Thus the demand for a Sikh state was a reaction to the demand for Pakistan rather than a well thought out and well-planned strategy for seeking independence. Some historians also feel that this demand for a separate Sikh homeland, was the first time that the demand for 'Khalistan' was raised.

The objective of a separate Sikh State of *Sikhistan* or *Khalistan* was officially adopted by the Akali Dal in March 1946. A resolution adopted by the executive committee of the Akali Dal stated, '...whereas the entity of the Sikhs is being threatened on account of the persistent demand for Pakistan by the Muslims on the one hand and of absorption by the Hindus on the other, and executive committee of the Akali Dal demands, for the preservation and protection of the religious, cultural and economic rights of the Sikh nation, the creation of a Sikh state.'<sup>85</sup>

This gradual hardening of stance was motivated more by politics than by religion. First, when the possibility of Independence started looming large on the horizon, and the demand for Pakistan gained ground, the Sikhs began to feel threatened as their position in the emerging political setup seemed fragile and weak.<sup>86</sup> Second, they sensed an apathy of the Hindus to their right to political representation having been totally sidelined in the elections to the provincial legislative councils given their limited share of the votes.<sup>87</sup> Third, even amongst the Sikhs there was no unity. The Unionists (a party primarily representative of the agriculturists), the aristocracy, the Akalis and supporters of the Congress found themselves fighting each other for a small share of the larger whole. It had probably become apparent to the Akalis that only a hard line stance could help close ranks—an assumption, which ultimately failed.

Divisions in Sikh politics have already been discussed earlier. It needs to be highlighted in the light of Cabinet Mission's visit to India, that during discussions with members of the mission, Sikh leaders came up with views totally at variance with each other. There was no unity of thought and foresight. This gravely damaged the Sikh cause in their demand for a separate Sikh state within independent India, which finally materialised nearly 20 years after these meetings.

The role of Sikh leaders during this phase has been both criticised and lauded

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<sup>84</sup> Discussed in detail in Chapter 2 under the section Jammu and Kashmir.

<sup>85</sup> Kapur 1986: 206–7.

<sup>86</sup> In the provincial elections in 1909, the Sikhs who did not have any representation at this stage did not win a single seat out of the three, which were all won by Muslims. Even later in 1916 their representation was nil with five seats each going to Muslims and Hindus and one to a European. Even after the 1919 Montague reforms a percentage of 15 did not give the Sikhs any political clout in a demographically divided electorate with the Hindus and Muslims still having electoral control.

<sup>87</sup> The Akali statement quoted above makes Sikh sentiment obvious (Khushwant Singh 1999: 242–43).

by different sections: hard line and moderate. One section felt that in throwing in their lot with the Congress, they had played an honourable role in the struggle for Independence. Another section felt that the Muslims had got Pakistan and the Hindus India, but that the Sikhs had got nothing. Though Master Tara Singh spearheaded the movement for Indian Independence representing the Sikhs, there were traces of resentment at having been given a raw deal. In his biography he admits that, 'The reason for us not pressing the demand for a Sikh state was our ignorance of history and world politics.'<sup>88</sup>

It is worth mentioning that the majority of the Sikh leaders opposed the idea of Partition till the very end of negotiations. The probable reasons behind this have to be understood. First, the Sikhs understood that in the event of Partition they would in all likelihood be the biggest losers. From the time of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Lahore had been the political capital of the Sikhs and Amritsar their religious capital. Any attempt at a division was akin to severing the political and religious umbilical cord of the Sikhs—which is what ultimately happened.<sup>89</sup> A vast population of the Sikh landed class lived in that part of Punjab that is now in present-day Pakistan. The land in this region was better and more fertile and the people who lived here were economically more prosperous. Any partitioning of India threatened to snatch this land from the Sikhs with negligible compensation. Second, even in India, the Sikhs had little in terms of a majority and control over East Punjab. Some of them feared the loss of their identity and saw themselves drowning in a sea of Hinduism.

There is a feeling among certain sections that the Sikhs did not participate in the National Movement. This is because of the belief that the Indian National Movement became a movement for Hindu nationalism and a Hindu resurgence. 'The domination of the Indian National Congress by Arya Samajists gave the freedom movement an aspect of Hindu resurgence and was chiefly responsible for the aloofness of the Muslims and the Sikhs.'<sup>90</sup>

Partition saw millions of people finding themselves on the wrong side of a newly demarcated border. Sikhs suffered to a large extent, precisely as they had feared they would. Overnight the rich peasantry from Pakistan became landless and was forced into an existence of penury. From the two main professions of agriculture and soldiering, Sikhs migrated across the length and breadth of the country and beyond its borders in an attempt to make ends meet. These Sikhs make up the largest part of the Indian Diaspora, as they migrated to countries around the world in search for work. This is probably why one finds them in all corners of India and the world, doing a variety of jobs and usually prosperous given their propensity for hard work and their never-say-die spirit.

Thus, in the period after Independence, a section of the Sikhs and their leaders

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<sup>88</sup> Jaswant Singh (ed.) *Autobiography of Master Tara Singh*, p. 197.

<sup>89</sup> Besides losing the political capital, the Sikhs also stood to lose religious places like Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak.

<sup>90</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 147.

felt that they had been given a raw deal.<sup>91</sup> They felt that Partition had given them little by way of satisfying their aspirations for a region where they were in a majority and where they did not have to play second fiddle any other community—Hindu or Muslim: in short a Sikh homeland. This feeling of being hard-done-by continued as a part of their psyche, and emerged intermittently till it manifested itself on the national political scene as a full-fledged separatist movement in Punjab. This movement was also the result of a weak Sikh leadership, both the Akali Dal and the Congress camps, coupled with vested political interests.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.: 293.

## Chapter 9

# Post-Independence Period

Independence and the years that followed it saw India rejoicing at breaking the shackles of British imperialistic power. The people despite the traumatic experiences of Partition and the loss of thousands of innocent lives to the violence that had accompanied it were coming to terms with the challenges that lay ahead. The Indian government also had to face the challenge of various secessionist movements, that had sprung up in many different corners of the country. In fact immediately after Independence, came the conflict in J&K, sponsored and for the most part entirely engineered by Pakistan.

One of the areas that witnessed the maximum suffering was Punjab. Large sections of its population, both Sikh and Hindu, had had to flee their homes in that part of Punjab that had become a part of Pakistan. They had witnessed terrible carnage and were shattered by the experience.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the celebrations that followed Independence, and the joy of their new-found freedom, the people of Punjab felt a deep sense of loss. Land, livelihoods, property and other valuables, kith and kin and above all a homeland had been irrevocably lost. Even though this homeland had not been a separate Sikh state, similar to that which they later wished to create with their demand for Khalistan, having a region of their own, where they were in a majority, held deep meaning for the Sikhs. A Sikh region was for them a place where their religion, culture, customs and traditions would have flourished reinvigorated, justifying the years of sacrifice. It was also essential to their conception of a distinct Sikh identity. Tara Singh, the undisputed Akali leader said, 'we want to have a province where we can safeguard our culture and our traditions'.<sup>2</sup> There were many among the Sikhs, and even some among the British, who had felt that the changes sweeping India would

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<sup>1</sup> Sikhs were the worst sufferers because of their distinct identity that enabled them to be dealt with in isolation. They were also seen by some Muslim mobs as the militant wing of the Hindus. The Sikhs also suffered in areas where they were in minority like the taxi drivers of Calcutta.

<sup>2</sup> Kapur (1986: 210) quoting Nayar (1966).

negate the values of the Sikh religion and push it over a precipice into the darkness of oblivion.<sup>3</sup> One such writer was Khushwant Singh. He says:

The chief reason for my writing an account of my people is the melancholy thought that contemporary with my labours are being written the last chapters of the story of the Sikhs. By the end of the century, the Sikhs themselves will have passed into oblivion.<sup>4</sup>

It was this inherent fear that generated a feeling of paranoia in the Sikh leaders. This sense of a fading identity led many of their leaders to resent the Hindus, for in them they saw an attempt to bring the Sikhs back into the fold of Hinduism. This tussle was most apparent between the Arya Samaj (founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati) and modern Sikh leaders. A right wing Sikh, Sangat Singh says, 'For Swami Dayanand, Sikhism was one of the innumerable cults of Hinduism, to be noted, refuted and then forgotten.'<sup>5</sup> It was clashes of this nature that continued to give certain sections of the Sikhs a continuing feeling of insecurity. However, it needs to be highlighted that a vast majority in Punjab, both Sikh and Hindu, never even gave a thought to these issues. For this majority, which had in common places of worship, food habits, friends, culture and festivals, any hint of division was unthinkable. Marriages were common between Hindus and Sikhs, there were also Hindus and Sikhs (*mona* and *kesdhari*) who belonged to the same family. Divisions were more in minds of extremist elements of both faiths. Some authors have gone to the extent of placing the blame for this divide on the Gurus of the Sikh religion. 'It will be evident that the seeds of Sikh separatism was sown by the Sikhs' own gurus when they gave them their own temples, their own scripture, their distinct appearance, the common casteless name, Singh.'<sup>6</sup>

In addition to this feeling of insecurity, it was politics yet again that played its role in creating dissatisfaction. For the Akalis there was no dividing line between religion and politics. They also felt that they were the sole representatives of the Sikhs. Partition did result in an increase in the percentage of Sikhs in Punjab with most Muslims migrating to Pakistan, however, they still remained a minor force on the political scene in the state with both power and prestige evading them. 'Alliance between the Congress and Akali Parties, from 1948 to 1951 and from 1956 to 1960, made the Akali Dal a junior partner.'<sup>7</sup> This led to an increasing demand for a Punjabi-speaking region. It is felt that this was only an excuse for seeking a region where Sikhs would be in a majority. 'The cover of a Punjabi-speaking-state slogan serves my purpose well since it does not offend against nationalism.'<sup>8</sup> Some authors

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.: 208.

<sup>4</sup> Khushwant Singh (1999: 39) quoting from the preface of his book (1953).

<sup>5</sup> Sangat Singh 1996: 144.

<sup>6</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 38.

<sup>7</sup> Marwah 1995: 154.

<sup>8</sup> Kapur (1986: 212) quoting Nayar (1966).

feel that the agitation had wider implications and was actually a formula to gain a Sikh majority state.<sup>9</sup> The demand for a separate 'Punjabi Suba' was followed by a widespread agitation in the state, with the major leaders of the Akalis going on fasts unto death to put pressure on the central government. This included Sant Fateh Singh and Master Tara Singh. Their demands were finally met when present-day Punjab was formed in 1966.<sup>10</sup> Another important fallout of this period was the rise of Jat Sikhs as a potent force in Akali politics under Sant Fateh Singh after the failure of Master Tara Singh to keep his fast unto death.<sup>11</sup> However, demands for transfer of Chandigarh, share of river waters and a separate High Court for Punjab were not accepted. This led to Darshan Singh Pheruman undertaking a fast that cost him his life, leading to widespread condemnation of the central government. Mrs Indira Gandhi now had to agree in principle to give Chandigarh to Punjab in exchange for Abhor and Fazilka, an exchange that never materialised.

Formation of the new state gave the Sikhs an opportunity of being the majority community in a region. Moreover, it also led to a state in which all the chief ministers, have always been from the Sikh community. However, it soon became clear that the Akali leaders were not satisfied even with this, and with the passage of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution on 1 August 1977 (see Appendix G),<sup>12</sup> the Akali conception of statehood finally became apparent. There are three major aspects that are prominent in what is a fairly long resolution. First, was the aspect pertaining to political issues dealing with the devolution of powers to states in a federal spirit. The second part of the resolution dealt with religious matters and the third with economic matters.

Some of the major political demands were the inclusion of Chandigarh in Punjab, transfer of Punjabi speaking villages to Punjab from neighbouring states, keeping control of the head works of rivers in Punjab and fair sharing of the waters of the Ravi and Beas. A demand was also made for maintaining the existing

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<sup>9</sup> 'Much of the literature on the Sikh crisis in India begins, for example, with the misguided belief by the Indian centre that the formation of a Punjabi speaking state in 1966 would satisfy Sikh demands for autonomy. Such a belief, although clearly responding to Sikh demands, failed to notice the degree to which the demand for a linguistic state ("allowed" by the Indian Constitution) smuggled in the beginnings of a Sikh state ("disallowed" by the constitution)' (Hewitt 2002: 65).

<sup>10</sup> The Sikhs were probably encouraged by similar demands based on language. Agitation in Telangana over Telugu and in Maharashtra too are likely to have had an effect on Akali thinking. A major issue, which influenced the formation of the Punjab in 1966 was the agitation by Arya Samaj and their encouragement of Hindus to declare Hindi as their mother tongue instead of Punjabi, which further made the divide perceptible. The Hindus were probably unsure of their future in a Sikh dominated and ruled region, which ultimately precipitated their action.

<sup>11</sup> Tully and Jacob 1985: 42. This period had a major impact on the rise in militarism in Punjab and in the majority following in the terrorist movement, as will be proved later in the study through a demographic sample.

<sup>12</sup> There were a number of other Anandpur Sahib Resolutions passed, however, this particular Resolution will be considered while discussing Akali demands as this seems to be having support of most Akali factions.

percentage of intake of Punjabis into the army, and a cessation of atrocities in the Terai region of Uttar Pradesh in the name of land reforms.<sup>13</sup>

The economic demands included the removal of poverty in 10 years, an increase in per capita income to Rs 3,000 in 10 years. They also demanded the establishment of an international airport at Amritsar and a stock exchange at Ludhiana as well as facilities for easy conversion of currency. In addition, the Akalis asked that free plots of land be allotted to the Scheduled Castes, and for good remuneration for cash crops.<sup>14</sup>

The demands, which became controversial, were those dealing with political reorganisation of the state, and with its autonomy. These read as follows:

... have, all those Punjabi speaking areas deliberately kept out of Punjab, such as Dalhousie in Gurdaspur District; Chandigarh; Pinjore-Kalka and Ambala Saddar, etc., in Ambala District; the entire Una tehsils of Hoshiarpur District; the 'Desh' area of Nalagarh; Shahabad and Gulha blocks of Karnal District; Tohana Sub-Tehsil, Ratia block and Sirsa tehsil of Hissar District and six tehsils of Ganganagar District in Rajasthan; merged with Punjab to constitute a single administrative unit where the interests of the Sikhs and Sikhism are specifically protected.

In the Punjab envisaged by the Resolution the Centre's interference would be restricted to Defence, Foreign Relations, Currency and General Communication; all other departments would be in the jurisdiction of Punjab (and other states), which would be fully entitled to frame own laws on these subjects for administration. For the above departments of the Centre, Punjab and other States contribute in the proportion to representation in the Parliament.<sup>15</sup>

This demand would have placed Punjab in the pre-1953 status of J&K. It cannot be said with certainty whether these demands were merely political gimmicks or whether the Akalis were serious about them. One indication, however, is their stance and their actions during the period when they were in power in the state.

... the Akalis were in power in Punjab from 1977 to 1980 (for nearly three years). In this period they also shared power at the Centre. It is true that they did nothing to settle these disputes or the 'Punjab demands' as they have come to be known.<sup>16</sup>

This observation makes a pointed reference to Akali intentions and objectives. Having been in power often, it must have been quite evident to them that some of their demands were untenable. In all probability, their persistence with these demands was nothing more than a political ploy, to play to the gallery for political gain. The history of low intensity conflicts (LICs) is witness to a number of cases

<sup>13</sup> Anandpur Sahib Resolution, Resolution No. 2a-f.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, Resolution No. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Dang 1988: 12.



where political parties have hardened their demands and attitude because of vested interests. This is specially the case where the electorate is divided between two or more communities or by caste equations. Hardening attitudes and extreme demands are then used as a ploy by political parties to swing the votes of a particular community in their favour, by giving them the feeling that the particular party is working in their best interests. This has been observed time and again in Assam, Tripura, J&K and all regions affected by the LIC problem. The same technique was employed in Punjab not only by the Akalis but, by others as well, as will be seen subsequently.

### Politico-Religious Mix

This section will analyse the immediate causes of the separatist problem in Punjab, the dangerous politico-religious nexus to be found in the state will also be discussed.<sup>17</sup> While covering the history of the region, the reasons for the emergence of Sikhism have already been analysed in some detail. It has also been seen that the religious movement was a subsequent offshoot of an endeavour to cleanse and reform Hinduism. It has also been discussed how those who exercised religious power among the Sikh community, very often exercised political power as well. 'The elections of the SGPC became primarily political battles, for leadership and control of the SGPC contributed powerfully to determine leadership of the Sikh community.'<sup>18</sup> It has also been seen how the Sikhs emerged as a political power, only when Maharaja Ranjit Singh had separated politics from religion. However, the emergence of the Akalis as a political power once again saw the mixing of religion with politics.<sup>19</sup> 'They run their *morchas* from *gurdwaras* and to justify that, they stick to the theory that for the Sikhs religion and politics is inseparable.'<sup>20</sup> The results of this volatile mix were advantageous neither to the Sikhs, nor to the nation at large. This mix produced circumstances, wherein, poor political leadership was produced with little insight into the nuances of political finesse. At the same time it resulted in the muddying of the religious environment, bringing into Sikhism weaknesses similar to those that had plagued Hinduism. This is the likely reason for many of the Sikhs becoming disenchanting with the leaders and rejecting them.

It was not only the Akali Dal that displayed such short-sightedness in handling Punjab's religious diversity, other parties also played this political game. For example, at the time when the state of Punjab was being delineated on the basis of language,

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<sup>17</sup> Marwah 1995: 152. The author refers to this close link at the very start of his chapter on Punjab.

<sup>18</sup> Kapur 1986: 196.

<sup>19</sup> Nominees of Akali Dal who have projected themselves as the rightful representatives of Sikhs have traditionally dominated the SGPC. This has made the line dividing Sikh politics and religion invisible.

<sup>20</sup> Dang 1988: 14.

the Akalis urged the Sikhs to declare their mother tongue as Punjabi, even as many mainstream parties urged the Hindus to declare theirs as Hindi. This was despite the fact that a majority of people in Punjab, both Hindus and Sikhs, spoke Punjabi.

It was the Congress leadership, which made the Hindus declare that Hindi is their language. In Punjab and it's the only state the Hindu identified with Hindi and the Sikh identified with Punjabi. No where else in India it has happened... that was a major blunder, if they [Hindus] had declared, [Punjabi as their mother tongue] then Punjab State would have been a Hindu majority area. Unfortunately it was the Congress leadership, which in the 1951 census asked the Hindus to declare Hindi [as their mother tongue].<sup>21</sup>

The religious and socio-political mix of the state made the Akali Dal's ambition of holding on to political power difficult. A near balance in the percentage of Hindus and Sikhs in the population meant that the Akalis were likely to find it very difficult to come to power on their own. They were often forced to cobble together weak coalitions with the help of other parties. This also led to parties in the state like the Congress, fighting back with similar propaganda leading to polarisation. As the political climate heated up, religion and politics entwined to produce a poisonous concoction: which finally led to the hardening of attitudes on all sides and rising extremism.<sup>22</sup>

This trend coincided with an increasing tendency toward extremism in the entire subcontinent.

It is a strange coincidence that about the same time as there was a revival of religious fundamentalism in the Islamic world, came the revival of aggressive Hinduism which in its turn triggered off revivalism among the Sikhs. In their religious zeal, Arab Sheikhs poured money into India and succeeded in persuading some untouchables in South India to convert to Islam. Orthodox Hindus were alarmed and poured in more money to counteract these moves. With the Sikhs the challenges did not come from Islam but from Hinduism and the Sikh revivalist movement dwelt on the differences between Sikh traditions and Hindus.... Sikh fundamentalism and minority complex added fuel to Sikh grievances.<sup>23</sup>

The hardening of attitudes and increased tendency toward extremism were visible, and were worsened by the declaration of the formation of the 'Sovereign Republic of Khalistan', by Dr Jagjit Singh Chauhan in 1969, a Sikh migrant who had earlier settled in the UK. Though this development was not taken seriously at that stage; it became the main plank of extremists in the 1980s as will be seen subsequently.

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<sup>21</sup> K.P.S. Gill in an interview with the author. Words in brackets are the author's own.

<sup>22</sup> This becomes most evident during the courting of Bhindranwale initially by the Congress led by Zail Singh for control over the SGPC and subsequently by the Akalis after the Congress could no longer handle the heat of communalism generated by Bhindranwale.

<sup>23</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 40-41.

## Factors Leading to Terrorism

There are some more relevant factors that are worth considering and analysing at this stage, before going on to details of the years of terrorism in the state. Soon after Partition, the people of Punjab through their hard work transformed the state, and the agricultural prosperity it achieved and gave it the title of the 'Granary of India' with its high productivity per acre bringing prosperity to the population. However, stagnation was reached after a stage and with it frustration grew amongst the people. Punjab did not have other avenues and means of economic progress like industry, to further raise the standards of living of the people. One of the possible reasons for industries not being set up in Punjab was its border with Pakistan and related security concerns.

The State has a legitimate grievance that it has been deprived of adequate industrial development, that there is lack of flour, textile and sugar mills to process the agricultural produce, that this has led to serious discontent and educated unemployment.<sup>24</sup>

The state's politico-religious mix as a factor in its politics has already been discussed in the previous section. However, it needs to be emphasised that the traditional Akali vote bank was threatened by the increasing modernisation of Sikhs in Punjab.<sup>25</sup> This probably led to an urge to swing the tempo from increasing liberalism to hard line sentiments with an aim of keeping their vote bank intact.

Ironically, another factor, which led to rising discontent in Punjab was also one of the reasons for its prosperity. Landholdings in Punjab are comparatively large. The landlords are rich farmers and wield considerable power in the state. Most of these landlords are 'Jat Sikhs'. The labourers on the farms are primarily Sikhs from the Scheduled Castes. Therefore, there is a clear-cut division between these two classes in Punjab. Yet another possible cause for division and possible heartburn, is that most Hindus are concentrated in towns and are engaged in commerce. Over the years they too have done well for themselves, further increasing the economic divide between them and the underprivileged rural Sikh labourers from the Scheduled Castes. 'Politically a small section of it (landlords and peasants) is with the Congress. The rest has been with the Akali Party. In fact the Akali Party leadership is in the hands of rural rich, the kulaks and the landlords.'<sup>26</sup> It will be worthwhile to add that the Congress has derived most of its votes from the Hindus and Sikhs other than 'Jats'. This brings about a clear political divide based on varying caste, religious and economic interests. It is revealed that the Jat Sikhs spearheaded the struggle for a greater say in Sikh affairs at various stages: during the early 1920s; after independence for a Punjabi Suba; and then subsequently for greater autonomy.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.: 84-85.

<sup>25</sup> Tully and Jacob 1985: 37.

<sup>26</sup> Dang 1988: 14.

The underlying factor throughout this period was the quest for power, both religious and political. In an analysis carried out on a database of 50 terrorists, in an attempt to find their political leanings, it was found that 72 per cent of them were supporters of the Akalis and the remaining 28 per cent had extremist leanings. It is also pertinent to point out that more than 50 per cent hailed from either the rich landholding class or from the urban middle class.<sup>27</sup> Thus unlike other uprisings, it was not the underprivileged lower class peasantry, which led the struggle. In fact it was the upper class that felt that along with their economic clout, it was also time to inherit political clout with wide ranging powers.

Another factor that influenced the hard line elements in the state was its (the state's) demographic mix. At the time of creation of the state, the ratio of Sikhs to Hindus was roughly 56:44. This was subsequently reduced to 52:48 with an influx of labourers into Punjab and their subsequent settling down there.<sup>28</sup> This led to growing feeling of insecurity amongst the Sikhs. They feared becoming a minority in their state, repeating in Punjab what had happened in Assam and Tripura.

There are also some factors, which could have been avoided and would have reduced the problems in the State. When the re-organisation of the erstwhile Punjab took place, the new states of Punjab, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh were carved out along linguistic lines. However, these were based on tehsil-level division. This resulted in a number of Punjabi speaking villages going to either Haryana or Himachal. This could have been resolved through a tribunal. Yet another issue was the passage of the All India Gurdwara Act, which involved taking the approval of the states and the major *gurdwaras* in the country—something that did not seem to be a major hurdle at the time. The act has still not been passed. A controversy rages over its enactment, as states other than Punjab do not want to lose control over Sikh shrines in their regions. Another religious issue that did not at the time appear to be a major problem was the declaration of Amritsar as a holy city and designating a station for broadcasting religious sermons and *gurbani* all over the world to devotees. Besides these two, it also included renaming of a train as the 'Golden Temple Express'. However, some of these demands could not materialise at that time for incomprehensible reasons. Khushwant Singh made an interesting observation when he addressed the Rajya Sabha on 8 August 1983. He said:

It would appear that we are like needles of gramophones caught in one groove. It used to be Assam. Now it is the Punjab. In the speeches of the Government, opposition, in fact, all of us we have been saying the same thing over and over again for a year-and-a-half. I hope that now somebody from the government or Opposition will move this needle forward to something different and more positive.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.: 33–34.

<sup>28</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 49.

<sup>29</sup> Khushwant Singh's speech in the Rajya Sabha on 8 August 1983.

## Spiralling Terrorism

Given the politico-religious reasons and various other factors that led to the rise of terrorism in the state, it would now be relevant to analyse the events that finally led to the outbreak of terrorism in Punjab.

Before narrating the string of events involved, it would be relevant to develop a character sketch of a person who became the face of terrorism in Punjab, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. Jarnail Singh was born into a poor family and was one of seven children. Schooled only till the primary level, he was sent to a religious teacher, Sant Gurbachan Singh Khalsa, under whom he studied the religious scriptures of his faith.<sup>30</sup> Bhindranwale was blessed with an excellent memory and was known to make spellbinding speeches laced with couplets and quotes from religious texts. This ability endeared him to the rural masses, among whom he travelled and preached extensively. After the death of Sant Kartar Singh in 1977, Jarnail Singh was elected leader of the Damdami Taksal (religious school). Thus commenced the eventful journey of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale from rustic religious teacher to one of the most dreaded terrorists in all of Punjab.

As has been mentioned earlier, in Punjab politics and religion are intertwined.

There has been a tendency by the Congress that when there is a demand of this nature, you set up a more extremist demand, to meet this demand, they have used it in various parts of the country and always to the detriment of national interest.<sup>31</sup>

Some of the Akali and Congress leaders, despite the increasing polarisation of the two camps, were able to maintain a respectable distance from these two poles thus ensuring peace. However, as the political stakes went up, and as each side looked to its own interest, the intriguing turned into open and fierce conflict—which was eventually to ravage the state. The first major incident that marked the beginnings of the violence that was to engulf Punjab took place on the auspicious day of Baisakhi on 13 April 1978. At this stage, the main targets of Bhindranwale's venom were the Nirankaris. Nirankaris are one of the sects among the Sikh faith.<sup>32</sup> However, their belief in a line of gurus that succeeded the 10 Gurus recognised by orthodox Sikhs, is a major bone of contention between them and other orthodox Sikhs. They also follow religious texts other than the Guru Granth Sahib that the mainstream orthodox Sikhs follow. From the Akali point of view, the Nirankaris are despicable as they worship a living guru. The orthodox Sikhs had declared Nirankaris apostates in 1973 and since then, both groups had often clashed. The Nirankaris allege that on the 18 April 1978, Bhindranwale led a group of Akalis

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<sup>30</sup> Jarnail Singh read the religious teachings under Sant Gurbachan Singh Khalsa in the village of Bhindran. His attaining the status of a religious preacher after being elected head of the Damdami Taksal gave him the title of Sant and the village gave him his extended surname of Bhindranwale.

<sup>31</sup> K.P.S. Gill in a personal interview with the author.

<sup>32</sup> See also Kapur (1986: 15, 226).

in an attack on a Nirankari. Bhindranwale's party was fired upon leading to the deaths of 13 people.<sup>33</sup> This was the incident, which led to declaration of an informal war by Bhindranwale and his cronies on the Nirankaris. Thereafter, a series of murders planned and executed by Bhindranwale's men took place, culminating in the killing of Baba Gurbachan Singh, the head and guru of the Nirankari sect on 24 April 1980 in New Delhi.

It had become clear to both major political parties in Punjab, the Akalis and the Congress that Bhindranwale was a rising force, and that an investment in him was likely to pay rich dividends.

This Sant too was brought into politics by the Congress(I). During the 1972 election to the Shrimoni Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) his candidates were supported by the Congress. During the 1980 Lok Sabha elections the Sant supported Congress(I) candidates Gurdial Singh Dhillon and Raghunandan Bhatia.<sup>34</sup>

Extremism was thus gaining ground in the political arena, with Bhindranwale getting support from the Congress and simultaneously, increasing the tempo of communal propaganda. The Akalis had no choice but to follow suit, fearing that if they did not espouse extremist ideals, they would lose their traditional vote bank to the Sant. On the other hand, the Congress after winning the state elections in Punjab in 1980, came to the conclusion that their association with Bhindranwale, fanatic though he may have been, was a fruitful one. In this chasing of votes, the threats and communal venom Bhindranwale had started spewing, did not deter any of the parties involved.

The Congress(I)—at least one faction of it—continued to nurture and support Bhindranwale even after he openly called for the murder of the Nirankari Baba, Lala Jagat Narain, etc., ... The game was not given up even after the Sant began organising large-scale terrorism and making serious efforts to bring about the Hindu-Sikh riots. The Akalis too played the game of using him against the Congress(I) and the Government of India.<sup>35</sup>

Unfortunately, in using the Sant neither the Akalis, nor for that matter the Congress, ever stopped to realise that he was in fact using them. His aim was to drive a clear wedge between the Hindu and Sikh communities, so that he could then use terros to force the Hindus to migrate out of Punjab. He felt that this would cause the collapse of the legitimate administrative machinery of the state, and the realisation of the dream of Khalistan. 'Unfortunately when Bhindranwale rose to prominence, there was a Hindu-Sikh divide.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> One of the persons killed was Fauja Singh, whose widow became the dreaded leader of a terrorist organisation in Punjab.

<sup>34</sup> Dang 1988: 17.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> K.P.S. Gill in an interview with the author.

This existing divide when coupled with socio-economic factors within the state gave Bhindranwale a volatile mix with which to work, which could be harnessed to create an explosive situation. Bhindranwale understood well the simple psyche of Sikhs in rural areas and he exploited these sentiments to his advantage.

Politically the Sikh community is very naïve. They go by very simple solutions to complicated problems. They go into conspiracy theories that Brahmins are not letting us grow then it started as, Hindus are not letting us grow. One of the reasons was that Sikh expatriates who went abroad grew rich very quickly, that the boy sitting here would not understand that why can't he do that, so he found something wrong with the social system here and Bhindranwale said that I will give you a way out of this, it is because of the Hindu that you are weak so you must kill the Hindu, you must get rid of him—exactly the way in which Hitler grew in power, there is a tremendous parallel.<sup>37</sup>

Hatred, thus fuelled, started increasing, and as Bhindranwale and his followers perpetrated various crimes so that it built up even further, the Akalis started agitating for the fulfillment of the demands specified in their Anandpur Sahib Resolution. The state government could not afford to give the Akalis, who were in opposition, both in the state and at the centre, an upper hand. They, therefore, rejected their demands, which primarily consisted of transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab, the issue of boundary adjustment with neighbouring states and sharing of river waters. Bhindranwale, on the other hand, wanted to change Punjab's demography, so that the percentage of Sikhs in the population went up to the level at the time it was granted statehood, as opposed to the then current ratio of Sikh to Hindu in the state, of 52:48 in favour of the Sikhs. Both these agitations, and the associated protests and aggression resulted in serious law and order problem in the state. The Akalis decided to launch statewide protests, which included *jail bharos* (courting arrest), and a variety of civil disobedience programmes.<sup>38</sup> This resulted in thousands of arrests and more vehement protests. Moreover, Bhindranwale's reign of terror had started getting bloodier by the day.

On 9 September 1981, Lala Jagat Narain, the owner of the largest newspaper chain in Punjab, was killed to the shock and disbelief of many. Following this gruesome incident, Bhindranwale was arrested on 20 September 1981 only to be released on 18 October 1981, without any action. At the time he was under arrest, an Indian Airlines flight was hijacked on 27 September 1981, very probably to protest his arrest. Violence did not cease after his release, on the contrary, he became a hero amongst his followers. In a major act of defiance of the central government, he took out an armed procession in New Delhi, against the government's orders. Little was done by the government, which preferred to lie low and let the incident pass. At this time in Punjab it was Bhindranwale's writ that ran throughout state.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> One of the proposed civil disobedience programmes of the Akalis scheduled for 3 June 1984 ultimately perpetuated Operation Blue Star. Details will be covered in a subsequent section.

He went to the extent of publishing a 'hit list' in the newspapers, prior to letting loose his terror squad to exterminate those mentioned as targets on it. Fear, anarchy and a total breakdown of the state's administrative machinery left Punjab at the mercy of Bhindranwale's terror squads.

These incidents led to the subsequent role played by the government and fundamental Hindu organisations in the entire affair. In what was an impulsive and spontaneous reaction of policemen from Haryana, Sikhs who had come to New Delhi to attend the Asian Games, held there in 1981, were humiliated enroute. This only resulted in further alienating the Sikh community. There are allegations that certain politicians covertly encouraged these acts. 'At one stage Bhajan Lal had started acting on the theory of "teaching the Sikhs a lesson".'<sup>39</sup> Khushwant Singh in a speech in the Rajya Sabha warned of Hindu backlash when he said:

What I fear most today is the Hindu backlash. It is evident that the Sikh extremists cannot have it all their own way. If they kill innocent Hindus in Punjab, it is only a matter of time for Hindu extremists to hit back. Then the fat will be on the fire.<sup>40</sup>

The Hindu backlash did come in some of the neighbouring states like Haryana and subsequently with unsurpassed fury in the capital, New Delhi.

Bhindranwale, taking advantage of the lack of response from the government initially took shelter in the Guru Nanak Niwas, and subsequently shifted to the Akal Takth building inside the Golden Temple. It was from the precincts of this holy shrine that he broadcasted his message of hate, and organised further killings by his terror squads. One of the most blatant outrages and challenges to authority of the state government was witnessed on 24 April 1983, when the DIG of the Punjab Police A.S. Atwal was murdered outside the Golden Temple with hundreds of people as witnesses. The terrorists after taunting the authorities present proceeded back into the Golden Temple complex, even as the state government and police rather than reacting with a firm hand shifted the ball to the court of the central government, seeking from it the permission to take appropriate action, permission that was incidentally never given. This incident proved to be a major blow to the morale of the police in the state and to people's confidence in general.<sup>41</sup> In another gruesome incident, six Hindus were murdered on 5 October 1983, after a bus was hijacked. Simultaneously extremists went about desecrating Hindu temples with the obvious aim of creating further trouble between the two communities. With the situation worsening and criticism of the state government handling of the situation mounting, the Chief Minister, Darbara Singh's government was finally dismissed and President's rule was imposed in Punjab.

A large number of paramilitary forces were inducted into the state, with the aim of bringing lawlessness under control. However, this did not alter the situation

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<sup>39</sup> Dang 1988: 19.

<sup>40</sup> Khushwant Singh in his speech to the Rajya Sabha on 23 April 1983.

<sup>41</sup> Details of violent incidents in Punjab are given at Figure 9.1.



perceptibly, as they were neither trained nor equipped to handle terrorists in an area totally alien to them. They were also unable to react to the terrorist tactic of using the *gurdwaras* as hideouts. 'It was by now becoming apparent that Sikh extremists were using some Sikh *gurdwaras* as a secure base. In April [1984] security forces traced some terrorists to a *gurdwara* in Moga.'<sup>42</sup> The worsening situation and mounting evidence of terrorists hiding in the Golden Temple armed with sophisticated weapons made the central government increasingly nervous. Pressure was mounting on it to deal with the Bhindranwale menace, and to neutralise him. It is not that his killing or capture would have meant an end to terrorism in Punjab, however, the government probably felt that it would have symbolic value, as he more than anyone else had come to symbolise the worst challenge to authority of the government.

## Operation Blue Star

By 1983 terrorism in Punjab had spiralled out of control. We can get an inkling of the extent of the problem by casting a glance at the casualty figures attributable to terrorist killings in Punjab during that year (see Figure 9.1). From 13 civilians killed in 1982, the number leapt to 75 in 1983. Similarly, for police casualties, the figure jumped from two in 1982 to 20 in 1983, which included the sensational murder of A.S. Atwal. The number of terrorists killed, on the other hand moved up from seven in 1982 to 13 in 1983, an increase not exactly significant.<sup>43</sup> These figures make the state of affairs abundantly clear to the reader. The various aspects of this situation will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

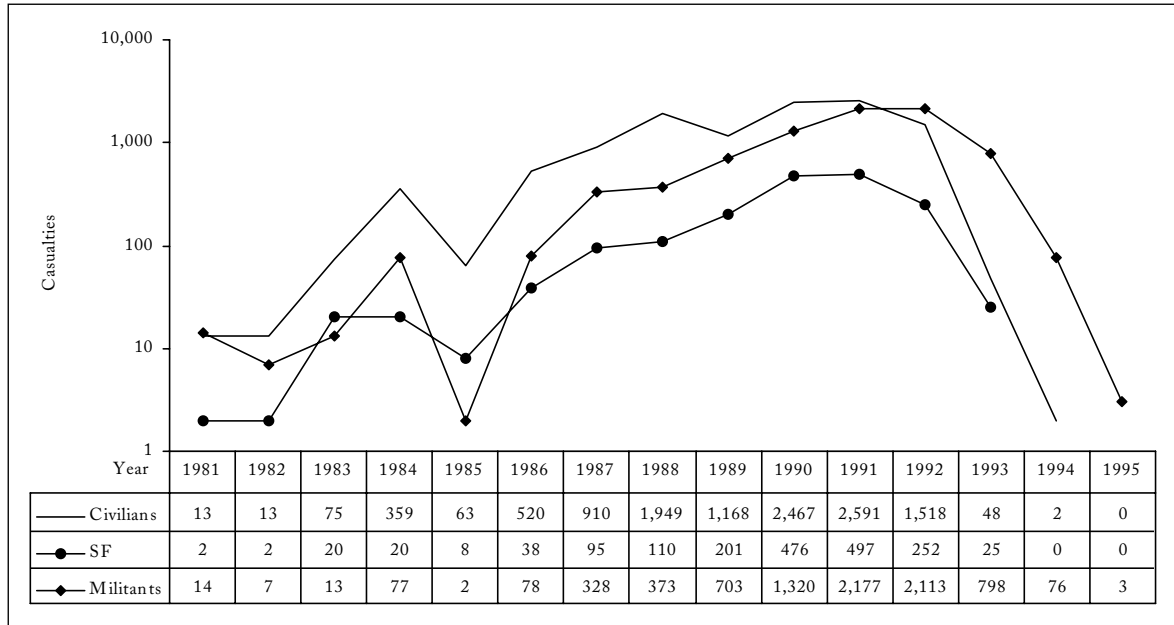
First, the common man had lost confidence in the state government's, and after the enforcement of President's rule in the central government's, ability to protect their lives and property. Second, the common man had seen the manner of the death of DIG Atwal, and for that matter of many other policemen in the state leading to an increasing lack of confidence in the ability of the police to extend them any protection, as it was patently obvious that they could not even protect themselves. Third, Bhindranwale's system of publishing the names of common people on a hit list in the newspapers had given the common people the impression that a '*jungle raj*' (that is, the law of the jungle) prevailed, and made him a cult figure at least among his followers. Fourth, the killing of Lala Jagat Narain and subsequently that of his son and heir had virtually muzzled the free press, sending out the ominous message that anyone speaking out against the terrorists was doing so at the risk of their lives. Fifth, Khalistan appeared to be imminent and no longer a distant dream, at least as far as the direction in which events were fast moving was concerned. Sixth, there was an exodus of Hindus from the state, who felt that it was no longer safe for them to live there. Seventh, the destruction of the state's economy was a distinct possibility, especially, the situation continued in a similar manner or worsened, thereby, taking one of the most prosperous states on

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<sup>42</sup> Kapur 1986: 229.

<sup>43</sup> www.satp.org.

Figure 9.1  
Casualty Details—Punjab



Source: www.satp.org.

a downhill. Eighth, the situation in Punjab was likely to give a fillip to similar movements in the country, as it very probably finally did in neighbouring Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), where an insurgency exploded in 1989. Ninth, the situation was placing great stress on the Punjab police, paramilitary forces and the army as and when it was being employed. For both the police and paramilitary forces, both of which were ill trained for any operation of this kind, this was a bloody, on-the-job period of training. Tenth, the situation was likely to harm the electoral prospects of Congress(I) both in Punjab and at the Centre. The last deduction, by no means inconsequential, however, may in all likelihood may have been one of the aspects that the central government took into account. With these factors and conclusions emerging, the writing was well and truly on the wall. The Central Government thus had few available options to solve the problem. One of the available courses of action, was to engage in peaceful negotiations with the Akalis and Bhindranwale. The second may have been the employment of the police and paramilitary forces in a less bloody affair. The third was to let the situation drag on and hope for its resolution through public pressure, or to go for the fourth and last option of employing the army to tackle the situation.

The government did try the softer, conciliatory approach to begin with. Sardar Swaran Singh was deputed to conduct negotiations with the Akalis and Bhindranwale. 'The half-hearted attempt to find a political solution through Sardar Swaran Singh, the former foreign minister, also made no headway. The intermediaries blamed the Central Government as much as the terrorists for their failure.'<sup>44</sup> These attempts at negotiations were also made by the then Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, prior to her televised address to the nation on 2 June 1984, in which she explained her helplessness and the failure of talks with Akali leaders.

The second option was also tried when the police and paramilitary forces were deployed and tasked to control the terrorist problem. However, the situation that developed in the first six months of their operations in the state was far from encouraging. 'Between 1 January 1984, and 3 June 1984, the terrorists killed 298 persons on commands that emanated from the headquarters that had been established in the Golden Temple.'<sup>45</sup> Some analysts feel that the task of clearing the Golden Temple complex was initially given to the CRPF:

The Director General of CRPF, Shiv Swarup, along with his IGP went to Amritsar for an on the spot assessment of the situation. What he knew and what he saw convinced him that the task would be very messy and difficult and in any case beyond the CRPF to accomplish. After more than one visit to Amritsar and making a detailed assessment, he reported to the Home Ministry about his inability to undertake the task, as the militants had the type of weaponry and explosives, which the CRPF was not equipped with or trained to handle.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Marwah 1995: 171.

<sup>45</sup> [www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/punjab/backgrounder/index.html](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/punjab/backgrounder/index.html).

<sup>46</sup> Marwah 1995: 173.

It needs to be understood at this stage that, had the paramilitary forces and National Security Guards (NSGs) agreed to take on the task of ridding Punjab of the terrorist problem, Operation Blue Star need not have been conducted. It also needs to be highlighted that the Special Frontier Force (SFF) was probably prepared for the operation, but was never employed in isolation. As Lieutenant General Brar says:

...I did come to know, just a day before we went into the temple that, some weeks earlier, contingency plans had been prepared by the Special Frontier Force—a paramilitary outfit working directly under the Cabinet Secretariat at the Centre—for a flushing operation to be carried out inside the Golden Temple if the situation so warranted.<sup>47</sup>

This fact is only being stated here, to indicate that the situation from both the political and security points of view was such that the government did not wish to employ any other means at its disposal, other than the army, primarily because it was felt that no other force could tackle the problem. It was probably also felt that a failure to bring the situation under control was likely to cause far greater harm than the decision to employ the army, and, thereby, raise the level of counter-terrorism operations. The situation prior to Operation Blue Star is often compared with the situation prior to Operation Black Thunder. The comparison between the two operations Blue Star and Black Thunder will be discussed subsequently with a view to analyzing the two operations objectively.

Whenever, a decision as sensitive and critical as launching an operation of this nature is required to be taken, those concerned invariably divide up into two camps, the doves and the hawks (fence-sitters being considered irrelevant). Decision-making finally boils down to the persuasiveness of either camp. And this is what probably happened when the decision to launch Operation Blue Star was taken. In this case as history bears out, the hawks won:

From all available accounts, Mrs Gandhi was most reluctant to be pushed into a military adventure. But the hawks in the army, the intelligence, the civil service and most of all, those from among the Congress, ultimately had their way.<sup>48</sup>

Besides the factors considered earlier, it seems that the immediate reason for employing the army was the call given by Akalis, led by Harchand Singh Longowal, for a state-wide blockade (*morcha*) on the movement of grain on 3 June 1984. How judicious was this decision and how did it help in solving the problem being faced in Punjab? This question will be addressed after the events of Operation Blue Star are briefly narrated.

Prior to the launch of Operation Blue Star, on the night of 2/3 June 1984, the existing cordon established by the CRPF outside the Golden Temple was strengthened to ensure that the militants did not have the opportunity to flee from the area.

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<sup>47</sup> Brar 1993: 39.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.: 172.

Simultaneously, curfew was clamped on the entire state from 9:00 p.m. onward for 36 hours. Thereafter, on the morning of 5 June 1984, the emplacements constructed atop the Ramgarhia Bungas and the water tanks in the temple were destroyed. The army had identified 17 built up areas around the temple complex that were being used by the terrorists to block entry to the area and dominate its surroundings. Two of these, Hotel View and Brahm Boota Akhara were cleared in the early part of the night of 5 June 1984.<sup>49</sup>

Operation Blue Star commenced on the night of 5/6 June 1984. The planners had probably not foreseen, appreciated or received sufficient intelligence into the level of preparedness of the terrorists in the temple which had been achieved over a considerable period of time. Major General (later Lieutenant General) Brar says:

Very scant information was forthcoming from local police and intelligence sources.... In fact most of it was woefully inadequate, unconfirmed and outdated. The estimates of the number of extremists entrenched in the Temple complex were at wide variance and more the result of speculation rather than of hard, accurate intelligence.

He goes on to add, '...there is no truth whatsoever in some reports, which found their way into the press, that the army had been given detailed intelligence about the defences within the Golden Temple many weeks earlier....'<sup>50</sup>

The initial rushes into the *parikrama* were met with well coordinated fire of automatics from the Akal Takth building and neighbouring buildings like the Nishan Sahib and Darshani Deori. The extent and accuracy of automatic fire was capable of holding any number of troops, rushing in unprotected over a flat surface with no prospect of taking cover. The casualty ratio of troops has come under severe criticism by informed as well as not so informed sources. Speaking purely from a military point of view, the soldiers and leaders went well beyond the call of duty to carry out the task assigned to them. The placement of automatics by the terrorists was such that even the crawling of troops with an aim to close in on the target buildings was not possible. All the windows, doors and heights had been prepared with clinical military planning and lent the place the look of a fortress rather than a religious place. The fire of automatics, which gave little room for maneuver or escape, excellently covered the entire area, once the main area of the *parikrama* was entered.

Thereafter, on 6 June 1984, because of heavy troop casualties sustained, due to the kind of fortifications that had been constructed, it was decided to employ tanks to break the terrorist's resistance. The army however received a rude shock when the terrorists used Rocket Propelled Grenades (RPG) against the army tanks. Finally, the tanks did break through the resistance; they entered the temple complex and flushed out the terrorists in a painstaking and dangerous room clearing operation.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.: 82.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.: 33-39.

During Operation Blue Star the army had witnessed the inhuman killing of army personnel who had fallen into the hands of the terrorists. 'In a ghastly act, the militants had strapped dynamite sticks around Subedar Ravi and then blew him off.'<sup>51</sup> Incidents such as these led to a certain amount of collateral damage, as after this the army was no longer willing to take unnecessary risks while carrying out its operations.

On a particular occasion, there was a sudden commotion during which one of the prisoners of the group, who had had his hands freed on the pretext of easing himself, suddenly tried to overpower the sentry and snatch away his weapon. Simultaneously, the other prisoners in the group made an attempt to escape. In a spontaneous reaction, the second sentry, who was at the moment standing a little further away, opened fire as a result of which a few people in this group were killed.<sup>52</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the operation another task of clearing other locations in the state of terrorists took place, this was termed Operation Wood Rose. The effects of Operation Blue Star, in Punjab and the rest of the country were far-reaching. Prior to the rise of terrorism in the state, Punjab and its people had been representative of the spirit of India. The problems in the state had however subdued this spirit and tarnished the state's image. The fallout of Operation Blue Star was as has been stated earlier, far-reaching. First was the divide between the Hindus and the Sikhs, which had become even wider in the aftermath of the operation. There was widespread condemnation of the central government's decision to force an entry into the temple complex, and for the collateral damage, that is, the inadvertent deaths of innocents, which had resulted. This led to a number of luminaries resigning from government appointments that they had held, including the Parliament. On the other hand, the people in general, and the media and politicians welcomed it. The contrasts in the reactions are worth quoting. 'The entire Sikh community considered the assault on the Golden Temple complex an assault on the Sikh religion.'<sup>53</sup> Khushwant Singh speaking for both sides said, 'All major political parties and newspapers of the country also approved of the action. The only exception, to the otherwise national approval, were the Sikhs.' In conclusion he says:

The Akalis and, more than them, Bhindranwale and his goons, did grievous harm by driving a wedge between the communities who had always shared a common historical, linguistic and religious heritage. What the Akalis and Bhindranwale did in alienating the Hindus from the Sikhs was complemented by the governmental action in further alienating the Sikhs from the Hindus.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.: 100–101.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.: 149.

<sup>53</sup> Marwah 1995: 176.

<sup>54</sup> Khushwant Singh 1999: 74–75.

Second, Operation Blue Star angered the Sikh population, who then started sympathising with the terrorists, which had not been the case previously. This came as a major blow to the efforts of the Government as well as the security forces in dealing with the problem.

Third, there was a sudden rise in terrorist related incidents in the state after a brief decline in 1985. This is evident from the figures given earlier. As is evident, there was a sudden upward swing in the graph till 1991. This period saw thousands of people being killed in the terrorist attacks in the state.

Fourth, this incident gave a fillip to Pakistani efforts to step up their aid to the terrorists and their anti-India propaganda, with special emphasis on human rights abuses. There was a regular supply of weapons and other equipment to the terrorists from across the border, much to the chagrin of Indian security forces and the government.

Fifth, the incident destroyed all hope of a peaceful settlement to the Punjab problem. This may have been possible prior to the storming of the Golden Temple. Post this, no party or group in Punjab was in a position to negotiate or enter into such discussions, given the mood of the people in the state.

Sixth, the incident coupled with the anti-Sikh riots that had occurred after the assassination of the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, which was also a fall out of Operation Blue Star, created deep divisions amongst the Hindus and Sikhs in Delhi and Haryana. The damage done due to this unfortunate development took years to heal—and that too only partially.

The last fallout of the operation was the Congress(I)'s unprecedented loss in the elections that were held in Punjab in 1985.

It would at this stage be relevant to attempt to gauge the achievements of Operation Blue Star. There are many points on which the operation may be criticized, but it did have its share of achievements, and these need to be highlighted in all fairness to the government.

First, the operation undoubtedly left an impression that the government was not going to hesitate to take a tough stand hereafter, having taken the extreme step of entering the Golden Temple and employing the degree of force thought necessary to clear it of terrorists. This was a tremendous psychological boost for a number of government agencies in the state.

Second, the operation restored the credibility of the government in the eyes of all sections of the country, other than the Sikhs of course, who understandably were deeply hurt. This was especially true of the Hindus living in Punjab, who were on the verge of migrating from the state because of the situation that had prevailed just prior to the operation.

Third, the government had successfully broken the myth and aura of invincibility that had come to surround Bhindranwale. This was very essential, as it proved to the people in general and to the terrorists in particular that there could be only one end for terrorists.

Fourth, the Akali leadership may have realised their mistake in their over use of hard line approaches and extremist stands to further their political agenda. Their

approval, tacit or otherwise, to Bhindranwale's misuse of the premises of the Golden Temple was they had realised a very large blunder.

Fifth, the manner in which events in Punjab had precipitated Operation Blue Star was a lesson to the government as well. It displayed to them the disastrous consequences of soft-peddling with extremist elements. It brought home the stark realities of supporting and propping up extremist entities, as a policy that had the potential of causing disastrous situations to develop. What was on display in the aftermath were the results of a weak Punjab policy, and the consequence of playing politics with national interest.

Sixth, the operation taught the security forces vital lessons, on the conduct of operations of this nature. It was proved beyond doubt that such situations, need to be nipped in the bud through decisive action, rather, than allowing them to flower by dithering over the course to adopt. Though the army had completed the operation almost as per schedule, the results could not have been encouraging for anyone, military commanders or the the people at large.

Seventh, Operation Blue Star was partially responsible for the success of Operation Black Thunder, an operation of a similar nature conducted in 1988 by the NSG and CRPF, though under entirely different circumstances, which will be discussed a little later in this chapter.

Last, an aspect, generally glossed over and neglected because of the fallout of Operation Blue Star, was the unparalleled valour, devotion to duty and determination of the soldiers involved in the operation.

The Indian Soldier displayed spectacular discipline and valour in the face of the heavy odds arraigned against him. In order to fight a battle righteously, there is no doubt that the army paid a heavy price in terms of casualties, and its soldiers never disobeyed the orders given to them, despite extreme provocation. As one of those who had to give some of the most unreasonable orders to those under my command, I salute them for their implicit and unflinching obedience, the restraint exercised by them and for the sacrifice they made for the noble cause of preserving the integrity of their nation. Duty, Honour, and Country—this is what a soldier swears by and lives for. This precept has perhaps never been borne out as amply as it was by the Indian soldier throughout Operation Blue Star.<sup>55</sup>

Whether or not Operation Blue Star was necessary, is a decision left to the reader, after taking into account the situation prevalent before it was launched.

## Rise in Violence

If Operation Blue Star was the first unfortunate incident to take place in 1984, the second was the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi, the prime minister, at the hands of her own security guards who happened to be Sikhs. 31 October 1984, the day

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<sup>55</sup> Brar 1993: 127–28.



on which she was assassinated, was an unfortunate day in more ways than one. Her death sparked off anti-Sikh riots in Delhi with widespread reprisals against innocent Sikhs. Delhi witnessed the most gruesome, unfortunate and painful days as frenzied mobs ran amok, torching business establishments belonging to Sikhs and hunting down Sikhs to kill them mercilessly. These incidents were another step backward in already strained Hindu–Sikh relations. Sikhs who represented the strength of Delhi suddenly became suspects. The incident also had an impact on the politics and psychology of both the Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab.

1985 did initially seem to be the year that promised a turnaround in the increasing spiral of violence in Punjab. There was a sudden decrease in the number of killings and the deployment of the army seemed to be having an impact on the situation. These positive developments were the result of a mature handling of the Punjab crisis, by Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi and the leader of the Akalis, Sant Harchand Singh Longowal. They successfully worked out an accord, which was signed on 24 July 1985 (for text of accord see Appendix H). One wonders why this accord could not have been signed earlier. Had both parties displayed maturity and a deft handling of the situation, Punjab would have been saved much bloodshed and the loss of lives of many innocents. The accord was widely welcomed except by the opponents of the Akalis from within their own party and their critics in the state who called it a ‘sellout’.

This was followed by successful elections in the State in September 1985 that predictably saw the Akalis coming to power with a huge majority: they won 73 of the 117 seats.

However terrorism once again reared its ugly head in 1986. During that year 520 civilians, 78 terrorists and 38 security personnel were killed. The state administration was found unprepared for this fresh terrorist onslaught. The experiment of returning democracy to the state soon started to show discernible cracks. Immediately after the elections, the Surjeet Singh Barnala government released 2000 of the detainees as per the recommendations of the Bains Committee, this was followed by the handing over of Golden Temple to the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) on 22 January 1986. Again, predictably, this led to various unscrupulous elements gaining control over the temple complex. The climax to all of this was reached with the declaration of Khalistan by the ‘*Panthic Committee*’. Describing these events K.P.S. Gill says:

By the end of April a ‘*Panthic Committee*’ had been constituted to coordinate all terrorist activities, and a ‘Declaration of Khalistan’ was issued by the Committee from the Golden Temple (29 April 1986). A day later, the Barnala Government ordered a mock search of the Temple with ample advance notice. It was an ill conceived and ill-planned raid (occasionally, if inappropriately, referred to as ‘Black Thunder—I’) mounted by the National Security Guard (NSG).<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> K.P.S. Gill (1991). ‘Endgame in Punjab: 1988–1993’, *Faultlines*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (May): 12.

In all of this innocent people continued to fall prey to the terrorists, and with each passing year the death toll climbed steadily upward. The Central Government finally decided to take control of the situation and dismissed the state government in April 1987, reimposing President's rule in the state. The government took tougher measures on the security front even as it continued its parleys with the political leadership of Akalis to diffuse the situation. However, terrorism seemed to have sunk its tentacles deeper into the state, as the menace spread from the border districts of Amritsar and Gurdaspur to the districts of Hoshiarpur, Jalandhar, Ludhiana and Faridkot.

In yet another significant political gesture, the government released 40 high profile prisoners.

On 4 March 1988, 40 high profile prisoners—the Jodhpur Detenués, including Jasbir Singh Rode—were released as part of another compromise with terrorists. They simply walked into the Golden Temple, where Rode was installed *jathedar* (head priest) of the Akal Takht (which was part of the deal). Shortly thereafter, the terrorists began to build up internal defences within the Temple around the *parikrama* (which certainly was not part of the deal).<sup>57</sup>

## Operation Black Thunder

Operation Black Thunder was planned and given the go ahead when the presence of terrorists inside the temple had again become more than apparent, and yet again, fortifications started coming up in the Golden Temple complex. The Central Government realised that they could not take the risk of another situation of the kind that had given rise to Operation Blue Star in 1984. 'The government finally made up its mind when S.S. Virk, DIGP, CRPF, was fired at and injured by the militants from inside the Golden Temple.'<sup>58</sup> This time around the responsibility of conducting the operation was given to the NSG and the paramilitary forces. The operation was conducted between 11–18 May 1988, and it was an unqualified success, 'achieved in a clean, economical and near-bloodless action executed in the fullest glare of media—both national and international'.

However it will be relevant to enquire, at this stage, into the reasons for the terrorists once again creating such a situation, especially with the example of Operation Blue Star and its demonstration that the government was both willing and able to take a tough stance.

First, the militants witnessed the launch of the ineffective operation that preceded Black Thunder (Operation Black Thunder—I, as it is sometimes called). Its very ineffectiveness was what probably prompted them to take the calculated risk of seeking refuge inside the Golden Temple, especially as pressure from the security forces was being put on them elsewhere. This step gave them relative immunity

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.: 15.

<sup>58</sup> Marwah 1995: 188.

as the security forces could not very well lay hands on them, at least initially, in what was the very heart of religious capital of Punjab.

Second, it may have been their intention to force the Central Government into yet another operation along the lines of Operation Blue Star, thereby totally alienating the Sikhs, and causing the government to lose total control of Punjab.

Third, the terrorists wished to create a situation in which the Punjab police could be discredited. The police force had been reeling under the impact of terrorist violence aimed at them and their families. At the time of Operation Black Thunder the regrouping of the force was in progress, the terrorists therefore felt that this was the ideal time to derail this process and deal the police a deathblow. Fourth, the terrorists felt that if the government could be forced into another bloody operation, their cause would receive worldwide publicity, they would be able to put the government on the backfoot once again, thereby, furthering their cause.

However, unlike Operation Blue Star, this time the terrorists were not as well prepared, neither were their positions and gun emplacements as well sited. However, this is not to say that Operation Black Thunder was easy to conduct, the terrorist presence and deployment inside the temple was still adequate enough to deter any foolhardy attempts at clearing the area. The strategy worked out this time was vastly different in its conceptualisation, planning and finally execution. There were two options before the select group that finally gave the go ahead to the plan. The first was storm the temple in a quick and clinical operation. This had the advantage of completing the operation post haste, without any opportunity for an adverse public reaction. However, it had the disadvantage of greater potential for casualties and possibly damage to the temple complex. The second option was to launch an operation in a phased manner, taking more time but ensuring minimal damage to the temple complex as also casualties to their own troops.

To discuss the situation and decide the strategy of flushing out the terrorists, a meeting was held at the Union Home Minister Buta Singh's room in the Parliament House. The Governor of Punjab and the Minister of State of Home Affairs, P. Chidambaram, attended the meeting amongst others. After discussing various options open to the Government, it was decided to hand over the operations to the National Security Guards.... Though the option of mounting a swift operation was not ruled out, it was decided to give the NSG time to implement its operational plan.<sup>59</sup>

The broad plan of the operation is further amplified on by Mr K.P.S. Gill, the then DGP of Punjab:

When I attended the first meeting on Black Thunder it was not called Black Thunder. I attended the first meeting and we were in Rajiv Gandhi's office (the residence office, it was late at night), now what I found was that no one had a clue as to what to do. The then DIG was there, NSG was not called in,

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.: 188–90.

Chidambaram was there and they were looking at a map of that whole area and no one could come out with a suggestion. So I, at that point of time happened to be the junior most officer, I said, look if you look at the Golden Temple Complex, it is actually three rectangular areas. First is the *Sarais*, second is the *langars* and third is the Sanctum. I said that *Sarais* we have always entered and searched, so there should be no problem. As far as the *langar* is concerned, we have entered *langars* but with protest. There will always be protest. And Golden Temple, what they call precincts, we have never entered, there has always been a lot of furore, if anyone enters, so what we do is, we will surround it, we had already surrounded it even before the Black Thunder started through the CRPF. It was because we had the foresight to surround it that no one escaped after shooting that night, no one escaped... so I said we will go into these two areas and in the third, we will make limited quick forays, hit a morcha and come out... so Rajiv said, 'okay we will accept the plan and what do we call it,' so he says, 'we will call it the Gill Plan.' So Black Thunder started as the Gill Plan.<sup>60</sup>

The plan involved neutralising the terrorists atop the *bungas*, where they had again located themselves. Thereafter, it was a game of patience the NSG planned to play. It involved taking locations atop vantage points around the temple complex and employing NSG snipers, to pick off the terrorists. Any attempt by the terrorists out of the buildings thus put them under sniper fire. It was also planned to slowly take control of buildings surrounding the complex and squeeze the militants at a slow, steady and well-defined pace. The tactics paid off despite occasional pressure to go in for Option I.

Even though the NSG's plan was working with clockwork efficiency the Punjab Police was getting impatient. DGP (K.P.S. Gill) was pressurising all the time for the NSG to speed up its Operation to flush out all the militants.<sup>61</sup>

The operation finally succeeded as the NSG's patience paid off. Operation Black Thunder was a resounding success that was appreciated by a wide cross-section of the countries population—including the population of the state of Punjab. The effects of the operation need to be highlighted.

First and foremost, public confidence in the government and the security forces, especially the Punjab police, was restored. This had a cascade effect, as the police subsequently gained the confidence to take on the terrorists on their own terms.

Second, the media had been handled well during the operation. They witnessed the operation and reported the actual facts more accurately helping change opinion within and outside the country. 'We allowed the international press. The second was that we made it an operation in which everything is visible and we don't say aggravating things.'<sup>62</sup> Thus the operation proved to be an excellent public relations

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<sup>60</sup> K.P.S. Gill in an interview with the author.

<sup>61</sup> Marwah 1995: 192.

<sup>62</sup> K.P.S. Gill in an interview with the author.

exercise for the government and the security forces. The terrorists were portrayed by the media as who they really were: terrorists and criminals and not as freedom fighters who would fight for their cause to the last bullet. Their meek surrender was an eye-opener to a number of people, who had been fed on false stories of their bravery and bravado.

Third, the operation was successful in maintaining sanctity of the Golden Temple, which had been one of its most important aims even prior to its launch. This redeemed the image of the government and the security forces.

Fourth, it was successfully completed without any casualties having been incurred. This was an achievement in itself and an example of exemplary planning and perfect execution.

Fifth, it was made clear and obvious to the terrorists that any attempt by them to use a place of religious importance would be met with similar action. This is probably the reason that no such attempts were made after Operation Black Thunder.

Sixth, the operation provided a blueprint for others of a similar nature elsewhere in the country and even beyond it. It was an example of one of the most successful operations of its kind. The operation did however generate its share of controversy. Some statements made at the time prove this. As Ved Marwah of the Punjab police says, 'The Punjab Police was asked to take charge of briefing the media in Amritsar, but not involved in either the planning or the implementation of the Operation.'<sup>63</sup> On the other hand K.P.S. Gill says, 'Operation Black Thunder was executed squarely under the charge of the Punjab Police—backed up by the elite anti-terrorist force, the National Security Guard (NSG) and para-military forces.'<sup>64</sup>

At this stage it will also be appropriate to compare the two operations: Blue Star and Black Thunder. Though comparisons are bound to take place since both took place at the same location and against similar opposition with the same aim in mind. However, this is where comparisons end. There are a number of distinct differences that exist between the two operations and an analysis of these will probably clear the fog of doubt that exists in the minds of people in certain quarters.

First, the events that led to Operation Blue Star and those, which led to Operation Black Thunder were totally different. At the time Operation Blue Star was launched, Punjab was 'alight with passion', and there was every danger of its 'alighting with the smallest spark'. Besides the terrorists had virtual control over the state's administration as also the psyche of the people, with the political leadership of Akalis pitching in to add fuel to fire. The situation was explosive to say the least. On the other hand, prior to Operation Black Thunder, even though more killings were taking place at the hands of terrorists, the situation had stabilised as far as the people were concerned. As Ved Marwah states:

I moved around in the city in plain clothes and what struck me most was the lack of tension in the city. A crowd in front of a *halwai* shop was busy eating

<sup>63</sup> Marwah 1995: 191.

<sup>64</sup> K.P.S. Gill (see n. 56), p. 16.

hot *jalebis*. There was hardly any tension in the city, even though the sound of artillery fire booming from the complex could be heard all over.<sup>65</sup>

Second, there is again no comparison to be made in terms of the terrorists involved in the two incidents, either in terms of their number, or their levels of preparation and motivation, all of which were far greater in the case of Operation Blue Star. Prior to Operation Blue Star, the temple complex had been fortified by a terrorist who was an ex-major general of the Indian Army, reputed to have a sharp intellect and a flair for such tasks. The nature and quantity of weaponry at the disposal of the terrorists, coupled with near impregnable fortifications, in the abovementioned operation were capable of holding back a large force. A conventional attack would have been preceded by artillery and tank fire prior to the assault. With little or no chance of achieving surprise, there was no way the army could have breached the wall of fire that had been carefully contrived by a wily soldier. On the other hand, the situation was dramatically different during Black Thunder. Preparations during Operation Black Thunder were comparatively neither as well planned nor were they anywhere near the effectiveness and robustness of Blue Star days. The construction of bunkers, method of organizing mutually supporting fire plans, type and quantity of weaponry, scale and type of ammunition and the tactical location of weapons all pointed to a form and degree of expertise, which was incomparable.

Third, the mandate that the concerned security forces had been given in both operations was diametrically different. Whereas, in Operation Blue Star the army had been required to clear the temple complex of terrorists as early as was practically feasible, so as to avoid any extraneous factors being brought to bear on the situation, for example, pressure from the population, in Black Thunder the NSG had been allowed the necessary time to play a waiting game which was the basis of their plan in the whole operation.

Fourth, there was the important aspect of the psychology of the terrorists prior to Operation Blue Star. At that time after the reign of terror that they had unleashed in Punjab they were feeling invincible, a feeling they imbibed in part from Bhindranwale. Moreover, they had also felt that the central government would not risk entering as sacred a place as the temple complex. This was not the case during Black Thunder. The terrorists knew that the government would in all probability employ the security forces and use them to enter the temple complex. They were therefore not as sure prior to Black Thunder as they were prior to Blue Star of emerging victorious. In short, Operation Blue Star had shattered their confidence, all the more since Bhindranwale had been killed during the earlier operation.

Lastly, the quality of leadership of the terrorists during the two operations was radically different. During Operation Blue Star the terrorists had been motivated and to a large extent blinded by the aura Bhindranwale projected and his magnetism. At the time of Operation Black Thunder, Bhindranwale, killed in Operation

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<sup>65</sup> Marwah 1995: 190. The author gives his impression of the situation during the conduct of Operation Black Thunder.

Blue Star, was no more. Thereafter the terrorist leadership was never again to be as strong, the terrorists were more petty criminals than fighters, out to make a quick buck. As Lieutenant General Brar says, ‘...to paradigmatically draw any comparisons between two totally unrelated scenarios is reprehensible’.<sup>66</sup>

## Final Phase Begins

Operation Black Thunder did not cause any ‘dip’ in terrorist activities as had happened in the aftermath of Operation Blue Star. However, the terrorists were psychologically on the defensive after a shameful let down by their fellow terrorists at the Golden Temple.

The main problem that prevented any capitalisation on the success of the operation was the relative ineffectiveness of the police and paramilitary forces in Punjab vis-à-vis the terrorists at this stage. The problem is best explained in the words of K.P.S. Gill:

After the successful execution of the Operation, I found, under my command, a police force far from triumphant in this victory; deeply divided and demoralised; ill equipped, organisationally, materially and mentally, to confront the larger challenge of eradicating terrorism from the entire state.<sup>67</sup>

Operation Black Thunder had set the stage for the final confrontation with the terrorists, but in this the police proved inadequately prepared for the task at hand. The steps initiated by K.P.S. Gill the DGP of the Punjab police, to overcome this were as follows:

- Upgrading police stations in terms of manpower, commanders manning them, communications, weapons and defensibility.
- Improving the ratio of operational to static duties from 40–50 per cent to 85 per cent.
- Weeding out those suspected of having communal tendencies.
- Impetus to joint interrogation and operations to remove misgivings.
- Upgrading intelligence network based on intelligible patterns.
- Giving coherence to the counter-terrorist strategy. And
- Rejuvenating police leadership.

In addition to these, there was a concerted effort to adopt a proactive strategy. In the words of K.P.S. Gill:

In a city, as a rough formula [was adopted that] the reaction time to any incident should be three minutes maximum and in the country side fifteen minutes. I said, if we achieve this reaction time, we have won the war (personal interview).

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<sup>66</sup> Brar 1993: 153.

<sup>67</sup> K.P.S. Gill (see n. 56), p. 17.

Gill also developed a target life expectancy for a terrorist in Punjab. This gave the forces an objective to work on, and proved to be very demoralising for the mentors of terrorists and the terrorists themselves. The police felt that if the life span of terrorists was anything less than eight to nine months, it would pay dividends because it would seem that a terrorist's life was not worth it. Another unique strategy adopted was, 'All terrorists are not active all the time. So in these fifteen days, part of my thrust will be on those groups, which have been active in those fifteen days or a period of that, plus on current activities, which also worked.' It was decided not to go after terrorists, who had been active in the past thereby assisting in getting the focus on to active terrorists who are 'contemporaneously active'.<sup>68</sup>

There was also a systematic approach to operations, which was formulated. The strategy was to hit at villages that were likely to yield results rather than merely operating without a plan.

We made a deep study of the problem. For instance we found out that about 250 villages account for 75 per cent of the terrorists. So that made our task a little easier. We found out that about out of the 13,000 villages in Punjab, about 600 accounted for 60 per cent of the civilian rural casualties. So we tried to break up the whole problem into its various parts and then attend to that.<sup>69</sup>

Large-scale reforms started to pay dividends. There was a new will that was soon visible in the police force's manner of taking on the terrorists. In 1989, there were large-scale co-ordinated operations that were conducted in the *Mand* area of Punjab, neutralising it as a sanctuary for terrorists to a large extent. The security forces were also able to restrict the terrorists to the border districts thereby limiting their area of operation. Yet another initiative taken by the government was the planning and establishment of Village Defence Schemes. People were issued weapons and thus given an opportunity of defending themselves.

One of our very successful operations was, we had 12,000–13,000 villages in Punjab and I think at the end of giving weapons to villagers to protect themselves, we had roughly crossed the figure of 2,500–3,000 in the worst affected areas. That means one fourth of the state was protecting itself.<sup>70</sup>

This was also the stage when proliferation of automatic weapons came up as a major area for concern, especially since the police force was not as well equipped in this respect as the terrorist were. The situation was further aggravated by the employment of explosive devices against the security forces, and their targeting of political figures. As the fight progressed, the devices the terrorists employed started becoming more sophisticated. This became a major source of worry for the government and the security forces. Rail tracks were blasted, assassinations planned and the

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<sup>68</sup> K.P.S. Gill in an interview with the author.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*



security forces targeted with impunity. The period also saw group killings of civilians aimed at further widening the Hindu-Sikh divide.

The spate of killings and a number of failed attempts to find a political solution to the problem finally forced the government to re-induct the army into Punjab in November 1991. The army was tasked along with the other agencies to create circumstances whereby elections could be held in the state in February 1992. The following period is considered one of the best examples of unified command and cooperation at all levels of planning and operational functioning. As K.P.S. Gill says, 'What emerged now, was one of the most unique experiments in multi-force counter-terrorist strategic initiatives and integrated command structures.'<sup>71</sup> The three forces, army, paramilitary forces and the police worked together to overcome the common fallacy of similar operations in the past. Gill elucidates this point when he says:

My advantage was that I have worked both with the CRPF and I have had army units in aid of civil power from 1960 onwards so I knew how the army officers feel, how the CRPF feels, how the BSF feels and my main aim [was that] there should be no rough edges.... There has never been a more harmonious operation between forces than it was in Punjab.<sup>72</sup>

This approach began to show immediate results, especially since the forces were given the requisite freedom by the political masters, in the form of no interference in military matters. Again K.P.S. Gill states:

Law and order was entrusted to the professional agencies of the state within whose constitutional mandate they fell. There was no back-seat driving from Delhi, no dubious political moves and manoeuvres, no deals with terrorists and their over-ground agencies, undermining strategic and security initiatives.<sup>73</sup>

Despite a relatively low voter turnout, elections to the state assembly were successfully held in 1992. The Akali Dal boycotted these elections and Beant Singh of the Congress came to power. He continued with the successful counter-terrorist policy that had been pursued in the months preceding the elections, and success started to make its presence felt. While the terrorists began to specifically target police personnel and their families in a last ditch attempt to break the will of the police, the police responded killing most of the major leaders of the terrorist groups. This had a major psychological impact on the terrorists and they were not able to sustain the pressure, once the top echelons of their leadership had been wiped out. The strategy followed by the police was of 'immediate identification of perpetrators of the latest outrage, and the application of the fullest force to secure their arrest

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<sup>71</sup> K.P.S. Gill (see n. 56), p. 59.

<sup>72</sup> K.P.S. Gill in an interview with the author. He also brought out the important aspect of social interaction between officers of various forces and their families as a method of bridging the gap and improving the working relationship.

<sup>73</sup> K.P.S. Gill (see n. 56), p. 58.

or elimination'. The second was to 'focus on most important terrorists'. The third was 'Operation Night Dominance'.

The year 1993 is widely recognised as the year in which terrorism finally came to an end in Punjab. There was a sudden drop in terrorist activities with most organisations virtually eliminated and their leadership annihilated. This was coupled with the increasing realisation amongst the common people in the state of the futility of such movements. Even the Akali leadership probably realised what the reality of the situation was, with the result that today there is no mention of secessionist demands, which had become the hallmark of their opportunistic politics of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Before concluding the section on Punjab, it will be interesting to draw comparisons between Punjab and the solution applied there, with other regions suffering from similar problems in the country.

## Conclusion

Drawing comparisons between Punjab and other areas in the country where LIC conditions prevail, for example, J&K, is tempting to certain analysts and observers. Similarly, there is a tendency for certain people to suggest the use of the Punjab model for fighting insurgencies in other areas. While it is true that the basic means of combating an LIC will remain the same irrespective of where it is located, it is equally true to say that such attempts to interpolate solutions are at best short-sighted attempts at finding simplistic solution to what are complex problems. The many variables that go into the making of an LIC create a situation that is so complex and unique as to make it almost impossible to apply a model suitable to one conflict to another occurring elsewhere.

For example, what had taken place in Punjab was very clearly terrorism. It was not as is sometimes mistakenly believed an insurgency. From the time of its inception, through its peak and till its decline, it was not able to change this basic aspect. On the other hand in Kashmir what the state initially faced was an insurgency with large-scale popular support for the disillusioned elements which are a part of it. However, with the passage of time, realisation slowly set in among the common people, regarding the vested interests of their so-called saviours and of the true meaning of being independent. Thus the Kashmir problem is now becoming one of terrorism with popular support for the insurgents waning albeit slowly. It was Pakistan's aim to use this situation, whether insurgency or terrorism, to bleed India with a proxy war.

Punjab is an example of a variety of solutions tried by the government and security forces. It saw political initiative, strong counter-terrorist actions by the security forces; fissured and disoriented action and then excellent multi-organisational cohesion. The struggle is an excellent case study for students of LICs, as also for the security forces—especially the police. Punjab is also an example of the dangers of mixing politics with religion. One can go further and say that any element that

is capable of churning up mass hysteria should ideally be kept away from politics, which is at times a game of opportunism.

The conflict in Punjab is also a salutation to the spirit of people, who, despite having suffered extensively, rallied to fight the terrorists and bring back normalcy to the state. Punjab along with Mizoram is an example for certain other states that have not as yet understood the meaning of cohesive and symbiotic coexistence. Punjab has been at the forefront of nation building and with the end of this forgettable and unfortunate chapter of terrorism, the state yet again stands on the edifice of progress and prosperity.

PART III

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THE NORTH-EAST



## Chapter 10

# Assam—ULFA

### Background

Assam is a land of plenty with a rich historical, cultural and social heritage. It has been at the forefront of a cultural revolution that has led to the emergence of North-east India as an independent, self-respecting entity, since Independence. From being a mere fringe state, today it is at the helm of affairs and is fast becoming the cosmopolitan hub of North-east India. Assam presents an amalgam of a rich cultural heritage and a progressive modern outlook.

Discontented groups, which over the years have fought for preserving their identity and economic prosperity, have been accused of hindering Assam's progress. However, it may not be fair to them if their protest and demands are perceived as 'unjust' and are negated in totality with the entire blame of the economic slowdown being laid at their door. As the history of the region will reveal, some of the demands are justified, and are merely a product of economic needs of the day.

There are two dimensions of the uprising in Assam. The first is that the majority of the Ahom population wishes to secede from the Indian union. This secessionist movement had gained initial popularity by fighting on emotive issues, such as, illegal immigration and economic deprivation. The second dimension of the uprisings has been spearheaded by tribal groups, such as, the Bodos, Karbis, Hmars, Rabhas, Mishings and Tiwis, who want autonomy and statehood for the regions of Assam they occupy. The primary reason underlying their demands is that they have been neglected within Assam.

In the past, Assam was ruled by the Ahom kings. However, their power disintegrated with their unsuccessful struggle against Burmese rulers in the early years of the nineteenth century. The Ahoms had initially asked for Burmese assistance to quell an internal rebellion, but they soon fell victim to their own policies. The success of the Burmese against the Ahoms was viewed by the British with alarm. As a consequence, they fought the Anglo-Burmese War that led to the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo on 24 February 1826. This resulted in the expulsion of the Burmese from Assam. However, Ahom rule was soon to come to

an end, with the British taking over the region in 1838. The reasons behind the British takeover were, the imperatives of commercial and political expansion in India, and their political rivalry with the Chinese and Russia. This led them to demarcate 'lines', which signified inner and outer regions. The inner region was closely administered, while the outer region was required to accept the suzerainty of the British, in return for which it was allowed to run its own affairs in an autonomous manner.

Opportunities in administration and commerce lead to an influx of the labouring and educated classes into Assam. These were poor labourers from Mymensingh and Sylhet in Bangladesh, Nepal and some states of India like Bihar, and educated workers from West Bengal. This influx was created by the need of the British to till underutilised land for growing rice and tea. However, what aggravated the Assamese was a loss of job opportunities in the British administration to the educated Bengalis.

The continued immigration of non-Assamese began to have an adverse effect on availability of land, and also affected the demography of the region. The Assamese thus faced the threat of becoming a minority in their own land. This led to growing resentment among Ahoms and tribals in the pre-Independence period as they began to experience the political and economic fallout of the changing ethnic composition of the region.

Illegal immigration into Assam from neighbouring countries continued after Independence, despite the growing concern of the ethnic population and their desperate voicing of their concerns. Feeble attempts at allaying their fears, coupled with political compulsion, led to the problem attaining explosive dimensions. It was partially solved when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi successfully signed the Assam Accord in 1985. The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), formed in 1979, was moderate in its activities before the Accord was signed. However, after it was signed, its founding members felt betrayed and launched their militant struggle against the government—a struggle which continues till this day. The Bodo movement in Assam was, to begin with, a struggle for autonomy within the state; however, certain elements within the struggle started demanding independent statehood for the Bodos to protest against economic deprivation and loss of majority in their areas. It was also alleged that the Bodos were under the threat of rapid 'Assamisation'. There was hope of peace with the signing of the Bodo Accord (1993) between the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), with their President, S.K. Bwismutiary and the Additional Chief Secretary of Assam, in the presence of Chief Minister, Hiteswar Saikia and the then Minister of State for Internal Security, Rajesh Pilot. However, some sections of the resistance movement like the Bodo Liberation Tigers Front (BLTF) and National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) did not accept the accord, and continued to wage a militant struggle against the state government and the army, which was deployed in the area. The impasse was partially resolved with a tripartite agreement between the state government, central government and the BLTF in 2003, only to have the NDFB reject it and continue with its armed struggle.

## Historical Journey till British Control

Not much is known about ancient Assam. It can only be assessed that the earliest known inhabitants of Assam, as we know them today, were the Bodo-Kacharis.<sup>1</sup> The earliest reference in history to Assam is to a place called Pragjyotishpura, (present-day Guwahati). Mention of this place is made in both the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Texts of c. 1000 B.C. mention a King Narakasura and his son Bhagadutta. There is another common belief that:

... the Kalitas or their ancestors entered India from the west, settled in Upper India, and ultimately entered Assam, and that they were Ksatriyas.... The theory of the entry of the Alpines and the Aryans into Assam seems to centre partly round the origin of the Kalitas, who, we believe had an Alpine origin.<sup>2</sup>

The next major reference to the region is found in an inscription on the Allahabad pillar in Uttar Pradesh, dating back to 4 A.D., which mentions the kingdom of Kamrup. The first detailed account of the region is available from the well-tabulated and graphic narration left by the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang in 640 A.D. Hiuen Tsang visited India during the rule of Varman dynasty in Kamrup. The succeeding period saw rulers descended from the Kacharis, who held sway over North Cachar, the valley of the Brahmaputra, Goalpara, Dimapur and Cooch Behar.

The first major ingress into the region took place in 1236 A.D. with the conquest of Upper Assam by the Ahoms; a Mongoloid race from Thailand, which crossed the mountain ranges along the eastern frontier of present-day India.<sup>3</sup> The Ahoms, led by Sukapha, defeated the rulers of the region. This initial foothold was soon expanded towards lower Assam during the following decades by defeating the Kacharis, Koch and other ruling clans. The migration was followed by the

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<sup>1</sup> Though the history of this period is shrouded in a haze, it has been claimed by scholars like K.S. Singh (1994), that the Bodos are the original inhabitants of Assam. It certainly is an irony that the Bodos, who may have been the region's original inhabitants, are now fighting the Assamese (ethnic Ahoms) for their homeland, and that the Assamese, in turn, see themselves as the rightful claimants to the area despite having migrated there only in 1236 A.D. under the leadership of Sukapha from Thailand.

<sup>2</sup> Choudhury 1959: 108-9.

<sup>3</sup> A. Mackenzie, who was in charge of political correspondence of the British in 1869, and also wrote an authoritative book on Assam (1979), stated:

... it is enough for us to know that in the Eighth century after Christ, the Brahmaputra Valley was invaded by a vigorous and warlike race of Burmese Shans, which had by the commencement of the thirteenth century wrested the whole country from its Hindu rulers and arrogated to its own dynasty and people the title of 'Ahom'—the unequalled—destined in the softer form 'Asam' to become the modern name of the province.



capture of the region and led to establishment of a long line of Ahom rulers. The name 'Assam' is also derived from the word Ahom. The Ahoms were Buddhists; however, with the passage of time, intermarriage with the local population led to assimilating and imbibing local culture and customs. Similarly, the local culture underwent a change after interacting with Ahoms, and emerged richer from the experience. The region came under the influence of Vaishnavite Hinduism, with learned religious scholars travelling to the area and triggering many conversions. The Muslims also came to this region, as part of the the army of Mohammed Ibn Bakhtiar in 1206. Thereafter, they continued to slowly and steadily spread across the area, well into the seventeenth century. Despite the ingressions of these two different religious groups in Assam, the region witnessed the emergence of a homogeneous society, which took pride in a common Assamese identity, rather than in their separate religious or ethnic identities. There was consistent and continuous progress in the state with self-sufficiency and cultural advancement peaking in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. During the seventeenth century, Assamese kings achieved the proud distinction of defeating the Mughal army. In 1671, at the Battle of Saraighat, Lachit Borphukan led the Assamese army in collaboration with the Koch against the Mughals, and emerged victorious.

One of the major upheavals in Assam was the potent challenge to Ahom kings by local revolutions. The first of these was the revolt of the Moamarias in 1769.<sup>4</sup> These revolts weakened the Ahoms and opened the doors for others to loot and plunder the region. The next revolt was led by the King of Darrang, Krishnanarayan, assisted by his band of *burkandazes* (1792).<sup>5</sup> The Ahom king had to request the British for help in order to crush these revolts.

Thereafter, infighting and rivalry between various contenders to the throne marked the last phase of Ahom rule. A report by Captain Welsh, dated 6 February 1794, reads, 'Every kind of oppression was practised on the people. The Momarias succeeded probably by the connivance of the King's Generals—certainly by their supineness.'<sup>6</sup> Infighting led to requests by the competing sides for help from the Burmese rulers and the British. The state came under Burmese onslaught from 1817, until the British effectively and decisively defeated them and the Treaty of Yandabo was signed on 24 February 1826. This also led to Assam coming under British rule, bringing to an end 600 years of Ahom rule. Some scholars have contested the right

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<sup>4</sup> The rise of Moamarias is similar to that of other low-caste groups in north India because of the ills of the caste system and the strong grip of upper class Brahmins over the society. The rise of this group can be seen as yet another attempt at challenging the supremacy of upper class in the society. The Moamarias were peasants who followed the teachings of Aniruddhadeva (1553–1624). Thus, an LIC began in the region against the established rule of Ahoms, which finally resulted in the disintegration of the kingdom.

<sup>5</sup> The *burkandazes* were ex-soldiers of the Muslim armies and zamidars, who became available after their services were no longer required.

<sup>6</sup> Welsh's Report on Assam 1794.

of the Burmese to cede Assam to the British, questioning their sovereignty over Assam.<sup>7</sup> These people also question the amalgamation of Assam into India.

The forces of *Swadhin Asom* were trying to re-read, re-interpret and even recreate history in order to build up their theoretical base that Assam has always been a free nation and that its amalgamation into British India was based on trickery and fraud.<sup>8</sup>

## British Rule

British rule in Assam followed a pattern similar to that of other states in the country. The Ahom ruler, Gaurinath Singha, had requested them for help against the rampaging *burkandazes* in 1788 finally, in 1792, an expedition achieved victory. However, presumably at this stage the British only had a fleeting interest in Assam and were quite content to have it as a buffer region. This changed after the region was occupied by the Burmese, who seemed to be threatening the neighbouring areas in an attempt to increase their influence in the region. 'British apprehensions were proved correct when Burmese acts of aggression started in Chittagong, Cachar and Jyantia.'<sup>9</sup> Thus, British interest in Assam at this stage was due to geo-political considerations rather than economic ones; however, with the discovery of oil and the establishment of tea plantations, commercial interest in the area increased. The first sign of growing economic and commercial interest of the British in Assam was in the late eighteenth century, with the conclusion of a 'Commercial Treaty' between Captain Welsh and Gaurinath Singha on 28 February 1793. The first article of the treaty reads, 'That there shall henceforth be a reciprocal and entire liberty of commerce between the subjects of Bengal and those of Assam for all and singular goods and merchandizes . . .'<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that the Assamese welcomed British rule at this stage, because the state was being ravaged by the Burmese.<sup>11</sup> This growing interest was again reflected in the East India Company's Report of 1797. It says:

The country of Assam is represented as abounding in the most valuable products, and it were therefore an object of public interest to take measures for restoring it to peace and quiet, with a view to promote the intercourse of commerce . . .<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Amiya Kumar Das (1992) says, 'The Burmese did not have the right to cede Assam to the British since their sovereignty was not really established. Moreover, when the treaty was signed Assam was free of Burmese presence. Any agreement on Assam, at the most, should, therefore, have been on a tri-lateral basis. Thus the British possessed Assam through fraud, deceit and power.'

<sup>8</sup> Udayon Misra 2000: 62.

<sup>9</sup> Bhuyan 1949: 511.

<sup>10</sup> Commercial Treaty concluded by Captain Welsh with Gaurinath Singha on 28 February 1783. Captain Welsh was a British army officer posted in Bengal. He was ordered by Lord Cornwallis into Assam, once the revolts broke out.

<sup>11</sup> Bhuyan 1949: 552.

<sup>12</sup> Company's Report on Assam, 1797.

Thus, the initial British entry into Assam was influenced more by the Burmese threat, rather than by any other political or economic reason, though later commercial and economic interests became important.

The Raj of Cachar which lay directly in the way of any force invading East Bengal from Burma, had sometime previously placed itself under British protection. In the face of repeated warnings and expostulations the Burmese, who then held the valley of Manipur, persisted in advancing towards Cachar and threatening Giant (a bordering dependency of Bengal); and no resource was at length left to the Indian Government save to declare war.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, on 5 March 1824, a conflict broke out between the Burmese and the British. This finally came to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo.<sup>14</sup> The Burmese ceded Assam to the British, who allowed Purunder Singha, the Ahom ruler, to continue in power, until they found the experiment unsuccessful. They then brought Assam directly under their control in October 1838.<sup>15</sup> The British gained control of Lower Assam in 1826, and as has been stated, allowed Upper Assam to be ruled by the Ahom rulers. However, the entire territory was taken over in 1838, completing the end of Ahom rule. The following years were a period of consolidation and expansion from the heart of North-east India into its fringes. This policy was termed the 'Forward Policy'. Sadiya, located on the north-eastern fringe of present-day Assam, was taken over from the Muttocks. The Khasi Hills region was captured in 1833 followed by defeat of the Jaintia ruler in 1835. Cachar was annexed in 1850 and the Garo Hills were taken over in 1869. The Resolution of 1873 was passed which drew an imaginary line through the British domains in the North-east. This demarcated an 'inner line' and 'outer line'. The inner line essentially covered the plains. The British carried out revenue administration in this region, which was different from the regions of the outer line. The regions of the outer line recognised British suzerainty but continued their administration as per the dictates of their own traditions and customs. The tribal areas in the hill regions of the North-east were allowed such autonomy, in return for promises of peace and maintenance of law and order.

The British conquest of the region faced limited uprisings from various sections of the population. Often these were motivated by interests other than a desire to overthrow the chains of imperialism with broad-based support from the population. The first uprising came in the form of an aristocratic uprising by Gomadhar Konwar and Rupachand Konwar in 1828–29. These were primarily launched to resurrect the position of the aristocracy in the state. This was followed near simultaneously by a revolt of the Khasis under the leadership of U. Tirot Singh. 'It undoubtedly goes to the credit of the Khasis that it was they who put up the first organised

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<sup>13</sup> Mackenzie 1979: 4.

<sup>14</sup> A detailed reference of British ascent in Assam is also made in the Ahom Buranji, which is a historical account of Ahoms in the state.

<sup>15</sup> Mackenzie 1979.

resistance against British rule in the north-eastern region and their struggle involved a large section of the population.<sup>16</sup> The Khasi struggle was one of the few exceptions, where an attempt was made to overcome the barriers of class divisions and inter state boundaries to forge a united alliance. However, unfortunately for the people, it failed to result in perceptible success and fizzled out by 1832. This was followed by an attempted uprising in the wake of the churning of 1857 by Maniram Dewan.<sup>17</sup> However, this attempt also failed. Two peasant uprisings played a major role in galvanising the people, especially the lower classes. The first took place immediately after the events of 1857–58, when the peasants rose against the government for prohibiting poppy cultivation and for levying taxes on betel nuts and garden produce. This led to large-scale demonstrations, which went a long way towards uniting the people's movement. This was followed by a campaign against an increase in tax rates by the Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1892. Large-scale unrest and demonstrations followed in Kamrup and Darrang districts, finally forcing the government to reduce the increased levies from 70–80 per cent to 37 per cent. This was a major victory for the people. Reflections of this can be found in the unrest launched by large sections of the people as will be discussed subsequently. It will be pertinent to point out that at no stage did any of these struggles aim at collectively overthrowing the yoke of British rule in the area. Whereas, the first uprising was aimed at securing rights for the aristocracy, the later ones were for the rights of peasants.

Conquests by the British in the North-east were not bereft of economic motives. Tea was found to be a major source of income after its availability was discovered in 1821. This led to the first tea garden being established at Assam in 1835 and the export of tea began in 1838. Then oil was discovered at Makum and a refinery was set up at Digboi in 1890. These economic motives led the British to look for cheap and easily accessible labour to work in the tea estates and oil refineries. Economic upheaval also necessitated requirements of labour for building communications networks, which included building roads, laying railway lines and improving inland waterway networks. The British also realised that large tracts of unutilised land could be gainfully employed in cultivation. These requirements could not be fulfilled with the available manpower in the state. This shortfall was made up by cheap labour from Sylhet and Mymensingh in present-day Bangladesh and chiefly from Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, the Central Provinces (present-day Madhya Pradesh), the United Provinces (present-day Uttar Pradesh) and Madras (in Tamil Nadu).<sup>18</sup> There are varying estimates of the degree of influx into the region, though the fact that immigration did take place on a large and unhindered scale

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<sup>16</sup> Misra 2000: 67.

<sup>17</sup> Maniram Dewan was instrumental in assisting the British to gain control over Assam, however on finding their excessive exploitation growing at the cost of peasantry, he attempted to assist the heir Kanderpeswar Singha, only to be discovered and subsequently hung for his attempt.

<sup>18</sup> The estimated figures provided by one of the respected authors Verghese (1996) were 'just short of 4,25,000 in 1891 and had exceeded 1.3 million by 1911'.

is beyond doubt.<sup>19</sup> The increase in commerce in the region in the pre-1857 period led the East India Company to pay more attention to the administration of the region. After 1857, the area came to be administered by representatives of the British government in India, when all of the Company's Indian dominions vested in the British Crown. With all of this came the need for people to staff the administration, especially at the lower levels. Educated Bengali clerical and lower administrative cadres stepped in to fill this void. This led to influx from Bengal into Assam. Sreeradha Datta observes, 'The Census of 1911 described these migrant farmers as "hardy and prolific cultivators working their way northwards. These people are accustomed to the risk arising from diluvian and devastating floods which other cultivators are unwilling to face".' Likewise, the 1931 Census reported: 'At first the local people did not accept them joyfully. But as they came to see their knowledge of agriculture, their contribution to the general prosperity of the district—the prejudices and dislikes are beginning to disappear.'<sup>20</sup>

The ethnic population faced a paradoxical situation, in which there were fresh opportunities for economic advancement but at the expense of a loss of identity. As has been explained the British requirement of people to run the administration led to an influx of the educated class into Assam. After this, however, it was necessary to feed the growing population that had been encouraged to migrate into the state. This made it necessary to cultivate barren land, especially in the aftermath of the Burmese onslaught, which had led to mismanagement and gross shortage of food grains. Thus, there was also an influx of the labouring classes into Assam. While the influx did increase production levels, it also robbed the locals of their land. In a similar paradoxical situation, the immigration of the Bengali educated working class not only took most of the white collar jobs in the administration, it also lobbied for implementation of Bengali as the medium of instruction in schools, a decision that was eventually reversed in 1873. An esteemed historian of Assam writes:

In April 1931, the Government of Bengal made Bengali in place of Persian the court language of Assam.... Their services became in-dispensable in almost all the Government schools, whether Anglo-vernacular or vernacular, since local teachers were not available in adequate numbers, in any case to impart lessons in Bengali which had since become the medium of instruction.<sup>21</sup>

This was made worse by consistent assertions that Assamese was a Bengali dialect, and as such an offshoot of Bengali.

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<sup>19</sup> According to Guha (1977), in 1869, there were 22,800 imported and 11,633 local labourers on tea plantations. In 1884–85, 44.7 per cent of the labourers were from Chotanagpur, 27.6 per cent from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, 5.5 per cent local and 0.9 per cent from Bombay and Madras. In 1901 the non-indigenous population of the Assam valley was estimated at 0.5–0.6 million in the total of 2.2 million.

<sup>20</sup> Sreeradha Datta, 'Northeast Turmoil: Vital Determinants', [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

<sup>21</sup> Barpujari 1994: 266–67.

Another problem which the indigenous Assamese felt was contributing to a loss of their identity was that the areas that made up Assam were continuously subject to change. For example, in 1895 the North Lushai Hills were made part of Assam, this was soon followed by the inclusion of the South Lushai Hills and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which had earlier been a part of Bengal. Then East Bengal was merged with Assam in 1905, reducing the Assamese to a minority in their own land. This resulted in an agitation that led to a reversal of these decisions in 1912.

Migration into the state continued to be a major problem, despite the government coming up with the 'line system', which restricted outsiders from settling beyond a certain limit in areas where migration was rampant. However, this did not succeed due to vested interests in the region. Since a majority of the migrants were Bengalis and Muslims, a tacit encouragement by Muslim leaders prevailed at most times. The affected party of this continuing migration was the Muslim League, which had the larger aim of the merger of Assam with East Pakistan during the period preceding Partition. Wavell, writing his memoirs in the 'Viceroy's Journal', called the 'grow more food' campaign publicised by Mohammed Saadulla a 'grow more Muslims' campaign. The 1941 census report makes interesting and revealing observations on the issue of illegal immigration:

The most noticeable rise in the Muslim population in Assam once again represents immigration from Mymensingh and East Bengal generally. The policy of colonisation of Assam by Muslims of Bengal was continued under the joint auspices of Sir Saadulla in Assam and Mr Nazimuddin in Bengal....<sup>22</sup>

In 1946, the Cabinet Mission recommended that Assam be placed along with Bengal, which would have resulted in Hindus becoming a minority. However, with Sylhet opting to join East Bengal in a referendum under the Indian Independence Act of 1947, the situation changed and Assam continued to remain in India. With this severing of ties, the Surma valley and the Brahmaputra valley finally parted ways just before Partition, thus bringing to an end the fierce rivalry between the two.

It was not only the ethnic Ahoms who faced problems due to the large-scale migration into Assam; the Bodos and the Kacharis were also at the receiving end of a large influx of migrants into their areas. This led to a reduction in availability of land for cultivation and to an encroachment into the jungle belt. The Bodos demanded specific representation in the census and legislature. They also made representations against the inclusion of Goalpara district—a Bodo-dominated area—in Bengal.

## Rise of Nationalism

The rise of Assamese nationalism can be traced to the rise of peasant movements in Assam. These movements and the subsequent rise of nationalism in Bengal as

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<sup>22</sup> Government of India (GOI), Census of India, 1941.

also in the rest of India, combined with the emergence of the Indian National Congress in the country, further encouraged Assamese middle class, which had become the strength behind these movements, to raise the spectre of political and cultural upheaval. Linguistic and demographic struggles became important rallying points for the Assamese. Gandhi's call for non-cooperation showed the Assamese nationalists the way ahead, and rapid politicisation followed. This resulted in the formation of various Assamese nationalist organisations, such as the Assam Chatra Sanmilan in December 1916, and the the Assam Sangrakshini Sabha by Ambikagiri Roychoudhury, which subsequently became the Assam Jatiya Mahasabha.

The seeds of Assamese nationalism were sown simultaneously with increased Indian nationalism. Roychoudhury propagated the idea of a loose federal structure in independent India with autonomy to the states. This idea was propounded despite his being an active member of the Congress. 'Roychoudhury insisted that Assam's position as a nation could be ensured only in a federation of equal nationalities that would be independent India.'<sup>23</sup> The idea of independence further gained ground when nationalists found that their fears of migration remained unchecked, which could result in lowering of their population percentage vis-à-vis Muslims. This could result in their becoming a part of East Bengal and loss of their identity. The Cabinet Mission Plan could have given Assam to East Bengal given the population percentages, as discussed earlier.<sup>24</sup> There were other intellectuals in Assam in the pre-Independence period like Janananath Bora, who propagated the idea of an independent Assam. He said, 'Till today our people have not been able to accept our country as a province of India.'<sup>25</sup> This was certainly not the view of the majority in Assam at that time; however, these ideas were certainly doing the rounds in the literate circles. With relentless exploitation of the state post Independence, the ULFA found suitable conditions to sell the idea of *Swadhin Asom* to a much larger section of the Assamese people, who were then ready to accept their point of view. There are certain factors which resulted in general dissatisfaction within Assam and this led to its people demanding independence.

## Legacy of the Past

A number of problems of this region are a legacy of the past. These problems are of a varying nature, and can be attributed to geo-political, economic, socio-linguistic and religious factors. It will be relevant to analyse these problems, as these have played a very important role in kindling the flames of the LIC now prevalent in the region.

First, the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan encouraged centrifugal tendencies in regions, which had similar ideas about their future in relation to India. In

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<sup>23</sup> Misra 2000: 85.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted by Misra (2000).

Assam, separatist views were voiced by people like Ambikagiri Roychoudhury and Janananath Bora. Their political ideas were further supported by organisations such as the Communist Party of India (CPI) and various tribal groups. There were also others like Gaurishankar Bhattacharya who wanted 'the Lower House elected through adult franchise, and there would be proportional representation based on population. The Upper House would be a house of communities made up of representatives of different ethnic communities.'<sup>26</sup> The Ahoms, who had felt themselves sidelined under the British with emergence of Aryan Hindu culture and feared continuation of the same after Independence further supported such demands. Most of the tribals felt that the majority was likely to give them the autonomy and power they had strived for in erstwhile Assam.

Second, Independence carried with it the burden of the past. Assam, as it was identified at the time of Independence along with the hilly regions comprising the tribal areas, faced complexities arising from a diverse ethnic mix, religious differentiation, linguistic differences and economic disparities. These differences were manifested in a natural resistance to unification after centuries of independent or at least autonomous existence. Partition also brought in its wake various strategic concerns that began to over-ride the regional cooperation, which had been the basis of trade and commerce in the region in the past, with present-day Bangladesh and Burma.

Third, Assam as a state at the time of Independence had never existed in that form prior to British occupation. It constituted within its boundaries numerous distinct, diverse and proud races and tribes, which were averse to and doubtful about the idea of being ruled by plainmen who had traditionally been known to neglect the regions in the hills. They feared 'Assamisation' of the region—an accusation that was unfortunately proved by many instances of such neglect.<sup>27</sup>

Fourth, the North-east was suddenly surrounded by countries, each of which was competing for a share of the geo-political space. East Pakistan, which had been part of the country not so long ago, was now an adversary. Tensions on the western frontier of India were felt in the east as well. Dissatisfied groups under leaders like Phizo, demanding independence for the Nagas, immediately found a safe haven and support for their designs in the region, to wage a protracted war against the country. This was repeated vis-à-vis Burma and Bangladesh in the post-1971 Indo-Pak War. Almost all the militant groups in their struggle against India have taken sanctuary in and procured weapons from neighbouring countries, exploiting the geo-political realities of the region. This is the legacy of a flawed inheritance that the country and the entire region faces, given its history.

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<sup>26</sup> Misra 2000: 92.

<sup>27</sup> The accusation gained ground with introduction of a bill to make Assamese the official language of the state in 1960. This was further aggravated by introduction of legislation in the Assembly making Assamese the sole medium of instruction for university and secondary level education in 1972.



Fifth, North-east India is culturally very diverse. This 'cultural tree' has two main divisions: the tribals and the plainsmen. Within this broad distinction, cultural and religious differentiation also exists, with Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists and a number of tribal groups populating the plains. Similarly, the hills are inhabited by a variety of tribal groups, each having their distinct culture and separate practices. Assam was the inheritor of this volatile mix at the time of Independence, and immediately after Partition there were accusations of favouritism and cultural invasion. The experiment to administer the state in the form in which it existed at that time was destined to fail; its division was only a matter of time. Therefore, the impracticality of unifying such diversity made the 'Greater Assam' dream, precisely that: a dream. And this has led to a number of movements in the region in the past five decades.

Sixth, the region witnessed large-scale economic disparity caused by lack of opportunities in the hills compounded by a relative lack of development in the pre-Independence period, given the autonomy and 'outer line' status enjoyed by the hills region. This lack of development vis-à-vis the plains of Assam was the cause of much resentment against the Government of India, even though it was something that it had not created but inherited. The economy of the region was also hit by the loss of markets, which the eastern part of the region like Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Manipur and also Assam had enjoyed as they no longer had access to the ports of Chittagong or other markets in what was now East Pakistan. The free flow of goods across the border stopped depriving the people of the region of many essentials. This situation had probably not been fully appreciated or was beyond the administrative capability of the government and it led to dissatisfaction and frustration.

Seventh, the hilly regions of the North-east were mentally attuned to being separate from the remainder of the region and India in general. This attitude had to a large extent been fostered by the British. They had encouraged the people of the hill regions to administer themselves, provided they accepted British suzerainty. The region was recommended to be a 'Crown Colony' as part of the 'Coupland Plan' (1942), another move that suited British interests. Some of the chief players in this game were the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, N.E. Parry and Dr John H. Hutton, Deputy Commissioner in the Naga Hills District, as also Sir Robert Neil Reid, Governor of Assam, who further supported their views. In a note written in November 1941 to the government, he suggested the separation of the hill areas of North-east India and North-west Burma and bringing them under 'some appropriate department at Whitehall'. He further added that their future should be decided by the British Parliament. 'It cannot be left to the Indian Political leaders', he stated, 'with neither knowledge, interest nor feelings for these areas'.<sup>28</sup> This finally became famous as the Coupland Plan. It was discussed by the Committee of Scheduled Areas from 5 to 11 December 1942 before finally being rejected, probably in view of the strong struggle for independence already in sway in the

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<sup>28</sup> David 1994: 26.

region. The British had earlier found a means of segregating the area through the line system, as already discussed. ‘The Line System was yet another example of the British genius in “colonising” areas through the back door, delineating compact belts by drawing lines.’<sup>29</sup> Christian missionary ingress into the area which resulted in large-scale conversions, even though it must be mentioned that they did much commendable work, further encouraged a feeling of religious alienation from the rest of the country, while a feeling of ethnic alienation developed from the fact that the people of the region were of Mongoloid descent and thus ethnically distinct from those of Aryan origin. Thus, during British rule, various policies led to an increased sense of religious and ethnic alienation, and from this emerged the demand for autonomy. This was particularly so since there had never been any British endeavour to amalgamate these far-flung areas into the overall fabric of the nation. Last, the region was a product of failed attempts at internal colonisation. There had been an all-out attempt by the Muslim League to change the demographic nature of the region and have it amalgamated into East Pakistan. A blatant attempt at this was the settling of Muslims from what was later East Pakistan in the plains area of Assam. In the 1931 Census Report, the Census Commissioner stated:

...During the years between 1921 and 1931, the immigration army has almost completed the conquest of Nowgong, the Barpeta subdivision has fallen to their attack and Darrang is being invaded.... It is said that Sibsagar district will be the only part of Assam in which an Assamese will find himself at home.<sup>30</sup>

The influx of Muslim migrants into Assam had two dimensions. The first and obvious problem was associated with the entry of a large migrant population from outside the state; the second, which is at times considered more important, was the aspect of religious colonisation associated with the immigration.

To some extent, it is true that Assam’s problem of identity has been enacted specifically by abnormal rise in population and migration of lakhs of Bengali people over the years. Another fear expressed is regarding the rapid increase of Muslim immigrants in the state and their proliferation due to the practices of polygamy. Can ambition of Assam to remain a Hindu and Assamese state be fulfilled within the bounds of the secular constitution of India? This is the real question.<sup>31</sup>

## Independence

At the time of Independence, the entire North-east was included in the state of Assam, with the princely states of Manipur and Tripura being the only two

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<sup>29</sup> Guru Dev 1996: 5.

<sup>30</sup> Guha 1977: 39–45.

<sup>31</sup> Dr Birendra Kumar Bhattacharjee, *Assam Tribune*, 16 April 1980.

exceptions. With the end of colonial rule there was much hope and expectation of something better in Assam. Post Independence, however, the problems for this state only seemed to increase. First came the huge influx of refugees from what was now East Pakistan in the wake of Partition, as many found themselves overnight on the 'wrong side' of the border. Although riots did not take place in the immediate aftermath of Partition as in Punjab, nevertheless the prevailing confusion and the fluidity of the situation did little to allay people's fears.

People in both countries, India and Pakistan, were given until 26 July 1949 to migrate. They would thereafter automatically become citizens of the country to which they had migrated.<sup>32</sup> However, as circumstances proved, the setting of a date was largely irrelevant as people continued to migrate across the border even after this date. Continued migration raised concerns regarding the state's ability to maintain its cultural, linguistic and religious identity. Sardar Patel foresaw this problem and was instrumental in the passing of the The Immigrants (Expulsion From Assam) Act, 1950 (see Appendix I). The Act provided that only people who were displaced because of civil disturbances in East Pakistan could migrate to India. This figure totalled to 765,000, though of this number, only 143,000 applied for citizenship. The deportation of people, which followed this Act, caused much resentment in Pakistan, and finally in a conciliatory gesture the Nehru–Liaquat Ali Khan Agreement of 8 April 1950 (see Appendix J) was signed. This agreement allowed the return of those people to India who had been deported till 31 December 1950. They were also promised Indian citizenship on their return. Despite the controversy that the passing of the Immigration Act raised, it was never effectively implemented, and it was finally repealed in 1957. Moreover, it was contended in certain quarters that the Nehru–Liaquat Ali Khan Agreement was only meant to stop Muslims even as it allowed Hindus to come to India.<sup>33</sup> It was followed by the Passport Act of 1951, which provided fresh opportunities for illegal immigration into the country. There were many people who entered India from neighbouring countries on a six-month passport, never to return.

During the Sino-Indian War of 1962, it was reported that some infiltrators had been seen with Pakistani flags. This renewed and compounded worries of the government and resulted in the adoption of the Prevention of Infiltration from Pakistan to Assam Plan (1964).<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> This was the day on which the Constitution of India was supposed to be adopted, but it finally became effective on 26 January 1950.

<sup>33</sup> Das 1992: 56.

<sup>34</sup> Amiya Kumar Das (1992) writes that as a result of this, the Chief Minister of Assam, Bimala Prasad Chaliha gave orders to carry out identification of illegal immigrants based on the National Register of Citizens of 1951. Two hundred border posts were built and in the first three years 240,000 illegal immigrants were detected and 190,000 were deported. However, the author asserts that due to the delicate composition of the Assembly, the Chief Minister was pressurised by Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad (Union Minister from Assam) to go slow to avoid alienation of minorities.

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*: 58.

Despite the tightening of the border, however, Assam's problems were not over. The 1970–71 atrocities in East Pakistan led to large-scale entry of refugees into India. This aggravated the already unmanageable problem the state faced. India was during this period host to 10 million refugees as a result of prevailing conditions. It is estimated that of these, approximately 1 million settled down in Assam and most of them were Muslims. Amiya Kumar Das quotes a prophetic pronouncement made by Henry Kissinger as saying in the *White House Years*:

The inevitable emergence of Bangladesh—which we postulated—presented India with fierce long term problems. For Bangladesh was in fact East Bengal separated only by religion, from India's most fractious and India's most separatist State of West Bengal. They share language, tradition, culture and above all a volatile national character. Whether it is turned nationalist or radical, Bangladesh would over time accentuate India's centrifugal tendencies.<sup>35</sup>

These tendencies may still have been checked had various provisions been made from time to time for forceful implementation of checking for and deportation of illegal migrants, which as the record shows was not done. It is clearly evident that as time passed the immigrant population became a powerful vote bank, which was difficult to ignore.

As Dinesh Kotwal observes:

Thus, demographically Assam has been the fastest growing area in the subcontinent. Its population has grown by 676 per cent, from 3.3 million in 1901 to 22.3 million in 1991, as compared with 354 per cent for India as a whole from 238.4 million in 1901 to 843.9 million in 1991.

Figure 10.1 overleaf indicates the trend of population growth in Assam as compared to the all India level between 1901–61. This data based on the Census Returns provides ample evidence of illegal immigration into the region. As mentioned above, historically the growth rate of population in Assam has been much higher than the Indian average ever since the colonial period. When the population growth rate was negative on an all-India basis during 1911–21, it was as high as 20.48 per cent in Assam.<sup>36</sup>

After Independence, Assam experienced much disunity and the effects of strong centrifugal tendencies. The reasons for all this were not altogether the making of the Assamese government, although it was certainly partially responsible. This was especially the case after the death of Gopinath Bordoloi, whose towering personality was instrumental in upholding the unity of a diverse Assamese demography.<sup>37</sup>

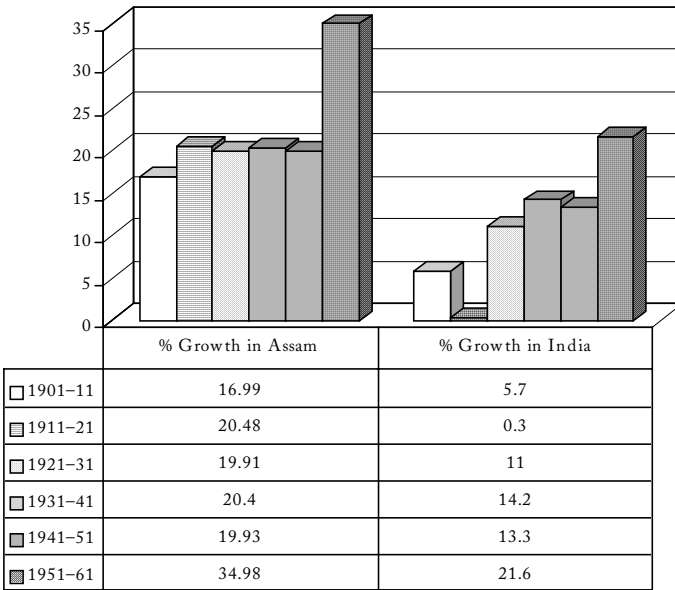
The makers of the Constitution had formulated the Sixth Schedule with a view to safeguarding the cultural, linguistic and traditional lifestyles of the tribal people.

<sup>36</sup> Dinesh Kotwal, 'Instability Parameters in Northeast India', [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

<sup>37</sup> Gopinath Bardoloi was the first Chief Minister of Assam. He was also instrumental in amalgamating North-east India with the rest of the country.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted by Verghese (1996: 34).

Figure 10.1  
Comparative Population Growth in the Country and Assam (1901–61)



**Source:** Census Reports, Government of India.

The spirit behind its formulation was best expressed by the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, while addressing the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Conference in Delhi in 1952. He said:

The essence of the struggle for freedom, which meant raising some kind of liberating force in India, did not reach these (tribal) areas, chiefly the frontier areas which are the most important tribal areas. The result is that...those frontier areas were not (so) psychologically prepared (for various changes in India). In fact they were prepared the other way by British officers or sometimes by missionaries who were there. The missionaries did very good work there and I am full of praise for them, but politically speaking they did not particularly like the changes in India....<sup>38</sup>

A sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly was set up to formulate regulations for Assam. It was apparent to its members that Assam’s case was vastly different from that of any other state in the country, and that the case of the tribals of Assam was different from that of the tribals residing in other states. This was due to the

<sup>39</sup> Karna 1990.

(by now) established policy of the British government of giving a degree of self-governance to the tribal people in the state for reasons already discussed earlier. It was also due to the relatively detached existence of the area in the past, given that a large percentage of it had never been amalgamated into any of the major Indian kingdoms in history. There were two options available to the Indian government. The first was to forcibly amalgamate the entire region into the country, irrespective of its historical status and popular opinion, so as to ensure faster assimilation into the mainstream. The other option was to grant the state a degree of autonomy through self-governance at the lower levels and provide safeguards for its cultural identity. The rationale for this was explained by the architect of the Constitution of India, Dr B.R. Ambedkar:

The tribal people in areas other than Assam are more or less Hinduised, more or less assimilated with the civilisation and culture of majority of the people in whose midst they live. With regards to the tribals of Assam, this is not the case. Their roots are still in their own civilisation and their own culture. They have not adopted mainly or in a large part, either the modes or the manners of the Hindus who surround them... I think that is the main distinction that influenced us to have a different sort of scheme for Assam from the one we have provided for other territories.<sup>39</sup>

In the years that followed, however, the problems in Assam continued to simmer. First, a number of groups emerged, asking for greater autonomy and statehood, and protesting against unabated violation of the international border and illegal immigration into Assam. While the former demand was headed by newly formed groups like the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) which came into existence on 15 February 1967, the latter was spearheaded by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP).

The AASU, in an attempt to gain recognition for its case against illegal immigration, submitted a 21-point charter to the central and state governments in 1973. This was followed by instructions issued by the Government of India to the Government of Assam to take necessary steps to halt illegal infiltration in 1975.<sup>40</sup> Similar attempts were made repeatedly in the subsequent years with little success. This led to formation of the ULFA on 7 April 1979. The AASU, also losing patience, started its agitation in July 1978, which further gained momentum in June 1979 with the deportation of foreigners, illegal immigrants being their main demand. This protest was triggered by two factors. The first was the large-scale immigration in 1977 estimated at 1.7 million illegal immigrants.<sup>41</sup> The second was the results of elections in February 1978. The AASU could not accept Muslim

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<sup>40</sup> The instructions were issued vide GOIMHA letter no. 14011/16/75-III, dated 20 August 1975 (Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs).

<sup>41</sup> Amiya Kumar Das 1992: 60.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

candidates winning 26 seats in the 126-member legislative assembly with another 11 seats going to the Communist Party of India-Marxist CPI(M) who were alleged to have won the seats with the help of 'foreigners' votes'.<sup>42</sup> This finally provoked the AASU to take to the streets in protest. They held a conference to chalk out their course of action in July 1978 and followed it up with the submission of a list of 16 demands to the Government of Assam and the Government of India. The main issue was the identification and deportation of illegal migrants. The first major non-violent struggle began in the form of picketing in front of the Deputy Commissioner's offices in Assam on 8 August 1978. The days till 22 August 1978 saw similar protests, which resulted in the AASU being invited for discussions by the Government of Assam on 23 August 1978. However, the talks did not result in any substantial progress on the issue. The peculiarity of the issue was having the problem accepted by all the major leaders because of complexity of the problem. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Foreign Minister in the Janata Party government, giving a reply in the Parliament on 27 November 1979 said that:

- It had come to the notice of the Election Commission from time to time that large-scale inclusion of foreign nationals in the electoral rolls, especially in the North-eastern region had been taking place.
- In August 1975, the Ministry of Home Affairs instructed all the state governments and the administrations of all the union territories that the State Criminal Investigation Departments might be instructed to take immediate steps to check the electoral rolls and if they discovered the names of foreigners in the rolls, that fact might be brought to the notice of the concerned electoral registration officers to delete those names. The Election Commission had also issued instructions to the chief electoral officers of the states/union territories concerned that if it was found that a large number of foreigners had managed to get their names registered in the electoral rolls, recourse should be had to the provisions of Section 22 of the Representation of People's Act 1950, for getting the names of such persons deleted from the electoral rolls on the ground that they were not Indian citizens.

The next incident, which highlighted the scale of infiltration and illegal immigration in the state, came to light when by-elections to the Mangaldoi constituency of Darrang district were held. As the voter list of the constituency was updated, it was found to the utter disbelief of many observers that out of a list of 600,000 voters, objections were raised to the inclusion of 70,000 voters, on the grounds that they were foreigners. Finally, a tribunal set up by the Chief Minister, Golap Borbora declared 45,000 of them to be foreigners. This revelation raised the pitch of demonstrations on the extent of infiltration in districts known to have been affected the most, including Nowgong, Goalpara and Barpeta. Large-scale demonstrations and the submission of a memorandum to the Chief Election

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<sup>43</sup> Made famous by the Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi, which involved non-violent

Commissioner (CEC) at Dispur ultimately resulted in postponement of the by-election in Mangaldoi till the mid-term poll. This accentuated the problem and led the chief minister to direct deletion of the names of foreigners from the voter list; however, his direction could not be implemented as his government fell on 4 September 1979.

What followed was the fall of the government at the Centre as well, and orders were issued for the holding of mid-term elections in December. This initiated the process of revision of the electoral rolls. Contrary to orders issued earlier, the CEC directed that names of suspected foreigners should not be deleted till the process of elections was completed. This raised a furore in the state and led to large-scale demonstrations with the AASU and the AAGSP demanding redressal prior to the elections. The period from September till December saw sustained and continuous protests, finally leading to a campaign from 3 to 10 December 1979 aimed at preventing candidates from filing their nomination papers. The success and mass support for the campaign can be gauged from the fact that except for the Bengali-dominated Cachar district, no nomination papers could be filed in the rest of the state. It is also pertinent to mention at this stage that the movement was relatively peaceful based on the well-recognised principles of *satyagraha*.<sup>43</sup>

On 12 December 1979, president's rule was imposed in Assam and the state legislature was suspended. The demonstrators in an attempt to up the ante on the authorities decided to agitate for their demands more forcefully. They realised that since Assam was the largest oil producing state in the country, any blockade they enforced would give them the necessary leverage against the government. This plan was put into effect on 27 December 1979 with thousands of people from all walks of life blockading the flow of oil to refineries at Bongaigaon and Barauni.

On 14 January 1980, Indira Gandhi took over as Prime Minister of the country. Immediately on assuming office, she focused her attention on solving the problem of illegal immigrants in Assam. The leaders of AASU received an invitation for talks, scheduled to be held on 2 February 1980. Prominent leaders of the AASU including Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhriгу Kumar Phukan attended the meeting. Indira Gandhi and the Home Minister, Zail Singh, represented the Government of India. The youth leaders of the AASU submitted a memorandum to the government, which included the following major demands:

- Detection and deportation of foreigners.
- Deletion of names of foreigners from the electoral rolls before holding any elections in Assam.
- Maintaining the security of the border.
- Issuance of identity cards to citizens.
- Constitutional safeguards to Assam.

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demonstrations, civil disobedience movements and non-cooperation movements.

<sup>44</sup> Sanjaya 1980: 53.



- Rejection of citizenship certificates issued by West Bengal and Tripura.
- Transfer of authority in granting citizenship from the states to the central government.
- Fresh nominations in the districts of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar.

The issue of detection and deportation hinged on a cut-off year from which the process would begin. The AASU favoured the use of the National Register of Citizens of 1951 as the basis for establishing citizenship, whereas the Prime Minister insisted that 1971 be taken as cut-off year.

These talks were followed by visits from the Home Minister, Zail Singh, to Assam on 14 February 1980, and by the AASU and AAGSP leaders to New Delhi on 6–9 March 1980. On 28 March 1980, the army was requisitioned in the state to assist the administration in maintaining law and order and in running its refineries, which it was successfully able to do, depriving the agitation of some of its bargaining power. The continuing agitation and its growing momentum resulted in the enforcement of the Assam Disturbed Area Act and the Armed Forces (Special Power) Act on 6 April 1980.

Indira Gandhi in another attempt to resolve the crisis visited Assam on 12 April 1980. However, despite meetings with agitating leaders, no results could be achieved as both sides refused to alter their respective positions. The position of the Government of India can best be understood from a speech over the radio by Indira Gandhi addressed to the people of Assam, in which she said:

Today your normal tranquillity is somewhat ruffled. I have seen your deep feelings and I understand your wish to preserve your local identity. Solutions to the problems that are agitating your minds must be found and will be found. They should be arrived at in goodwill and in the spirit of give and take.... You have apprehensions and I am anxious that these shall be allayed speedily. We are determined to deal with infiltrators. But any action we take must be in accordance with the due process of law, humanitarian considerations, and legal and constitutional obligations.

It is my duty to mention that a large number of people in the State have told me that they feel insecure because some look upon them as foreigners.

The agitation today is like a quarrel within a family. It has to be composed. You can be sure of my own sympathy. The Government which I happen to head will always be responsible to any grievance that is genuine.<sup>44</sup>

It is clearly evident that the government had political and legal compulsions in acceding to the demands of the AASU. Further, they did not want to appear biased against a particular community in their treatment of a section of the people. Especially since people belonging to the community in question lived in other states of the Indian Union, the government in solving the problem of one state did not

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<sup>45</sup> It is reported that a small percentage of the state's eligible voters exercised their franchise

wish to give rise to a similar agitation in other regions of India. It must also be remembered that by 1980, there was a large immigrant population in the state who were a major vote bank, and who possibly held the trump card for future governments in the state. It should also be noted that there were two major powers in the state at the time: the Congress(I) and the Janata Party supported by the AGP. Of these, it was evident that it was the Congress(I) which stood to gain from not antagonising this sizeable immigrant population.

In the following months, there was a deadlock between the government and the agitating masses with neither party willing to relent. As pressure increased on both sides, incidents of violence began to occur with increasing frequency. Meanwhile, the state assembly continued to remain in suspended animation as no government could be formed in the state. All attempts at talks and negotiations failed to yield any results, including those that were initiated by independent and non-partisan emissaries like Manipur's Chief Minister, Dorendra Singh, on 11 August 1980. In an effort to solve the problem through political means, another step was taken by ushering in a democratic government. The new state government was formed on 6 December 1980 under the leadership of Anwara Taimur. However, this did not ease the problem and agitation and *bandhs* (strikes) continued to rock the state. The state government again collapsed through a series of defections and president's rule was once again imposed in June 1981. The situation eased to some extent in the following two years with a reduction in agitation and demonstrations. It was perhaps a sign of a slackening in the movement through tough measures adopted by the central government. It may also have been due a loss of faith by the masses, as a result of the methods employed by the agitating groups to achieve their aims.

The next major event in the Assam agitation after a series of failed negotiations was the government's successful attempt at holding elections in the state, despite the horrendous Nellie massacre on 18 February 1983, in which the Lalunga tribal people killed more than 600 Muslims—an incident that sent shockwaves through the country. A popular government was sworn in and Hiteshwar Saikia took over as Chief Minister amidst a boycott call by the AASU and widespread violence.<sup>45</sup> Immediately after coming to power, the chief minister, using his political maturity and years of experience, chose the path of 'parallel diplomacy' by commencing secret negotiations with the AASU, which was to the advantage of both parties, given the rigid stands both had taken in public. This was also accompanied by similar talks under the aegis of the central government; but neither attempt yielded any results during the year. In 1984, Indira Gandhi deputed her Cabinet Secretary, Krishnaswamy Rao Sahib, to hold talks with the AASU. These talks started to yield results and were close to reaching a settlement, when Indira Gandhi was assassinated on 31 October 1984.<sup>46</sup>

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with 17.16 per cent of the people voting in the elections (Marwah 1995: 303).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*: 304.

<sup>47</sup> Assam Accord, 15 August 1985.

## The Assam Accord and After

The advent of Indira Gandhi's son, Rajiv Gandhi, on the political map as India's next prime minister brought a fresh approach to the problem with neither side burdened by the legacy of the past. It was a new start to negotiations with the advantage of much ground already having been covered by Krishnaswamy Rao Sahib. Rajiv Gandhi deputed his Union Home Secretary, R.D. Pradhan, to carry forward the negotiations. These soon bore fruit with the signing of the Assam Accord on 15 August 1985 (see Appendix K for the text of the Accord). Rajiv Gandhi announced this momentous event from the ramparts of the Red Fort in New Delhi during his speech to the nation on the same day as the anniversary of India's independence. In another significant development, Chief Minister Hiteshwar Saikia announced his resignation soon after the signing of the accord in a rare gesture of political maturity and wisdom. The Accord, under paragraph 5.1 of Foreigners Issue, said, 'For purpose of detection and deletion of foreigners, 1.1.1966 shall be the base date and year.'<sup>47</sup> The succeeding sub-paragraphs went on to explain the methodology of execution of the provisions of the Accord. It assigned 25 March 1971 as the date after which any foreigner who had entered the country and settled here illegally would, if detected, be deported. It also directed that foreigners who had entered and settled illegally between 1 January 1966 and 24 March 1975 would have their names deleted from the electoral rolls. Such people were also required to register themselves at the registration offices set up in accordance with the Registration of Foreigner's Act, 1939 and the Registration of Foreigner's Rule, 1939. These names could be restored to the electoral rolls only after a period of 10 years. Paragraph 6 of the Accord further provided that, 'Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the culture, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.' Paragraph 8.1 arranged for the grant of citizenship certificates by the central government, keeping in mind the aspect of infiltration. Paragraph 9 of the Accord said, 'The international border shall be made secure against future infiltration by erection of physical barriers like walls, barbed wire fencing and other obstacles at appropriate place....'<sup>48</sup> It can thus be seen that the accord provided for most of the demands of the agitators, except those demanding cancellation of citizenship granted to foreigners by the states of West Bengal and Tripura, and the date after which foreigners once detected would be deported. On these two demands both sides came to a compromise.

In the immediate aftermath of the Accord, a newly formed party, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) swept the state polls, coming to power in 1985. The easier task of agitation was over, but for the AGP there remained the tough task of implementing the provisions of the Accord. There was, however, widespread

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ved Marwah (1995) states, 'The Home Minister Bhriгу Kumar Phukan openly criticised

enthusiasm and much was expected of the young and clean politicians who had been propelled to power, forming a government, from protesting in the streets against the government. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, who signed the Assam Accord as the President of the AASU, and Brigu Kumar Phukan, the General Secretary of the same party, became the Chief Minister and Home Minister respectively. But euphoria and hope soon gave way to despair and disillusionment as the new incumbents proved inept administrators. Inexperience caused the new found power to go to the heads of a few, the result was some of the worst displays of disunity, with the Chief Minister and Home Minister trading charges against each other.<sup>49</sup>

A lacklustre administration ran the state, which once more saw the emergence of the ULFA. The ULFA, formed in 1979, had remained dormant till 1988, when it resumed its terrorist activities. The ULFA did not see a solution to the problems of Assam, either through the employment of peaceful means, or within the constitutional parameters of the country. They raised the demand of secession from the Indian Union. A pamphlet circulated by ULFA said:

...If we agitate or participate in parliamentary politics then the government formed by us has to work as per the Constitution of India and guidelines fixed by the Government.... This system is prone to exploitation and corruption as proved by the gradual change in phase from the Students Union to the Gana Parishad.... We have no alternative to armed revolution.

The period of relative dormancy of the ULFA between 1979 and 1988 leads us to two conclusions. First, that the ULFA was busy during this time, establishing itself in the state, carrying out recruitment activities, collecting funds and conducting the training of its cadres. Second, it was also probably keeping a watch on the phase of peaceful agitation and the attempts at governance that the state was witnessing, and had resolved to give the process a chance.

However, disillusionment seems to have set in after 1988 as is evident from the last-quoted passage. For many in the armed forces who took part in Operations Bajrang and Rhino carried out in Assam, it was clearly evident that the ULFA started its activities with the usual popular measures that most revolutionaries employ to gain the support of the people. Subsequently, they too suffered the same fate as the AASU. Corruption and personal gain overtook the 'cause' with widespread reports of embezzlement and siphoning off of money. Slowly, the movement transformed from an insurgency into a terrorist movement with limited support.

Violence commenced with the ULFA's shooting of Girdharilal Lal Harlalkar, the head of the Kamrup Chamber of Commerce, in 1988. Meanwhile, they (the ULFA) also negotiated with other older and more experienced militant groups in the region like the NSCN(IM) in Nagaland, Kachin Independence Army (KIA)

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the Chief Minister and even made allegations of corruption against him. On the other hand, Phukan was accused of giving clandestine support to ULFA in the hope of wresting the leadership from Mahanta.'

<sup>50</sup> Rabijit Choudhury 1995: 73.

in Burma and the LTTE in Sri Lanka. They were also in contact with the ISI of Pakistan. A series of terrorist attacks on innocent commoners, the police and the paramilitary forces commenced with increasing frequency, putting pressure on the AGP government to bring the situation under control. The ULFA, which had done its homework well, had infiltrated various government departments and the lower rungs of the state police force. It was suspected that they were getting advance information on measures planned to counter their activities. At this stage, however, their popularity was at its peak, with the 'Robin Hood' image they had cultivated ensuring that they had the support of the people. Their apparent crusade against ills prevalent in the social set-up appealed to the young amongst the masses who looked up to them as heroes with a revolutionary zeal to cleanse the corrupt society and governmental machinery. They also focused on the alleged exploitation of the state at the hands of the central government and rich businessmen to incite a popular wave of sentiment against the same. This translated into the abduction of businessmen and government officials. It also resulted in constant targeting of oil refineries and oil pipelines in the state, which they projected as a siphoning off of the resources of the state.

### Immediate Causes

The Assam problem is a complex one. Many of its causes are rooted in history, and many have dogged the state since the time of Independence. However, it is also relevant to analyse the immediate causes that led to agitation in the state taking a violent turn.

First, Assam inherited a multi-religious and multi-ethnic society at the time of Independence. Though there was a conscious and perceptible influence on the part of its middle class to exert an amalgamating influence, the deep divide between different religious and ethnic communities persisted and widened in the face of various economic and political factors. A continuing agitation against illegal migration into the state was aimed at the Bengali Muslims who were the largest percentage amongst the migrants. They were perceived as a threat to Assamese identity, and the policy of peaceful agitation or *satyagraha* soon took on militant overtones. This increased militancy was aimed at forcing the hand of the government, as also at placing the Muslim minority on the backfoot. It was felt that 'Muslim fundamentalism had taken firm roots in the Assam.' One of the views held by some writers is that, 'The VHP feared that the threat of Balkanisation and alienation of tribal societies from the national mainstream may lead to either Christianisation or Islamisation of Assam.'<sup>50</sup>

Second, it was becoming obvious to the militant elements in the state that a peaceful agitation or the use of controlled violence was not likely to influence the government to give in to their demands. Initially, the ULFA had remained in the

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<sup>51</sup> Guru Dev 1996: 74.

background and witnessed the AASU agitation with a certain detachment. However, once it felt that it had achieved critical mass in terms of establishment of a support base and training and organisational infrastructure, ULFA burst on the scene with full force attempting to catch the government unawares with their military and political might.

Third, the state was reeling under the effects of unemployment—a factor common to most regions affected by insurgencies. Unemployment problems result from the latent energy of the youth not being properly channelised, and their dissatisfaction found an outlet in agitation, and subsequently violence, when they joined the ULFA. According to the 1991 Census, the total percentage of the working class in the state of Assam was 36.37 per cent. This, despite the fact that in terms of potential and resources Assam is one of the richest states in the country.

Fourth, the state government was corrupt and inefficient. Every appointment in the administration had a price tag, and every job required a bribe. This is where the ULFA stepped in with their Robin Hood image and the promise of ridding society of its ills. Initially, it backed up this promise with certain harsh measures aimed at achieving these idealistic objectives, which won it the support of the people, further weakening the government's authority and moral standing.

Fifth, Assam, like many other states in the country, was submerged in the whirlpool of political brinkmanship. The Assam Accord had brought the AGP to power amidst high expectations and hopes of peace, economic progress and solution to the problems that the AASU had been fighting to redress.

ULFA emerged out of the ashes of the Asom Gana Parishad to fulfil what AASU promised as a student body but forgot as a student entity, leaving behind the debris of six years of misrule, resulting in the betrayal of the trust, which the Assamese community reposed in them, and the unfulfilled dreams.<sup>51</sup>

Sixth, the rise of the Bodo movement was regarded by the ULFA as a sign of the weakness and failure of the AGP government and they thereafter decided to resolve the issue through the use of force. The ULFA felt that the Bodo crisis, because of inept handling of the issue by the AGP, had snowballed into a problem that threatened to divide the state, and it were in no mood to excuse what it regarded as the government's shortcomings.

Seventh, one of the most important reasons for the rise of insurgency in the state was the dissatisfaction of the people with the government and the stupendous success of the ULFA in during the population to the support of its cause. Moreover, its ability to infiltrate most departments in the administration, including the police, gave them the power to subvert the system. This excellent strategy, coupled with the violent means that they had adopted, successfully broke the back of the administration.

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<sup>52</sup> Census of India, 2001.

Eighth, the government must shoulder part of the blame for the situation in Assam, as it failed to fully integrate its people into the national mainstream. This, after almost six decades having elapsed since Independence and after the country has seen a number of different governments—all of which had promised to fulfil the demands of the people. However, literacy and economic figures in the state are a sad reflection of the state of the social sector. The state lags behind all other states in the region with an annual per capita income of Rs 9,600 and a literacy rate of 64.28 per cent.<sup>52</sup>

Ninth, the state suffered from ad hoc policy decisions, when there was an urgent need instead for foresight and statesmanship. Despite growing indications of an insurgency in the region, there was an absence of major and long-term policy decisions, that could possibly have nipped the problem at its very inception. This was further aggravated by an indifferent bureaucracy, which displayed its inadequacy in handling the situation. The situation was allowed to slip out of the control of the government despite clear indicators of a brewing insurgency. 'There has been a large gap between administrative goals and the actual performance of the administration.'<sup>53</sup>

Last, the resources of the state did not translate into the economic well-being of either the state, or its people. The common yardsticks employed to chart the economic growth of a region demonstrate that growth remains woefully inadequate. Some of the examples are, first, 15.75 per cent of road is surfaced in the state, vis-à-vis the national average of 47.04 per cent. The doctor to population ratio in the state is 1:8750. The percentage of the literate population is 64.28 per cent, in comparison to 88.49 per cent in Mizoram, 67.11 per cent in Nagaland and 73.66 per cent in Tripura. This is in spite of the rich resources available with the state, which include 144.95 million tonnes of crude oil (including Nagaland), 151.68 billion cubic meters of natural gas reserves (including Tripura and Nagaland) and Rs 1.18 billion worth of mineral production. Yet, according to 2001 estimates, the per capita income of Assam is the lowest amongst the seven states of the North-east. Statistics such as these are indeed revealing.<sup>54</sup> In the light of these statistics, it is understandable that the people of the state felt that the state's resources had first been carried away by the British and thereafter by the Indian government without giving them a fair share of the gains. This economic exploitation was stressed by both the AASU and ULFA and was used to incite the people.

Subjected to a highly extractive nature of colonial rule for a century, this resource-rich state of the Northeastern region is today among the most backward in the country in terms of per capita income, industrial growth rate, literacy, etc. This despite the fact that the state produces about 54% of the country's tea,

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<sup>53</sup> Datta 1995: 190.

<sup>54</sup> Census of India, 2001 and Central Statistical Organisation, Planning Commission, NEC Secretariat, Indian Bureau of Mines, May 1992, CMIE Bombay.

<sup>55</sup> Misra 2000: 162.

a substantial portion of its petroleum and is rich in coal, timber and hydro-power resources.<sup>55</sup>

## Operation Bajrang

Chandrashekhar became India's Prime Minister in November 1990, and being under pressure to improve the law and order situation in Assam, took the step of dismissing the state government. This was followed by imposition of President's rule in the state, the banning of the ULFA under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and launch of Operation Bajrang by the army. The army's conduct of this operation against the ULFA has come under close scrutiny of the press and of their more informed colleagues from the security forces. Having been part of these operations, the author would like to bring out the circumstances and conditions under which this operation was conducted.

Over the past five decades or so, the army has often been required to launch operations at very short notice, with little background intelligence (not to mention actionable intelligence) and time for preparation. Operation Bajrang was no exception to this rule. The army was moved in to raid suspected ULFA camps. These camps, both in Upper and Lower Assam, were well-established, well-concealed, situated as they were deep inside the jungles. The army launched its operations, with neither any specific information of the location of the camps, nor was it given any guides or informers to ensure speed and surprise. It was only after the termination of the initial raid that it became evident that all camps across the length and breadth of the state had been forewarned about the impending operation and had been vacated well in time. It was too early to draw any conclusions at that time. However, with the passage of time, after establishment of a counter-insurgency grid and interactions with the people, the extent to which ULFA's cadres had infiltrated the government machinery became shockingly evident. The army was 'not only trying hard to observe in a pitch-dark night, it was also found that the torches given for its help had discharged batteries'. There was very little information available even about the names of ULFA cadres in the area of operations (photographs would have been a luxury). There were incidents of ULFA cadres being asked about their own whereabouts and of their visiting army posts with the utmost contempt and disdain. In the initial months, the army was literally fighting both bound and blindfolded. However, as the people became more and more disillusioned with the ULFA and its brand of 'freedom struggle', intelligence started trickling in and this handicap was overcome. The discovery of mass graves in ULFA camps and the brutal murder of people not willing to cooperate with it, had started isolating the movement.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> A mass grave of 15 bodies with their hands and feet tied was discovered at a camp on 4 December 1990. They had been executed for not obeying the ULFA code of conduct, called the 'Sowel Code'.

<sup>57</sup> *Ajir Batori*, 10 October 1998.



Operation Bajrang's initial results were certainly far from enviable; however, at its conclusion, it had suppressed the ULFA movement to a considerable extent. By the end of the operation, the ULFA's ability to destabilise the administration had been severely limited.

The role the press can play in an LIC was also made evident during the course of the operation. While the major dailies in the state stuck to unbiased and ethical reporting, smaller regional papers were either intimidated or were caught up in the wave of false 'nationalism' that the ULFA had propagated. There were numerous incidents of false reporting, with the army being accused of various excesses, including rape and murder. Most of these cases later proved false and motivated. One such case involved an alleged rape by a soldier.

...As per the investigating police officer, one ULFA activist in disguise of an army man had committed the crime and it was stage managed by some organisation. Police has identified this youth as someone who had taken away ballot boxes from Bijulighat centre during last parliamentary elections. It was a plan to close down the army camp in Korea PHC. Around six to seven ULFA men were standing near the bandh that evening.<sup>57</sup>

While it will be unfair and biased to say that there were no incidents of high-handedness, it is also pertinent to add that the army is one of the few organisations which maintains very high standards by which it judges its soldiers. Justice is generally swift and commensurate with the seriousness of the offence. This can be proved by cases in which exemplary punishment was meted out by the army to its personnel for offences that they did commit in Assam.

The success of Operation Bajrang can also be gauged from success of a subsequent follow-up operation, Operation Rhino. This was launched a short while after Operation Bajrang and yielded stupendous results. It will also be relevant to discuss the role of the police during these operations. The local police machinery had become totally demoralised, despite the dynamic leadership provided by some of the junior and middle-level IPS officers. Their ability to fight the militants and take the war to the ULFA camp was affected by two factors. The first was the genuine support of the people for the ULFA, at least in the initial phase of operations. This could be gauged by the overwhelming public outcry against any arrest made by either the police or the army. Initially, this response put the army and the police on the defensive, as in a number of areas the agitations were spearheaded by women. The army was taken aback at the level of support for the ULFA and the motivation displayed by these women. However, with experience, means were devised to pacify women agitators, and help was also sought from policewomen who were not similarly reticent when dealing with a woman.

The second handicap that the police faced was the extent to which the ULFA had successfully infiltrated their ranks. These ULFA infiltrators were severely

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<sup>58</sup> Verghese (1996) writes, 'As many as 431 hard core elements including 46 top leaders were

hampering the security network and its ability to achieve surprise during the conduct of operations. Nevertheless, it was to the credit of the police force that intelligence gathered during Operation Bajrang and even thereafter resulted in the capture of a number of high-ranking ULFA cadres.

Operation Bajrang successfully dissuaded the misled youth of Assam from joining the ULFA. There were a number of arrests of cadres, which acted as an example to the people. It also severely disrupted the communications and logistics network of the ULFA, which made it largely impossible for them to operate with impunity in the area. The ULFA, which was basically an urban movement in terms of its nucleus and hub of activities, was forced to shift further into the jungles to avoid the ever-increasing reach and intelligence of the army. The largely urban ULFA cadres were not used to a life under difficult and ever-worsening conditions and this led to the first trickle of surrenders, which subsequently yielded rich dividends during Operation Rhino. A major success of this operation took place when in the wake of an offer of clemency to militants who surrendered, by the Chief Minister of Assam, the ULFA publicity chief, Sunil Nath, surrendered with 3,500 cadres. This group, which was pro-talks, was soon christened the SULFA or surrendered ULFA.

With a palpable improvement of the situation in the state, Operation Bajrang was called off, the army was moved out of the area and elections were simultaneously announced. Elections came at an opportune time for Hiteshwar Saikia and proved to be the nemesis of AGP. Phukan, who had severed his ties with the AGP, fought the elections independently, splitting the AGP's vote bank and causing both his own and the AGP's defeat. Post elections, the Congress(I) came to power in the state. On 1 July 1991, Hiteshwar Saikia was sworn in as the Chief Minister and almost simultaneously in a pre-emptive strike, ULFA abducted 14 officers of Assam Oil and the State Additional Secretary, A.S. Srivastava. One of those kidnapped was a Russian engineer, Sergei Gritchenko. In a gruesome incident, Gritchenko was killed as he tried to escape on 9 July 1991. This was followed by the murder of another hostage, T.S. Raju, when the government did not agree to the ULFA demand for the release of 24 of their cadres from the prison. Table 10.1 provides the details of casualties.

## Operation Rhino

The Chief Minister, Hiteshwar Saikia's tenure began on a stormy note. Probably realising that this was in the best interests of the state, he once again called for the induction of the army, in an attempt to regain the initiative. This strategic decision of the Chief Minister paid off with the launch of Operation Rhino on the night of 14–15 September 1991. This time, having learnt its lessons well from Operation Bajrang, Operation Rhino proved to be a resounding success in the first two nights of operations itself. The army, which had already developed its contacts and was totally familiar with its counter-insurgency grid, swooped down on the unsuspecting

Table 10.1  
Casualty Figures

Year	Civilian	Security force personnel	Terrorists
1992	80	34	19
1993	74	24	33
1994	173	35	63
1995	170	73	27
1996	302	87	62
1997	285	85	167
1998	531	72	180
1999	214	77	212
2000	366	65	327
2001	264	59	283
2002	138	32	275
2003	212	12	281

ULFA cadres who were taken unawares. They were found moving about with impunity and careless calm on that fateful night. The clinically planned army operations broke the backbone of the ULFA. The army successes continued with as many as 46 top leaders captured amongst 431 hardcore cadres in the first few weeks of the operation. Sixteen ULFA camps were also destroyed.<sup>58</sup> Operation Rhino had one of the most successful starts of any operation in the history of LIC operations in the country. It brought out the importance of achieving strategic and tactical surprise against unsuspecting guerrillas. It also reinforced the principles of intelligence, mobility and communications as salient and battle winning principles.

The military success of Operation Rhino was simultaneously interwoven with effective and well-orchestrated psychological operations, which were aimed at bringing back misguided youth into the national mainstream. They were also aimed at educating the public at large about the false and hollow propaganda unleashed by the ULFA. A catalyst in these psychological operations was the wide-ranging civic action programmes initiated by the army to help stimulate the civic set-up, even while they aimed at putting things in the correct perspective for the public at large. All of this helped clear a number of misconceptions in the minds of the people, the foundations of which the ULFA and its publicity machinery had effectively laid and built upon over the years.

As operations progressed, the number of ULFA surrenders started increasing and finally overtook the number of those killed or captured. This was suitably encouraged by a generous policy of rehabilitation instituted by the Chief Minister for the SULFA, which included a cash incentive of Rs 50,000 and a soft loan of

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nabbed along with 299 supporters and trainees within the space of some weeks. Sixteen ULFA camps were destroyed. Piles of arms and ammunition, communication equipment, documents and photographs were seized.... Rupees 5 crores and 32 gold bars had been recovered during Operation Rhino.'

<sup>59</sup> Guru Dev 1996: 78.

Rs 200,000. More than 4,000 cadres had availed this offer by 1995, making the plan a huge success. The SULFA, whose power and influence increased as its ranks swelled with the passage of time, also challenged the legitimacy and standing of ULFA.

The latter years of Operation Rhino also saw the shortcomings of the earlier years—especially in the field of cooperation between various agencies functioning against the problem of militancy in the state on behalf of the central and state agencies. This was visible in the increased cooperation between the army, paramilitary forces and police. This greater understanding of each other's strengths, weaknesses and limitations helped improve the conduct of operations. It also reduced the tendency that these agencies had of working at cross-purposes, which was often more due to the lack of communication between them, rather than due to any professional differences.

Operation Rhino was also marked by increased accusations against the army of atrocities and excesses. Most of these were examples of the ULFA propaganda machinery at work, which stepped up its activities as it witnessed the army's successes and understood the danger posed to its standing before the people and also to its very existence. 'The Army authorities were keen to exploit tactical advantages and, it is not surprising, that the security forces were charged with committing atrocities.'<sup>59</sup>

## ULFA Loses Out

India went to polls in April–May 1996 and once again in the game of see-saw politics that is usual in the state, the Congress was defeated and the AGP came to power. It also joined the coalition at the centre under the United Front government. In Assam, people were demanding the army's return to barracks and the commencement of political dialogue with the ULFA. This found favour with the AGP, which made these issues their election plank. However, a sudden increase in terrorist acts made an embarrassed AGP, soon after it came to power, turn to the army to curb terrorist activities in the state.

The spurt in terrorist acts by the ULFA started threatening the state's assets, such as oil refineries and tea estates that were the major source of revenue to the region. This led to a tide of popular sentiment against the militants. The increase in terrorism included the ghastly killings of a Congress candidate, Binu Chetia, from the Margherita constituency and five other people in an ULFA ambush on 25 April 1996.<sup>60</sup> In another gruesome incident, the ULFA killed the State Rural Development Minister, Nagen Neog, at Silanijan near Golaghat along with eight of his bodyguards and one civilian on 6 May 1996.<sup>61</sup> The reason behind the ULFA's

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<sup>60</sup> *The Sentinel*, 26 April 1996.

<sup>61</sup> *Assam Tribune*, 12 May 1996.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

actions were summarised by its Publicity Secretary, Mithinga Doimary, when he said, 'The Indian State has been launching a continuous murderous campaign to trample the dreams of freedom of the people of the Northeast region and this has been supported by a tacit approval from the Indian citizens.'<sup>62</sup> The tenor and tone of the ULFA had thus undergone a sea change from its Robin Hood image in the initial years of existence. The Assamese print media, which had been accused of biased reporting, and the state's intelligentsia began to abandon the ULFA, as it became more and more difficult to defend its actions as being justified by economic, cultural and social exploitation. The destruction that it had unleashed in the state was at this time at its worst, as it was witnessed on 28 November 1996.

In a pre dawn operation today, suspected United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) militants triggered three consecutive explosions, causing extensive damage to a crude oil pipeline of the Oil India Limited (OIL) and partial damage to a production pipeline of the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) at Bijulighat under Nalban Police Station.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to these terrorist acts, confirmed reports began to appear in the state and national dailies about the alleged cooperation and close liaison of the ULFA with Bangladesh intelligence agency. This was a source of consternation and heartburn for local people who regarded Bangladesh as being partially responsible for the influx of foreigners into their state. They saw in the ULFA's joining of hands with the Bangladeshis, who they regarded as the root of some of their economic and political woes, a betrayal of their cause.

The ULFA Chairman Arbinda Rajkhowa, and its Commander-in-Chief, are presently hiding in Bangladesh and living lavishly, arrested Vice Chairman of the banned outfit Pradip Gogoi said during interrogation.... A large sum of money collected, through extortion, was also being spent on supporting the lavish lifestyle of the top leaders and their families in Bangladesh....<sup>64</sup>

A number of public revelations made by captured ULFA cadres and the reports of intelligence agencies also made the ULFA's close liaison with the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) public. The people of Assam were never suspected of secessionist tendencies even at the peak of the struggle. This was one strategic mistake the ULFA made, which ultimately made its stance and plank for fighting the government untenable. After Operation Vijay (1999)<sup>65</sup> as bodies of soldiers of the state were brought in with full state honours, a tumultuous expression of nationalistic sentiment engulfed the state. The people were proud of soldiers

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<sup>63</sup> *The Sentinel*, 29 November 1996.

<sup>64</sup> *The Hindustan Times*, 30 April 1998.

<sup>65</sup> Operation Vijay was the name given to the Indian operations in Kargil after the launch of Pakistani sponsored Operation Badr.

<sup>66</sup> *The North East Times*, 24 July 1998. There was reference to Pakistani hand in unrest in the

from Assam who had laid down their lives in the highest tradition of valour and sacrifice of the state. Reports of the collusion of the ULFA with the ISI did not go down well with the people. They saw this as yet another betrayal of their cause by ULFA.

The ISI has set up a training camp about 30 km from the Indo-Bangladesh border, between the hamlets of Chattak and Jaintiapura in Bangladesh. About 315 ultras from different outfits of the NE states divided into 14 batches are undergoing three months of intensive training under the Camp Commandant Major Meer Muammar Mushtaqaen....<sup>66</sup>

The state government, at this time, taking advantage of the disillusionment of people and the waning support for the ULFA in the region, launched a concerted attack on the ULFA cadres. With an ever-increasing number of ULFA cadres surrendering to the government, the SULFA became active and further weakened the militants. The security forces, learning from past mistakes, organised a 'United Command Structure' from 20 January 1997 to enable better coordination of various civil, military, para-military and police force departments. This improved the efficiency and understanding between the security forces and other actors in the operations, further increasing pressure on the ULFA. The pressure being exerted on the militants began to show results in 1998–99. There were large-scale surrenders, with 51 ULFA cadres surrendering on 24 July 1998, followed by another 202 cadres on 15 August 1999.<sup>67</sup> These were undoubtedly caused by the flagging morale of militants, brought about by their difficult living conditions, disillusionment with the cause and severe pressure being exerted by the army. The process was also influenced by frequent calls from the government for the militants to surrender, accompanied by the provision of opportunities for resettlement. Existing SULFA cadres were examples to the ULFA cadres to emulate. For most, the lure of an easier life post-surrender proved too difficult to resist.

This battle of wits and attrition had its effect on the ULFA leaders as well. The ULFA Commander-in-Chief, Paresh Barua, offered to enter into a 'scientific dialogue' with the central government on 3 January 2001. However, this offer was rejected on 12 January 2001. The government's contention remained that any dialogue could only commence after the ULFA agreed to shun the path of violence. Unconditional talks were ruled out. The government's stand and the ULFA offer were clear indicators that the former's confidence levels had increased while the latter was now on the defensive. This confidence of the government was based on

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Northeast in an article in *The Telegraph* on 15 April 1997 and in *The Hindustan Times* on 7 May 1998.

<sup>67</sup> Twenty and 138 ULFA cadres surrendered on 23 and 26 January 2001 following these surrenders. Another seven surrendered on 15 August 2001 at Dhubri, three at Bilasipara and six at Moregaon.

<sup>68</sup> This drive resulted in killing of four ULFA cadres in January 2001 at Khangbari and

a number of successes in the state of the security forces against ULFA.<sup>68</sup> This drive preceded the scheduled elections in the state. The ULFA, in order to make its presence felt, resorted once again to terror tactics. It started with a concerted attempt to terrorise candidates and supporters of political parties from the end of March 2001. April 2001 was a challenge for both the political parties and the people, with a number of ULFA killings of political candidates and their supporters. However, ULFA could not hamper the electoral process. Elections were held with Tarun Gogoi becoming the fourteenth Chief Minister of Assam.

On 27 July 2001 in a significant speech, Arabinda Rajkhowa, the Chairman of the ULFA, addressing the Martyr Day celebrations of the organisation demanded referendum in the state to judge its status. He stressed that he was in favour of a political solution to the problem. The ULFA's demand for talks was reiterated on 28 August 2001, when its Chairman Rajkhowa laid down three pre-conditions. These were:

- talks to be held in a mutually acceptable location outside India;
- talks to be held under the supervision of the United Nations; and
- the main issue to be discussed would be the 'sovereignty' of Assam.

These preconditions laid down by ULFA for the commencement of talks remained a stumbling block despite the best efforts of Tarun Gogoi. He wanted the ULFA to commence a dialogue with the Centre along lines similar to those adopted for NSCN(IM). He also recommended a ceasefire between the ULFA and the Union Government, which was rejected.

The central government ruled out acceding to the preconditions for talks laid down by Rajkhowa. This stalemate between the ULFA and the Government over talks continues and there is still a long way to go before peace can finally be established in the state. The situation has been brought under control to a great extent, but complete normalcy still remains a dream for the common people of Assam who have suffered both at the hands of the security forces and the ULFA. They have had to face the indignity of searches and checks at odd hours. Students have had to miss classes because of security cordons and search operations in the state. There have been isolated cases of high-handedness, which have soiled the image of the security forces despite an overwhelmingly clean record in the past decade. Moreover, there has been colossal suffering at the hands of ULFA. There have been numerous instances of killings in cold blood and extortion, all of which have harmed the state economically. In the age of economic liberalisation, when numerous multinational companies came to India to set up their industries, Assam lost out in the race for investment in infrastructure development and employment

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Soneshwar villages, three cadres on 2 February in the Mazgaon area, six on 23 February in Meghalaya, Kamrup District Commander on 24 February along with eight arrests, six cadres of 'Enigma Unit' of ULFA on 15 March and five on 30 March at Tengi and Kalakuchi villages.

generation because of the problem of terrorism. The beneficiaries were instead states such as West Bengal, despite its comparatively poor track record in infrastructure and reforms. The ULFA has also harmed the non-violent and dignified struggle of the people who were previously staunch followers of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy.

Assam's tryst with disintegration does not end with the government's struggle against the ULFA. It is facing similar discontent from the Bodo tribals, who are also now engaged in a secessionist struggle. This Bodo struggle is by a tribal people who regard themselves as the original inhabitants of the region, and are still a majority among the tribal inhabitants of Assam.



# Chapter 11

## Assam—Bodo Resistance

### Background

The problem of separatism in Assam does not only involve the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). Another group that is now demanding independence is that of the Bodos. The Bodo-Kacharis who are accepted as the oldest inhabitants of the area are a tribal people residing in the plains.<sup>1</sup> They are mainly found in Upper Assam, especially in the Kokrajhar and Goalpara regions. There are a number of sub-tribes among the Bodos, who have for long alleged exploitation at the hands of both Ahom-dominated Assamese society and the migrant Bengalis. They claim that their land, culture, language and economic interests have been sacrificed to the need for maintaining a balance in the state. The beginning of the Bodo movement spearheaded by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) found synergy with the movement led by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) in the rest of Assam, as each supported the other's cause. However, the signing of the Assam Accord came as a rude shock to the Bodos when they realised that the AASU had not protected their interests, and that the Accord did not take into account their worries and apprehensions.

This led to the Bodo movement taking a violent turn. Their initial demand for autonomy changed into a demand for an independent state, taken up by groups like the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) who demanded a separate country for the Bodos.

The situation improved with the signing of a Memorandum of Settlement on 20 February 1993 between the Government of Assam, the ABSU and the Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC). The Accord provided for the setting up of a Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) within the districts of Kokrajhar, Goalpara and certain other areas. However, immediately after the signing of the Accord, there was a dispute regarding the demarcation of this area, with the Bodos demanding that certain other non-Bodo the BAC constituted 2,750 villages and the Bodos

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<sup>1</sup> The Bodo presence in the state is generally agreed to be over 5,000 years old. Documented references to the Bodos can be found in Puranic records of the *Mababharata* and *Ramayana*. See also Bhattacharjee (1996).

demanded the inclusion of another 515, a demand which dominated villages form a part of it. The BAC constituted 2,750 villages and the Bodos demanded the inclusion of another 515, a demand which as mentioned earlier, was rejected by the government. The nature, extent and degree of powers to be vested in the BAC also became a matter of dispute. This difference of opinion gave rise to an armed struggle, which was finally resolved with yet another Accord. This was in the form of a 'historic tripartite agreement' between the central government, the Government of Assam and the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF) on 10 February 2003 (for the text of this accord, see Appendix L). The accord does not have the approval of NDFB and it is still too early to assess its success.

## Historical Journey

The Bodo-Kacharis, widely accepted as Assam's original inhabitants,<sup>2</sup> are a Mongoloid race that migrated from China. The Bodos themselves claim that, 'The Bodos are one of the earliest settlers in Assam. They migrated to Assam say at about 5000 B.C. from Central Asia such as China, Mongolia, Tibet and Siberia. Bodos are a branch of the Great Mongoloid Stock.'<sup>3</sup> With the passage of time, the Bodos have come to be further sub-divided into a number of tribes depending on the regions in which they have settled. Some of these tribes are the Boro-Kacharis, Rabha, Sonowal, Lalung, Deori, Dimasa, Barman, Garo, Hajong and Hojai Kochari.

When the words Bodo and Boro are used, it must be understood that these are not two different ways of spelling the same word, but have different connotations. The word Bodo refers to all the sub-tribes of the Bodo people, including those mentioned in the paragraph above. The word Boro, however, specifically refers to the Boro speaking people who are one of the major tribes amongst the Bodo group.

Unfortunately, the history of the Bodos has largely been lost for want of documentation, and what survives is lost in claims and counter-claims. The Ahoms successfully defeated the Bodos and took control of the region during the sixteenth century. Thereafter, they continued to dominate the area politically, culturally and economically until the British finally put an end to Ahom rule in 1838. A detailed record of Assamese history is available from the thirteenth century onward, in the form of *burunjis* or chronicles of the Ahoms. This record covers the period of decline of the Bodos and the rise of the Ahoms. To this day the political power structure, as also the ethnic majority in the state, is in favour of the Ahoms.

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<sup>2</sup> This has been accepted by all reputed historians including Acharya (1984) when he writes, 'The Kacharis are the earliest known indigenous inhabitants of Assam. They are known under different names in different places and ages throughout the North-Eastern corner of the Indian sub-continent. In Goalpara and North Bengal, they are called Mech and in North Cachar Hills, Dimasa. In the Brahmaputra, the Kacharis call themselves Bodos or Bodo-fisa (sons of Bodo). They are known to Ahoms as Timisa, clearly a corruption of Dimasa, and therefore, this name must be applied to them when they were ruling the Dhansiri Valley.' Other authors supporting the claim include K.S. Singh (1994).

<sup>3</sup> ABSU booklet titled *Why Separate State of Bodoland*.

Bodo power was at its zenith between the tenth and sixth centuries B.C. During this period they ruled all of present-day Assam, till the borders of Bengal and northern Bihar. In the third and fourth centuries they were defeated by the Asura dynasty. Thereafter the Bodos continued to rule small kingdoms till they once again gained prominence with the establishment of the Koch kingdom in the thirteenth century A.D. with the fall of the Pala dynasty. The Koch kingdom, which ruled over an area stretching from Cooch Bihar till present-day Tezpur, was at the height of its power when the Koch king Chilarai defeated the Ahoms. At this stage in history the Bodos also held sway over Manipur, Tripura, Jaintia and Sylhet. The Ahoms and Koch rulers, Lachit Borphukan and Chilarai respectively, also fought jointly against the Mughals and defeated them in 1671 at the Battle of Saraighat. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, a decline had set in, with the final blow to the Bodo kingdom being dealt by the British who took over the region in the nineteenth century. It is interesting to read the Bodo interpretation of their 'modern' history, as contained in an ABSU pamphlet, which they use to justify their demand for a separate state.

In the modern period of history only this province has been known as Assam. It is not exactly known since when this land has been called Assam. But the name Assam must not have come prior to the advent of Ahoms in Assam, i.e., 1228 A.D. As per historical records, the sixteenth century map of this land shows that in the north bank of the Brahmaputra comprising Cooch Behar, Mymensingh, Sylhet, Pragjyotishpur it was a great Koch-Kachari empire of Kamrupa with Headquarters at Gauhati, the easternmost Dibrugarh District and Sadiya formed a Chutia Kachari kingdom, the Sibsagar District and neighbouring parts formed Ahom kingdom, parts of Nagaon District and Dimapur, North Cachar Hills, Cachar District areas formed Southern Kachari kingdom. The Jyamtiyas, Khasis, Garos, Nagas, Manipuris and Mizos had their own geographical areas. So where did Assam exist? On the other hand only Kachari kingdoms and Ahom kingdoms could be noticed.<sup>4</sup>

Though the account contained in the ABSU pamphlet is partially correct, it is also to the same extent flawed and factually incorrect as borne out by independent sources. The Bodo-Kacharis did hold sway over a greater part of Upper Assam with the Koch kingdom extending from Cooch Behar to modern-day Tezpur, the Dimasas holding present-day Dimapur and the Chutiya kingdom based at Sadiya. However, in the sixteenth century the Ahoms overran the Dimasa and Chutiya kingdoms. They were not able to integrate the Koch kingdom, which existed along with that of the Ahoms until the British took over the region in the nineteenth century.

The other contention—about the name Assam and its people not existing before a certain point—is also factually incorrect. The *Ain-e-Akbari* written in the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.: 15.

seventeenth century does mention '*Asbam*',<sup>5</sup> which in all probability is derived from the word Ahom, the name of the largest ethnic group in the region which had established itself in the areas of Upper Assam contrary to what the ABSU account asserts. Despite the inaccuracies of Bodo claims, the fact that they are the region's oldest inhabitants, as well as the years of their domicile in certain areas of Upper Assam are not in dispute. The only point which this study attempts to make is the extent to which vested interests dictate the attempt to rewrite history, or to mention only those periods of history which best illustrate and prove their arguments. Thereafter, this becomes the basis for their contentions and demands for 'justice'. This, quite obviously, is a situation that cannot be justified, especially in the context of a country like India in which diversity is more a rule rather than an exception. It is possible for almost every community to ask for a separate state citing periods of history that best illustrate their varying contentions.<sup>6</sup>

## British Period

The history of the Bodos under British rule cannot be separated from that of the rest of Assam. The Bodos participated in the freedom struggle, though they did stress an identity distinct from the Assamese in terms of their history, language, culture and customs. This was apparent when the Simon Commission arrived in India and visited Shillong in January 1929. Amongst the various groups which submitted memorandums to them were the Bodos, demanding autonomy and distinct treatment from the rest of the state. 'In reality the Bodo movement may be identified to have started from the year 1929 with the submission of a memorandum by the Plains Tribals.'<sup>7</sup> They resented the treatment meted out to them and their being placed in the general category 'other than Assamese', rather than as Bodos. However, at this stage, they made no demands for separation from Assam. In fact they fought against the inclusion of Goalpara in Bengal, and made it clear that they regarded themselves as more akin to the Assamese. They did, however, fight for political representation within Assam, which in turn was connected to issues of economic and social progress which were of concern to them. '...due to the lack of representative to the council from their community, their community is lagging behind since no reform measure is implemented for their development'.<sup>8</sup> Similar demands and dissent were voiced by the Kacharis, who further highlighted their ancient heritage and history while claiming that they were discriminated

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<sup>5</sup> Barpujari 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Imagine the Marathas asking for the entire domain of the Peshwas as part of Greater Maharashtra or Bihar citing the Mauryan or Gupta period to demand almost the entire country. The country may also have to deal with claims from across the border from the descendants of the Kushans and the Mughals.

<sup>7</sup> Bhattacharjee 1996: 75.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

against and had become a backward class in the region. Citing this discrimination, they asked for their educational, social and economic benefits, demands which arose due to the impact of the First World War, the independence movement in India, and improving educational standards. The Bodos also demanded greater political autonomy within the state through a memorandum submitted to the Indian Statutory Commission. It said, 'This community shares with other communities the belief that Indians are fit for self-government, the dyarchy is unworkable and that provincial autonomy should be granted immediately.'<sup>9</sup> It became clear that the Bodos had started asserting themselves politically by the time the Simon Commission arrived in the country. This was further proved with the formation of the Tribal League in 1933 with an eye on the forthcoming provincial elections. The Tribal League remained a potent political force till Independence and held the balance of political power in the state.<sup>10</sup> However, they were not able to use this leverage to solve their problems and by the eve of Independence, had changed into a 'socio-cultural organisation'.

There was sympathy in certain quarters of the British government, which felt that hill and plain tribes should be directly governed by the Governor General of India or the Governor of Bengal, since these formed part of the 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas.<sup>11</sup> However, the Bodos and Kacharis did not face internal pressures from secessionist elements, as was the case with other tribes in most of the region, which was probably the result of an insular outlook bred by years of isolation from the national mainstream.<sup>12</sup>

## Independence and After

Bodo nationalism has gone through distinct phases from in the pre-Independence period till the time this study was completed. The first phase commenced with the formal organisation of the Bodo polity, with the Bodos feeling the need for a political party that represented their interests. This led to the establishment and rise of the Tribal League after 1933. Though political rumblings had commenced prior to the formal launch of the Tribal League, the full impact of formal representation of the Bodos was felt only in the post-1933 period. Therefore, to understand the Bodo nationalist movement, better, the first phase will be considered the phase of political awakening, which lasted from 1933 to 1966. The second phase began in 1967 and ended in 1986. This phase saw growing demands for autonomy,

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<sup>9</sup> Memorandum by Kacharis to the Statutory Commission in Assam, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> The Tribal League held the balance of power from 1938 till 1946 when they switched sides from Saadullah's government to that of the Congress. They joined the Saadullah government in 1940 despite having accused him earlier of 'sheltering immigrants'.

<sup>11</sup> A despatch by Lord Wavell, Viceroy of India, to the Secretary of State for India, Amery, dated 27 July 1944 mentions this idea put forth by Dorman Smith, the former Governor of Burma.

<sup>12</sup> Reasons for this insulation have been discussed in detail in Chapter 10, under the section titled 'Legacy of the Past'.

though it was yet to resemble a struggle backed by groups capable of employing violence as an alternate means to achieve their aims. The third phase commenced from 1987 and ended in 1992. It was characterised by open and persistent demands for autonomy, with the ABSU taking over from the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and spearheading the movement. The fourth and last phase began in 1987 and after a brief period of large-scale agitation, *bandhs* (strikes) and demonstrations, violence commenced, heralding yet another low intensity conflict (LIC) in the region.

The post-Independence period had initially witnessed a period of calm, with Independence pointing towards a speedy amalgamation of the region with the rest of the Indian Union. At the time dissatisfied ethnic groups ranged from the Nagas who wished to secede from the Union at one end of the spectrum, to groups like the Bodos at the other. The latter, despite being part of the tribal group, had not gained in any way from their inclusion and had not enjoyed any of the protection and privileges that had been extended to other tribals. The reason for this, which led to much disenchantment and dissatisfaction, was that they were living in the plains of Assam, in close proximity to the seat of power in the state. This deprived them of some of the privileges in terms of autonomy that the British had granted the tribals in the 'excluded' or 'partially excluded' areas of the hill regions.<sup>13</sup> The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was formulated to safeguard the interests of the tribal people and their culture and customs. It aimed at protecting these customs and traditions through the formation of autonomous hill councils based on the erstwhile 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas. This again left the Bodos without a distinct council of their own, despite the setting up of the Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee under Chief Minister Gopinath Bordoloi. What the Bodos did achieve was the constitution of tribal belts and blocks in 1947 which included an area of 5,704 square miles.<sup>14</sup>

Matters became worse for the Bodos in the immediate aftermath of Partition, when hordes of refugees migrated into the Bodo-dominated areas of Kokrajhar and Goalpara from Bangladesh and Bengal, which caused the demography of the area to change. Based on the Census of India (various years), Amiya Kumar Das estimates an increase in population at the rate of 38.39, 44.12 and 91.15 per cent during the periods 1951–61, 1961–71 and 1971–81 respectively. This clearly shows an unhindered and swift influx of outsiders, starting as a trickle and then turning into a flood that would engulf the region. The percentage of Bengalis and Muslims rose dramatically, with Muslims forming 42.3 per cent of the population of Goalpara as per the 1971 Census, a percentage that has subsequently increased.<sup>15</sup> This rise

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<sup>13</sup> 'Excluded' regions included the North-east Frontier Tract, Naga Hills District, Lushai Hills District and the North Cachar Hills Sub-division and the 'Partially Excluded' areas Garo Hills, Mikir Hills and Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

<sup>14</sup> This included two in Goalpara, eight in Kamrup, eight in Darrang, three in North Lakhimpur and 12 in Nagaon.

<sup>15</sup> Amiya Kumar Das 1992: 106.

in population impinged upon the jungle land, besides dominating areas along the Brahmaputra. Land was brought under cultivation, and business and government jobs went to migrants. The Bodos, being an underprivileged class, suffered because of the lack of educational advancement and development in the region.

The situation further deteriorated when tribals found that instead of being protected, they had been reduced to a minority in their own areas because of the large-scale infiltration of outsiders. This affected their political clout and worse, their constituencies were no longer influenced only by their votes. The migrant vote share was beginning to take away any semblance of political power that they may have perceived as theirs. 'So much have the Bodos been subjected to land alienation because of this constant influx that today it is estimated that 60–70 percent of the tribals in the region are landless.'<sup>16</sup>

Language is a vital determinant as a psychological factor that binds people together. It also serves as a medium which conserves and maintains the cultural ethos of a people besides being a mark of their distinct identity. The issue of language has been an emotive one for the Bodos, in a manner similar to the part it has played in other LIC-affected areas, a factor that will be discussed in this study. It was only in 1963 that the Bodo language was accepted as a medium of education in primary schools in Bodo areas. It was subsequently incorporated as the medium of instruction at the secondary level in 1968. In 1972, English was accepted as a medium of instruction in colleges along with Assamese after the Supreme Court gave a verdict to that effect. However, the Bodo demand for the adoption of the Roman script for the Bodo language has not been accepted. Instead, the Devanagari script is used.

Student leaders have always had an important role to play in most politico-social struggles. In Assam, too, the students have influenced both major struggles. While it was the AASU in the rest of Assam as discussed earlier, this responsibility was shouldered by the ABSU in the case of the Bodos. The ABSU was formed on 15 February 1967 at Kokrajhar. This organisation has been at the forefront of the Bodo movement, and has led the struggle for linguistic equality and political recognition, including the demand for a separate state within the ambit of the Indian Constitution. After Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's declaration of the policy of reorganisation of Assam on a federal basis before a delegation of the Mizo Union in New Delhi on 13 January 1967,<sup>17</sup> the Goalpara District Bodo Student's Union, while welcoming the policy, demanded a separate state for the tribal people of the plains.<sup>18</sup>

Besides the ABSU, the other organisation which has led the Bodo movement for a separate autonomous region (subsequently upgraded to a demand for a separate State) was the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA). This organisation was

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<sup>16</sup> Pradip Phanjoubam, *Ethnic Identity and Community Relationship*, p. 161.

<sup>17</sup> The proposal was vehemently opposed by Assamese students, while the Bodos welcomed the idea.

<sup>18</sup> ABSU booklet, p. 1.

formed on 27 February 1967 at Rongjasali Hall in Kokrajhar.<sup>19</sup> The PTCA submitted a memorandum for the first time to the President of India, Dr Zakir Hussain, on 20 May 1967 for the creation of an autonomous region. This demand was subsequently changed to a demand for a union territory named 'Udaychal' on 7 January 1973. Over the years, this demand for autonomy was again diluted to a demand for an autonomous region, a move resented by the hardliners in the PTCA. This finally led to a split in the party and the PTCA (Progressive) (PTCA[P]) was formed on 22 May 1979. They submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 8 July 1980 demanding a union territory called 'Mishing Bodoland'.

The PTCA and PTCA(P) merged to form the United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) on 19 April 1984 with the aim of unifying the movement. They again submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on 2 May 1984, this time for the formation of a union territory called 'Tribal Land'. Similar memorandums were also submitted over the years to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

The ABSU has been instrumental in winning the Bodos the right to be educated in their native language till the secondary level, and to have English introduced as the medium of instruction in colleges. After two decades of low-key political, social and linguistic struggles, Bodo activism finally emerged from its involvement in the agitation against the problem of foreigners in the state, an agitation that it had actively supported. A 92-point charter of demands, released by the ABSU on 2 March 1987, marked their emergence into the political arena of the state. These demands fell under two broad categories: political and socio-economic issues. The major political demands that they made were:

- Creation of a separate state of Bodoland.
- Creation of two District Councils on the southern Bank of the Brahmaputra.
- Inclusion of the Bodo-Kacharis of Karbi Anglong into the Scheduled Tribes (Hills) list.<sup>20</sup>

In 1987, the ABSU released a set of 53 questions and answers, which was probably an attempt to answer most of the common queries that were put to it. These, in effect broadly defined the policies of the ABSU when it came to pursuing their objectives.<sup>21</sup> Commenting on the issue of a demand for a separate state, they said;

(i) Historical basis—the Bodos or the Kacharis had kings and kingdoms in Assam. The tribals—the Mongolians—are the original masters of Assam whereas the so-called artificial Assamese have unjustifiably snatched away Assam

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<sup>19</sup> The PTCA was formed after the announcement by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to give direction to the political movement in the region on behalf of the Bodos.

<sup>20</sup> ABSU booklet, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> For a detailed study, refer to *Divide Assam Fifty Fifty: Fifty-Three Questions and Answers by ABSU*, 23 August 1987.



and its administration through the process of silent aggression and engulfment since the thirteenth and fourteenth century, (ii) linguistic basis, (iii) ethnic basis, (iv) principle of right to self-determination, political philosophical basis of smaller States and gains derived thereof.<sup>22</sup>

The release also contained the ABSU's political and philosophical ideology that guided their demands. They felt that smaller states should be created through reorganisation based on a federal structure 'giving more autonomy to the States for rapid progress and better administration'. The release further stated that non-tribals had been 'planted in large numbers' for 'ulterior political motives' and 'should be cleared'. This primarily referred to the areas above the northern bank of the Brahmaputra.

1988 was a landmark year for the Bodo struggle. During the 18th Annual Conference of the ABSU at Bashbari in Dhubri district of Assam, a significant decision was taken to suspend 89 of the 92 non-political demands and concentrate on the three political ones. It was also decided to name the proposed separate state 'Bodoland'.<sup>23</sup> During the conference the ABSU also decided to launch a 'people's organisation' called the Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC), aimed at generating a mass movement demanding a separate state.

The period from February–August 1989 was the first violent phase in the Bodo agitation, with Bodo activists embarking on a series of killings, kidnappings and bomb attacks, resulting in 350 deaths. These terrorist activities continued unabated till the signing of the Bodo Accord (1993).<sup>24</sup> This led to the state government adopting a tough line of action against the Bodo activists, with harsh measures employed to control them. This period of six years, which lasted from 1987 to 1993, has been described by the ABSU booklet in the following manner:

...This 6 year long Bodoland movement has the unprecedented history of human rights violation by the Govt. in the name of crushing down the democratic and peaceful mass movement. As many as 1135 Bodos including a few number of non Bodo agitationists were brutally killed or massacred only in the hands of Assam Police battalion and some hundreds were made physically handicapped out of torture. There were many cases of custodial death under police custody also. Hundreds of Bodo girls were gang raped and molested by the Chauvinist Assam police and Assamese extremists.<sup>25</sup>

The ABSU's allegations are undoubtedly exaggerated, although the occurrence of stray incidents of high-handedness cannot be ruled out. However, like others of its

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> ABSU booklet, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Twenty-one people were killed in a bomb explosion in a train on 13 October 1991, and 61 people were killed in Guwahati and Barpeta between 13 October and 21 November 1992 ([www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org)).

<sup>25</sup> ABSU booklet, p. 5.

ilk, the ABSU is prone to highlighting and exaggerating police excesses, while failing to mention the terrorist acts that its cadres have unleashed against innocent people in towns, villages, trains and public places. They also omit the gory details of ethnic cleansing carried out by their self-styled representatives fighting for independence and statehood. Neither is any mention made of these dastardly acts in the propaganda booklets that they have used extensively to define their ideology and demands.

Movements which commence as non-violent struggles, do at times end up as full-blown violent conflicts. These struggles, while highlighting the excesses of the security forces, conveniently forget their own excesses, which are committed in the guise of a freedom struggle, and the need to dispense justice to any traitors to the cause. While human rights activists wax eloquent on the injustice done to separatist elements, they fail to recognise the travails of the common people who most often bear the brunt of the terrorist activities of such groups. Neither is there, for the most part, any outcry from major international powers, or any attempts by them to ban such outfits and call them to account for their actions, at least not until their own security or the lives of their citizens are at risk. The events of 11 September 2001 in the USA have, however, opened the eyes of most armchair human rights activists, who had prior to this exercised with great ease their privilege of taking to task governments and security forces, while turning a blind eye to terrorist excesses. It must be understood that justice is not subjective and that the rules of the game are the same for both sides. Moreover, terrorism is a deadly menace that cannot be encouraged because of short-sighted interests, however justified the cause of the terrorist may be.

## First Bodo Accord

On 25 February 1991 the Government of India, in response to the Bodo agitation, finally set up a three member Expert Committee under Dr Bhupinder Singh. The committee was directed to arrive at the territorial extent of the proposed autonomous area and to decide on the nature and degree of autonomy to be granted. The committee submitted its report in March 1992. This report became the basis for the government's negotiations and its stand vis-à-vis the Bodo movement. The report proposed the establishment of two autonomous councils north of the Brahmaputra. The proposed West-Central Council was to have had a population of 1.107 million people, of which the majority would be Bodos with some Rabhas and Sonwals. The Eastern Council was to have a population of 0.315 million people with a Mishing majority and some percentage of Sonwals. The West-Central Council constituted areas in Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup and Darrang. The Eastern Council constituted areas in Dhemaji, Lakhimpur and Sonitpur, mainly comprising Mishings and Deoris. The committee recommended 22 subjects to be delegated to the councils for administration.

The Bodos rejected the committee's recommendations stating that, '...the ABSU made an additional demand for 209 villages, along with 1,035 other villages, which, according to the government record, had no tribal population'.<sup>26</sup> These differences were subsequently resolved through lengthy negotiations. Finally, the Chief Minister of Assam, Hiteshwar Saikia, negotiated with the ABSU to jointly sign the Bodo Accord with ABSU President S.K. Bwismutiary on 20 February 1993 (for the text of the Accord, see Appendix L). The Chief of the Bodo Volunteer Force (BVF), Premising Brahma, surrendered with his cadres soon afterwards. 'The Bodo Accord was reached with the objective to provide maximum autonomy to the Bodos for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement within the framework of the Indian Constitution.'<sup>27</sup>

The Accord was put into effect with the inauguration of the Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) on 7 March 1993 at Kokrajhar. The BAC was to have 35 elected members and five members nominated by the government so as to give due representation to all groups. The Bodoland Autonomous Council Act was finally gazetted on 14 May 1993.

The BAC Bill proposed a General Council of 40 members. Of these 30 were to be from the Scheduled Tribes. The General Council was supposed to meet once in every three months and the quorum for these meetings was 13 members. The council had powers over 38 subjects. In an important proposal there was a

provision for setting up special courts in consultation with the Guwahati High Court to try cases between parties, all of whom belonged to the Scheduled Tribe in accordance with the tribal customary law and procedure in the Village Courts and Subordinate District Customary Law Courts within a Civil Sub-Divisional Territory and District Customary Law Courts.<sup>28</sup>

The success of the Accord rested on the satisfactory delineation of villages that fell under the jurisdiction of the council. These were neither defined nor demarcated at the time the Accord was signed, leading to differences of opinion regarding the area under the BAC. The Accord had not taken all the parties representing the various groups into confidence before negotiating a settlement, with the result that some of the groups immediately denounced it. While Bwismutiary and Premising Brahma were nominated Chief Executive Member and Deputy of the BAC respectively, effectively appeasing the ABSU and the BVF, the Bodo Security Force (BSF) rejected the Accord.

Bodo Security Force (BSF) aiming for a separate Bodoland are up in arms with a renewed vigour in the shape of imparting arms training to recruits near Daifam in Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh jungles, according to reliable sources. Sources do not rule out violence in the near future as BSF militants are opposed to

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<sup>26</sup> *The Assam Tribune*, 21 February 1993.

<sup>27</sup> Bhattacharjee 1996: 140.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*: 143.

anything short of sovereign Bodo nation which is not the target in ABSU-BPAC combine that accepted the recent Bodo accord which opened the door for an Autonomous Council for Bodos.<sup>29</sup>

This was followed by a number of violent incidents which bore witness to the level of dissent of certain disgruntled elements in the region. In another move aimed at unification and closer cooperation, the BPAC and the BVF were united to form the Bodoland People's Party. The end of the year saw riots and killings aimed at certain minorities in the regions of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon. This led to an All Party Committee being formed to demarcate the BAC area. However, the committee was dissolved before it could make any appreciable headway and the government made a unilateral announcement to designate 2,750 villages as being under the BAC. These villages had a population of 2.14 million, with tribals forming 38 per cent of the total population. Bwismutiary resigned in protest as the notification did not include a 10-kilometre belt along the Bhutan border, the Manas Reserve Forest and the Manas Game Sanctuary. The notification also did not include 515 villages, as was demanded. The government stood firm, stating that the 10-kilometre belt had been left out on the recommendations of the Ministries of Defence and Forest, as per the provisions of the Accord. It also stated that the additional 515 villages demanded constituted non-Bodo majority areas besides not being contiguous to the BAC area and, thus, could not be included. The government was quick to add that the Bodos constituted a majority in only 1,100 villages of the 2,750 notified, and should thus be more than satisfied. The Bodo contention was that these remaining villages were a part of the traditional Bodo homeland, and thus the deadlock continued.

The BSF continued with its reign of terror, with the result that the army had to be called in and Operation Kranti launched in the Barpeta district. The BdSF is a Christian dominated movement which is demanding a separate country vis-à-vis the other groups, which have been asking for a separate state. A majority of the Bodos are Hindus, but a sizeable section is Christian. The latter, incidentally, are much better educated and more aware, probably because of their interaction with the Christian missionaries. It is this section of the population which primarily forms the BdSF. The BdSF receives support from the ULFA, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muviah) [NSCN(IM)], the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Bangladesh intelligence agencies as well. During the period preceding the elections announced in April 1996, alignments and realignments took place. The Bodoland People's Party (S) and the Bodoland People's Party (P), the (BPP[S]) and (BPP[P]), united to form the Bodo State Movement Council (BSMC) and put up their own candidates. On the other hand the hardliners in ABSU and BdSF formed the People's Democratic Front (PDF) of Bodoland. It is widely believed that the PDF used coercive tactics through the BdSF to obtain votes in the elections, in which the PDF won eight seats and the BSMC one. The militant outfit of the

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<sup>29</sup> *The Assam Tribune*, 18 March 1993.

BSMC is the Bodoland Liberation Tigers Front (BLTF), an organisation which is presently helping the security forces hunt down BdSF cadres. The BdSF was subsequently redesignated the Bodoland Army. Its political wing is called the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB).

The Bodoland struggle has also become polarised along religious lines with the Hindu-dominated BLTF supporting the security forces against the Christian-dominated NDFB and Bodoland Army which has raised the spectre of revolt, demanding a separate state outside of the Indian Union. This has serious repercussions for any future settlement that may be reached in the region. There is a political, ideological and religious divide which threatens to engulf the BAC and in fact the entire region even prior to the demarcation of the area under the BAC, and before elections to it can take place in a peaceful environment. As has been stated, the Bodoland Army has been receiving the active support of the NSCN(IM) and ULFA, which have reportedly trained 500–600 of its 1,000–1,200 cadres. The cadres have been operating in the jungle areas away from urban settlements along the national highway, NH 31C, north of the Brahmaputra. This has given them the added advantage of taking refuge in relatively safe sanctuaries like the Manas Reserve Forest and Manas Game Sanctuary. It has also given them the opportunity to make tactical use of the border areas of Bhutan, which are contiguous to the region, which they use to evade the dragnet of the security forces as also to operate their training camps.<sup>30</sup>

The Bodo struggle seems to be sinking into a political quagmire. It has repeatedly received setbacks because of internal differences. First, it was the ABSU alleging that the PTCA had betrayed the Bodo cause. Thereafter it was the rivalry between ABSU and BSMC moderates against ABSU hardliners and the BdSF (later NDFB), which did much harm to the Bodo cause. Finally it is the Bodoland Army and BLTF that are fighting each other because of an ideological divide, resulting in the killing of rival leaders and sympathisers, which is again weakening the movement.

## NDFB and Bodoland Army

The NDFB was established on 3 October 1986 at Udalgiri. It is the political wing of the BdSF. The BdSF was rechristened as NDFB on 18 April 1993. The group is led by Rajan Daimary, an educated leader who is a post-graduate in Political Science. The area of influence of the group covers the districts of Bongaigaon, Nagaon, Nalbari, Barpeta, Kamrup, Darrang, Sonitpur and Kokrajhar. The NDFB is divided into four regional commands, Eastern, Western, Central and Southern, directly under a General Headquarters. It is based on the formulating order of the

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<sup>30</sup> NDFB's safe haven in Bhutan received a setback when the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) launched operations against the ULFA, NDFB and Kamatpur Liberation Organisation (KLO) camps from 15 December 2003, destroying 30 camps. This was a major setback for the organisations and an encouraging sign of support for counter-terrorist operations in South Asia.

Bodoland Army Number 1/1995 NDFB (spelled as Boroland Army in the pamphlet) dated 7 February 1995. The date designated for the formal establishment of Bodoland was given as 10 February 1995.<sup>31</sup>

The pamphlet throws a great deal of light on the organisation and functioning of the Bodoland Army. While stating the criteria for recruitment, it says:

Recruitment of the Boroland Army shall be on strict observance of all essential prerequisites of a good soldier. Sons and daughters of Boroland with revolutionary and nationalist spirit having zeal to serve and sacrifice for the liberation of Boroland shall be recruited.<sup>32</sup>

The Boroland Army has a three month training period for recruits after they take an oath of allegiance as specified by the Constitution of NDFB. Their term of service is, '12 years compulsory service to the nation and the unmarried Boroland Army shall marry after minimum 5 years of service but he/she must complete 28 years of his/her age.'<sup>33</sup>

The 'Boroland Army' is organised in a manner similar to most regular armies with a Chief and Deputy Chief of Army Staff heading it. They have divisions, brigades, battalions, companies, platoons and sections just like a regular army. The personnel are liable to be transferred at the discretion of the Chief and Deputy Chief of Army Staff. The cadres are authorised 30 days of leave in a year. Long leave to officers and others is granted in special or exceptional cases. Similarly, a clear hierarchy has been laid down for promotions, discharge/resignation, and honours and awards.

There is a lot of emphasis on discipline, with stress on personal example, laid out at the very beginning of their booklet. It states, 'Each and every senior officer in the Boroland Army should be exemplary for learning of good discipline and be the institution imparting national responsibility to the juniors.'<sup>34</sup> Commenting on equality, it says, 'Propagation and practice of "ism" such as "groupism", "nepotism", "sectarianism", "regionalism" that are detrimental to integrity of the army personnel in the Boroland Army is strictly prohibited and is subject to severe punishment.'<sup>35</sup> Desertion is seriously dealt with, and those found guilty of it may be given a death sentence. Any cases of surrender are similarly dealt with.

## Failed Accord

The first Bodo Accord signed between the ABSU and the Government of Assam failed because of the rigid stands adopted by both parties. The euphoria of peace and a lasting settlement was, however, short-lived. Soon after the Accord, violence broke

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<sup>31</sup> 'The Formation of Bodoland Army', 7 February 1995, a report signed by D.R. Nabla, President, NDFB.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*: 6.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*: 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*: 14.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*: 14.

out once more, only this time it was the non-Bodos who were the target of attempted ethnic cleansing, as is evident from the pattern of violence.<sup>36</sup> In two phases in 1996 and 1998 respectively the Bodo terrorists stepped up violent activities against the Santhals in a bid to reassert their dominance in the area. The second phase in 1998 also saw violence acts against Muslims in yet another bid to carry out ethnic cleansing. It will be relevant to discuss the reasons for these acts of terrorism.

The Bodo militants probably felt that this would clear certain areas of non-Bodos making the Bodos a majority and, thereby, cementing their case for the amalgamation of additional villages and areas, into their proposed council. Second, it was also probably their intention to prove to the people and the government that it was their writ that ran in these areas and that unless their demands were met, they were capable of embarrassing them. Third, it is likely that the militants felt that this kind of pressure might force the government into negotiations on their terms instead of undertaking the risk of further violence in these areas, especially with the ULFA pressurising the security forces on a second flank. Fourth, the Bodos had no option but to resort to a hardline approach, given the hype they had generated amidst the common people. While the BLTF was asking for a separate state, the NDFB was demanding a sovereign country. Given these tall claims, their only option was to press for the achievement of the promises they had made.

In the post-1998 period the situation improved in the region as the government reached a ceasefire agreement with the BLTF in March 2000. In fact, this agreement was further cemented when the BLTF cadres agreed to assist the security forces in hunting down NDFB cadres. Simultaneously talks between the government and BLTF progressed and raised hopes for peace in the area. This agreement was extended twice in 2001.

One aspect, which became a cause of worry for both the government and the security forces, was the perceptible link that had developed between NDFB and the NSCN(IM) and ULFA. These links seemed to be in the fields of training, intelligence and the use of each other's sanctuaries whenever pressure was applied by the security forces. The NDFB's political proximity to the ULFA was obvious in the demands they made as a pre-condition to holding talks with the government, which were similar to ULFA demands. These demands, which were put forth on 15 December 2001, were as follows:

- That the talks should be held in a foreign country.
- That the talks must be held under the supervision of the United Nations (UN). And
- That the talks must discuss the issue of Assam's sovereignty.

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<sup>36</sup> From 27 May to 27 July 1996 over a 100 people were killed by Bodo terrorists. On 23 May 1996, approximately 80 people were killed and 100,000 were driven homeless in clashes between Bodos and Santhals in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts. On 16 September 1998, NDFB terrorists killed seven Santhals and eight members of the Orang ethnic group. On 11 October 1988 BLTF terrorists killed 13 Assamese and Bengali speaking people of Darrang district. On 12 December 1998, terrorists killed 23 Muslim settlers in Kokrajhar district ([www.sapt.org](http://www.sapt.org)).

It was evident that the group was aiming at ensuring security for themselves, while gaining international recognition of their problems and raising their profile. These demands were probably exaggerated, yet their tone and tenor gave an indication of the mindset of the group.

The ongoing ceasefire with BLTF increased the frequency of clashes between them (the BLTF) and the NDFB. The NDFB also resorted to killing ABSU leaders in an attempt to pressurise their opponents. This came out in the open with a press release by a representative of the NDFB.

On 16 January 2001, the group, through a press release, announced its plan for selective killings targeting rival Bodo organisations such as the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) and the All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation (ABWWF). Within three days of the announcement, three BLT cadres were killed by suspected NDFB terrorists at Bijni.<sup>37</sup>

## Hopes of Peace

As 2002 came to an end hopes for a negotiated settlement began to rise. There were indications that the ongoing negotiations between the government and BLTF were fructifying into an agreement which could bring a semblance of peace to the area. Finally, on 10 February 2003, a Tripartite Accord was signed between the central government, the state government of Assam and the BLTF. This finally paved the way for the formation of the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC). This historic agreement was signed in the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, the Chief Minister of Assam, Tarun Gogoi, the Minister for State for Home, I.D. Swami and Harin Pathak, Union Minister of State for Defence. The Accord proposed the scrapping of the BAC (also stated in the first Accord), immediately after the formation of the new BTC. It was further proposed that the BTC have 46 members, of which six would be nominated by the Governor of Assam. 'As many as 3,082 villages have been identified for inclusion in the proposed council, which would be divided into four contiguous districts after reorganising of existing districts of Assam within six months of the agreement.'<sup>38</sup>

There was also an agreement to set up a panel to decide on the inclusion of another 95 villages within a period of 90 days. The settlement also reserved 30 of the 46 seats on the BTC for the tribals, five for non-tribals residing in the area, and five were left open to the entire population of the area under the BTC. This agreement, which was the result of 17 rounds of talks, brought some hope to the

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<sup>37</sup> [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

<sup>38</sup> *The Hindustan Times*, 11 February 2003.



region. It remains to be seen whether groups like the NDFB also agree to the settlement—a proposition which seems highly unlikely in the near future. This is a major hurdle to the successful implementation of the settlement. Alternatively, it may have been an ideal, though a far more difficult option, to include all the rival groups in arriving at a settlement, given the considerable variations in their demands and ideology.

The setting up of the BTC is a test of the people's will to bring peace and tranquillity to a region marred by violence and bloodshed. Whether they will rise to the task remains to be seen.

## Chapter 12

# Nagaland

### Background

Nagaland is a lush green, picturesque region of pristine beauty enveloped in dew-bathed hills and virgin jungles. The state, which has for the most part been wrapped in a shroud of secrecy, satisfied and content with its modest requirements and tribal culture, first bedazzled the outside world when the British decided to lift the veil of the unknown. They opened up the state, giving the Naga people their first glimpse of the outside world. Despite the primitive and at times harsh sense of natural justice of the people with a past history of headhunting traditions, a quiet calm pervades the region as if still untouched by the corrupting influences of the outside world. As one enters the state from Dimapur, moving further into the heart of Nagaland, the green hills roll their way into the visitor's heart. The sudden rush of clouds draping the surroundings lifts the spirits, enlivening the journey.

Nagaland is bordered by Myanmar (Burma) to its east with the Patkai Range extending into Myanmar providing ideal conditions for infiltration and training for guerrilla warfare. Arunachal Pradesh is to the north, Assam to the west and Manipur to the south. The areas of Manipur to the south are hilly and predominantly Naga dominated, as is the Tirap region of Arunachal Pradesh bordering it in the north.<sup>1</sup> The North Cachar Hills District bordering Nagaland and Manipur is also populated by Nagas besides the Hmars who support the Naga insurgency.<sup>2</sup> It is this geo-political location which the Naga militants have used for safe sanctuaries, training and safe passage, as will be seen later in this chapter. The rivers in the state flow for the most part from the south to the north, meandering through Nagaland's lush green interior.

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<sup>1</sup> As will be identified and discussed later, the Tirap region is controlled by the Khaplang faction of NSCN and the hilly regions of Manipur by NSCN(IM).

<sup>2</sup> This support prompted the Naga militants to use their territory as a route for bringing weapons from Bangladesh and Myanmar (Nayar 2000: 147-50).

The region has remained relatively isolated, to a large extent because of the distinct linguistic differences amongst the different tribes and sometimes even within the same tribe. According to Y.D. Gundevia:

The reason for this linguistic isolation is not far to seek. The tribes lived in physical seclusion and, what is more, they were always at war with one another. The impenetrable jungle and the formidable nature of the mountain ranges enforced their isolation.... The very geography of this region contributed to independent development of this multi-lingual society in the eastern hills.<sup>3</sup>

It is in this heaven of natural beauty that the first struggle for self-determination, self-rule and the first assertion for independence germinated. In fact the Naga's tryst with destiny and history began on the same night when the first Prime Minister of independent India gave his rousing and stirring address. Before the clock struck midnight and the early morning rays of a nascent India could filter through 5,000 years of rich cultural heritage and history, its first challenge had already been announced when the gauntlet of cessation was thrown by Phizo, who declared the independence of Nagaland on 14 August 1947.<sup>4</sup>

Phizo was the leader of the Naga National Council (NNC). He charged the government with going back on its words when his interpretation of the Akbar Hydari Accord was not accepted. He perceived a referendum after 10 years of signing of the Accord to decide the future of Naga people, a contention which was rejected by the government. An analysis of the contentious ninth point will be analysed in a subsequent section. Phizo ordered conduct of a 'referendum' in May 1951 with '99 per cent people supporting "independence"'. He later formed the Naga Federal Government (NFG) and the Naga Federal Army (NFA) on 22 March 1956 after he had boycotted the first elections in the state in 1952. As a result of the growing violence initiated by the NFA, the Assam Police, the Assam Rifles and subsequently the army was deployed in the region to tackle the situation.

With an aim to bring peace in the state and give them the right of self-governance, Nagaland was made a state within the Indian Union on 1 December 1963. This was immediately followed by a peace mission on 1 April 1964 comprising of eminent personalities like Jai Prakash Narayan, B.P. Chaliha and Rev Michael Scott. Soon an agreement for suspension of operations was reached and talks commenced. However, after six rounds which ended in a deadlock, talks terminated in 1967. The government accused the NNC, NFG and NFA of secret parleys with the Chinese and of clandestine operations. This led to the banning of the three organisations in 1972 and launch of operations against them. The pressure and political will on both sides resulted in signing of the Shillong Accord

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<sup>3</sup> Gundevia 1975: 5.

<sup>4</sup> 'However, the younger independent India blatantly denied Naga independence and began to invade the Independent Nagaland using her brute armed forces.' (*Naga Army Rules and Regulations: Government of the People's Republic of Nagaland*, p. 1, based on pamphlet printed and circulated by the NSCN[IM].)

in 1975, bringing hope for peace to the region. However, the Accord was rejected by a section of the NNC. They formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) under the leadership of Thuengaling Muivah, Isak Chisi Swu and S.S. Khaplang on Myanmar (Burmese) soil in 1980. The organisation recommenced operations against the security forces. The NSCN faced another split in 1988 when NSCN(K) was formed under the leadership of S.S. Khaplang. The other group was led by Isak Swu and Muivah, called the NSCN(IM).

The NSCN(IM) has emerged as the most powerful group over the years. A breakthrough was achieved when a cease-fire was negotiated in 1997 with NSCN(IM) and talks have been going on since then, bringing hopes for a peaceful settlement.

## Historical Legacy

It is difficult to specifically pinpoint the precise time in history when the Nagas settled in present-day India. However, a reasonable assumption is that they probably followed the Bodos in their migration to the region. The Naga language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages, which is spoken by about 175 communities in the North-east.<sup>5</sup> Their advent into the region was well before the Ahoms, as the history of the Ahom's passage into India mentions their clashes with the Nagas en route.

The Nagas are not a single entity as the name may sometimes imply to those unfamiliar with the region and its people. The word 'Naga' is too difficult to explain in terms of its origin and usage. It may be a recent inclusion by the British in an attempt to collectively refer to the various tribes in the area. The generic term Naga encompasses within its ambit 32 tribes of Indo-Mongoloid origin, which are spread over a number of states. Of these 16 reside in Nagaland, seven in Manipur, three in Tirap in Arunachal Pradesh and in the North Cachar and Karbi Anglong districts of Assam. There are five tribes in Burma as well.<sup>6</sup>

The various Naga tribes in the region are proud, distinct social entities. They speak different dialects and follow traditions specific to their clans. The common or link language among the Nagas is Nagamese and English. Over the years there has been a distinct effort in this direction to enable greater communication and understanding between various tribes, who would otherwise more closely identify with their tribe rather than the Naga people as a whole. The tribes as a general rule are fiercely independent and proud of their age-old culture and customs. Tribes like the Konyaks and Semas have a hereditary and feudal system of headmen, while the Ao and Tankhuls administer themselves through a village council. Most Nagas villages are separate entities, which are mostly self-sufficient. They are also fortified,

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<sup>5</sup> K.S. Singh 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Verghese 1996: 83.

which is very probably a legacy of the days when inter-tribe rivalry led to raids and attacks on each other for control over pastures and jungle land.

The Nagas are predominantly Christian with an overwhelming 98 per cent converting to Christianity after coming into contact with Christian missionaries.<sup>7</sup> This has given the otherwise distinct and often warring Naga tribes a semblance of unity and a common platform through the church, which enjoys an important and powerful role in the Naga polity. This factor has also helped the Nagas broaden their outlook and perspective, bringing the ideals of liberty, independence of thought and expression, and pride in their culture and traditions.

The history of Nagas has not been documented and whatever little is known about them is through references to them in historical accounts of other states. There is reference to Naga tribals raiding the kingdoms of Ahom rulers. This was, however, reversed through a policy of appeasement by King Pratap Singha (1603–41) and the pursuance of trade and commerce with some of the Naga tribes. There is also reference to King Gadadhar Singh marrying an Ao girl Sentishila.<sup>8</sup> According to Assamese folklore there is mention of marriages between Assamese and Nagas, though not as a matter of common occurrence. Another occurrence was the ascent of a Naga named Panheiba to the throne of Manipur in 1714, a rare incident in the lineage of Manipuri kings. Panheiba changed his name to Garib Nawaz and adopted Vaishnavism as the state religion, giving Hinduism a boost in the region. Other than these rare and occasional cases of social interaction, Naga society remained isolated in the region during the eighteenth century.

Y.D. Gundevia in his book, *War and Peace in Nagaland*, while delineating British periods of influence in the region, divides the period into four distinct phases. The first, according to him, was one of non-interference which he terms 'control from without', and which lasted from 1839 to 1846. The second was of offensive expeditions which he terms 'expeditions and control from within', and which lasted from 1847 to 1850. The third was a period of peace where a live and let-live policy was followed. He calls this a period of 'non-interference', and states that it lasted from 1851 to 1861. The last period was the one which led to the amalgamation of the Nagas into the British Empire. This he describes as the period of control from 'within and gradual absorption into British India'.

In June 1877 the Government of India addressed the Secretary of State on the subject of the policy to be followed in future in Naga Hills. It was admitted that up to date the objects kept in view had merely been the peace of our own border. No attempt had been made to civilise the Nagas, or maintain order among them, save so far as our immediate interests were concerned. It was proposed, therefore, to move the head-quarters station to some locality in the interior of

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<sup>7</sup> The present religious mix of the State is 88 per cent Christians, 10 per cent Hindus and 2 per cent Muslims (Census of India, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Verghese 1996: 12.

the hills, and to strengthen the administrative staff, so as to provide for the management, on the new and more active principles, of both the Eastern and Western tribes.<sup>9</sup>

The reader may get the impression that the British exercised direct control over the Naga areas. Instead, the British preferred to administer the region by giving the Naga tribes as much independence as was possible, while at the same time ensuring relative peace and tranquillity within and around the region. They also made buffer regions between Nagaland, Manipur and Assam by forcing the Kukis to migrate and settle in areas bordering Naga regions as a 'punishment' for the Kuki revolt against the British in 1917–18. This policy of non-interference and relative autonomy vis-à-vis other states of the North-east suited the Naga psyche and traditional lifestyle well. It is relevant to note that it is this policy of relative autonomy which the Nagas used to bargain for independence, citing the British system of administration as a precedent.

The British opinion that the Nagas should be left to themselves for basic administrative functions prompted them to come up with the regulation marking the 'inner line' on 1 November 1873. Its main provision stated:

The Local Government by notification in the Calcutta Gazette, prohibit all British subjects, or any class of British subjects, or any persons, sending in or passing through, such districts, from going beyond such line without a pass under the hand and seal of the executive officer to such district, of such officer as he may authorise from time to time cancel or vary such prohibition.<sup>10</sup>

This kept the British away from routine administrative functions inside of the 'inner line' within which were situated the Naga areas. This was probably also prompted by the lack of commercial and trade interests in the region and the relative lack of communications linking the area. As Lord Dalhousie stated in a minute:

I dissent entirely from the policy which is recommended of what is called obtaining a control, that is to say, of taking possession of the hills, and of establishing our sovereignty over their savage inhabitants. Our possession could bring no profit to us and it would be unproductive.<sup>11</sup>

The inner line was, however, shifted a number of times in favour of the Assamese and the Manipuris to enable them to exploit certain areas for tea gardens and control reserve forests. This resulted in the Naga area receiving the least developmental effort and remaining backward during the early part of British rule. It was also influenced by the lack of proximity of the region to nearby commercial centres like

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<sup>9</sup> A. Mackenzie 1979: 130.

<sup>10</sup> Inner Line Regulation, 1873.

<sup>11</sup> Lord Dalhousie's *Minutes as Regard to the Relations to be Maintained with the Angami Nagas*, 20 February 1851.

Chittagong and Calcutta. However, the British were forced to build roads linking Dimapur, Kohima and Imphal, going further into Burma during the Second World War due to compulsions necessitated by the Japanese invasion.

The Naga tribes also benefited from Christian missionaries who went into the interiors to educate and work for the welfare of the people. B.G. Verghese writes:

... their role in the educational and cultural development and social reform among the tribal peoples are remarkable. By bestowing on them a written language and script, often English and Roman in the absence of an indigenous alternative, they brought about awareness and a sense of group identity.

It is also an undeniable fact that the majority of conversions in the state took place in view of the welfare activities undertaken by the missionaries in the region. The line between education and spread of Christianity became blurred, more so in the states where people slowly understood the value of good education for which the credit goes to the Christian missionaries.

Besides education and religion which unified the Nagas, they were also exposed to sweeping changes from the outside world when they were employed as porters during the First World War by the British in France. This changed their outlook and made them aware of concepts such as freedom, liberty and independence.

Organised Naga representation commenced in 1918 with the formation of the Naga Club. This was the first organisation to bring about a convergence of varying strands of thought among the Naga people as to their future after India gained her independence. The Simon Commission came to India in 1929. This provided the Naga Club with an opportunity to put forth their point of view to the Commission. As per NSCN records their view was as follows: 'We should not be thrust to the mercy of the people who have never conquered us ourselves and to whom we were never subjected, but to leave us alone.'<sup>12</sup>

Some of the sentiments of Naga leaders were echoed by the British as well, who were keen to retain their influence over the region. The Deputy Commissioner of Nagaland, Dr G.H. Hutton, said:

... the interest of the hill tracts would not be served by including them in the reforms. On the contrary, they would suffer on account of being tied to the politically more advanced plain districts. At the same time, the latter was also likely to suffer in the future, with people of irreconcilable culture in an unnatural union which could ultimately only entail discomfort for both parties. Culturally, hillmen had been neither part nor lot in Hinduism or Islam.<sup>13</sup>

At this juncture, it will be pertinent to analyse the contention of some Naga leaders like Phizo Angami and Rev. Micheal Scott. They said, 'the Nagaland of today, or

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<sup>12</sup> Official NSCN website.

<sup>13</sup> Acharya 1995: 223.

the Naga Hills and Tuensang district of the British days, was never a part of British India...'. This contention obviously is more an emotional statement than one based on historical fact. Assam came under British control with the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826. This was followed by the conquest of Nagaland (as we know it today) in stages and ultimately, 'The Naga Hills area had been formed into a separate district under the Lieutenant Governorship of Bengal, in 1866, with its headquarters at Samaguting.'<sup>14</sup> In 1874 Assam was separated from Bengal and the Naga Hills District became a part of it. It was also declared a 'Scheduled District' in the same year.<sup>15</sup> Sub-divisions were set up at Wokha and Mokokchung in 1875 and 1890 to assist in better administration of the region. In 1919, Assam became a Governorship and the Naga Hills was declared a 'Backward Tract'. 'The power of the Governor-General in Council to legislate for the Naga Hills district by Regulation, under Section 71 of the Government of India Act, 1915, also continued to be in operation.'<sup>16</sup>

Based on certain recommendations of the Simon Commission, the Government of India Act of 1935 was promulgated. According to the Act, the Naga Hills District was formed and the area was included in the 'Excluded Areas'.

Under the Government of India Act 1935, which was passed on the recommendations of the Simon Commission, the 'Naga Hills District' was declared to be treated as 'Excluded Areas' on 3 March 1935. It was also stated that no Act of the Federal Legislature or of Assam Legislature was to apply to the Naga Hills. Under Section 92 of the 1935 Act, the executive authority of the province of Assam extended to the Naga Hills district, but as an excluded area the Governor exercised his functions in his discretion in all matters relating to the hills district.<sup>17</sup>

The Nagas were kept as the special responsibility of the governor of the province in his capacity as the representative of the British crown. Thus, the Naga area was not brought within the fold of Indian policy. This is a flawed contention deliberately aimed at misleading the people. As has been discussed earlier in the book, 'Excluded Areas' did not imply areas excluded from the rest of the region. It was a term which indicated greater regional autonomy where the administrative control of the British was restricted. However, undiluted political control continued to remain with the British. Similarly, administration of the area by the governor instead of the Assam

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<sup>14</sup> Gundevia 1975: 47.

<sup>15</sup> The connotation of the Scheduled District was minimal interference by the government for the routine running of the region. Despite political control over the area, the British were keen to give the region as much regional autonomy as was possible to enable the Nagas to continue with their customary laws and procedures. It also ensured minimal problems in an area which had limited economic viability.

<sup>16</sup> Gundevia 1975: 48.

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



legislature was along the same lines as that of the 'Union Territories' in today's political context.

The constitutional position of Naga Hills district (the present districts of Kohima and Mokokchung) until 15th August 1947, was thus that of a regular district within the province of Assam, and it was as much a part of British India as any other district in any other province of India.<sup>18</sup>

The Nagas were again exposed to the outside world during the Second World War when the British employed them as 'guides'. Their gains during the war did not only include exposure to the outside world. They were also able to collect weapons from the British as gifts, and from the Japanese who left behind large caches during their hasty retreat.<sup>19</sup>

The last years before Independence were marked by desperate attempts by Nagas to convince the British regarding their case for sovereignty and independence. The first substantive endeavour in this direction came after the British formally announced their decision to grant independence to India in February 1947. This was followed by hectic activity by the Constituent Assembly led by Nehru and the newly formed NNC. While Nehru attempted to amalgamate Nagas into the Indian Union after Independence, the Nagas desperately tried to gain their independence from both India and Pakistan. It will be relevant here to analyse the role played by the NNC at this juncture. The members of the NNC were divided into two distinct factions. The hardliners were led by Angami Zapu Phizo. Describing him, Sanjoy Hazarika says, '... the first impression was, "How small he is!" Yet, one could not but marvel at the passion, energy and commitment which fired this slight figure.'<sup>20</sup> It is also interesting to note that Phizo hailed from the powerful Angami Naga village of Knonoma—a village which was at the centre of armed resistance against the British in their effort to conquer Nagaland.<sup>21</sup> A more detailed character sketch of Phizo elaborates on his 'fundamentalist missionary outlook', which subsequently turned 'revolutionary' when faced with adversity. His views were more a reflection of a 'sacred mission' than merely politics. Phizo gave his views a religious fervour, thereby tightly integrating the common people. He was also 'single-minded and dogged'. While this uncompromising attitude helped him to pursue his aim, it won him many enemies both within and outside the NNC. Phizo was also a fiery orator and had excellent organisational abilities—two factors which shaped his

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.: 48–49.

<sup>19</sup> Praval 1987: 413.

<sup>20</sup> Northeast Vigil, '100 People Who Shaped India', *India Today*, 2000. The article by Sanjoy Hazarika on the website is based on an interview conducted by him.

<sup>21</sup> Writing about the village, Mackenzie states, 'Meanwhile in December 1950, the tenth Naga expedition left to relieve Lieutenant Vincent. After with difficulty capturing a strong Naga fort at Konemah and fighting a bloody battle against great masses of the tribes at Kekremah, the troops were eventually in March 1951 withdrawn from the hills. In 1851 no fewer than 22 Naga raids were reported, in which 55 persons were killed, 10 wounded, and 113 taken captive.'

meteoric rise in the region. The other group of moderates was led by the secretary of the NNC Theyieu Sakhrie. They were amenable to entering into a settlement with the Indians after due deliberation in a spirit of mutual adjustment. The years preceding Independence witnessed many conflicting opinions voiced by India's nationalist leaders, which may have led to the Naga demand for independence. Pandit Nehru, initially opining on the issue, said:

... it may be desirable to fix a period, say ten years after independence after the establishment of the free Indian state, at the end of which the right to secede may be exercised through proper constitutional processes and in accordance with the clearly expressed will of the inhabitants of the area concerned.<sup>22</sup>

However, his opinion on the matter changed after he was elected President of the Indian National Congress, and in an official letter to Sakhrie he clearly said that Nagaland was not capable of 'political' and 'economic' independence given its landlocked location between China and India. He further suggested that Nagaland become a part of India where it would be granted 'as much autonomy and freedom as possible' to enable the people of the state to 'live their lives according to their own customs and desires'.<sup>23</sup>

The Nagas did not agree with Nehru's suggestion, wishing to tread a middle path. While agreeing to allow India to act as a 'guardian power' for a period of 10 years, they wanted the right of self-determination at the end of this period. This became the line of action and thinking of the NNC by May 1947, which led to breakdown of talks between representatives of the Constituent Assembly and the NNC. The task of finding a common ground and negotiating with the NNC was thereafter given to Sir Akbar Hydari who finally succeeded in signing the Nine-Point Agreement with the NNC on 29 June 1947 (refer to Appendix M for the text of this agreement). The ninth clause of this agreement made it controversial almost as soon as it had been signed. This clause stated that:

the Governor of Assam, as Agent of the Government of Indian Union, will have a special responsibility for a period of ten years to ensure the due observance of this agreement; at the end of this period the NNC will be asked whether they require this agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people be arrived at.<sup>24</sup>

Both the parties—the Nagas and the Indian government—interpreted this clause differently. While the Nagas claimed that this agreement gave them the right to self-determination at the end of 10 years, the government was of the opinion that it merely gave them the option of having modifications incorporated into this

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<sup>22</sup> Nehru 1946.

<sup>23</sup> Murkot 1988.

<sup>24</sup> Nine-Point Agreement, 29 June 1947.

agreement after a period of 10 years. The separatist view on the subject is indicated by the NSCN website, which states:

According to the agreement Nagas had to control the whole affairs of themselves for a period of 10 years at the end of which Nagas should be asked to decide—whether to join India or to be free to determine their own future.<sup>25</sup>

It must be stated, though, that the text of the agreement does not support the line taken by the separatists as it only gives the option for re-negotiation of the agreement. At the cost of repetition, it will be pertinent to reiterate the last line of the agreement, which states that, ‘... they require this agreement to be extended for a further period or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people be arrived at’.<sup>26</sup>

A hot debate also ensued in the NNC between the hardliners and moderates. Phizo and his supporters, who were in the minority in NNC, rejected the agreement. He wanted to press for independence, while the majority wished to accept and endorse the provisions of the agreement. This led to Phizo’s taking a hardline stance and declaring independence on 14 August 1947. This declaration was sent to the Government of India and the United Nations by the NNC. It stated that:

Benign Excellency (.) Kindly put on record that Nagas will be independent (.) Discussion with India are being carried on to that effect (.) Nagas do not accept Indian Constitution (.) The right of the people must prevail regardless of size (.)

Naga National Council<sup>27</sup>

This declaration of independence by the Phizo-led faction occurred on the eve of the Indian Union being declared independent on 15 August 1947. The NNC did not put their governmental machinery into effect based on a promise they claim they had received from Mahatma Gandhi on 19 July 1947 at Bhangi Colony, New Delhi, which stated that:

Nagas have every right to be Independent. We did not want to live under the domination of the British and they are now leaving us. I want you to feel that India is yours. I feel that the Naga Hills are mine as much as they are yours, but if you say, it is mine, then the matter must stop there. I believe in the brotherhood of man, but I do not believe in forced unions. If you do not wish to join the Union of India, nobody will force you to do that. The Congress government will not do that.

When the Naga delegates pointed out that Sir Akbar Hydari was threatening to do exactly that, Gandhi exclaimed, ‘Sir Akbar is wrong. He cannot do that. I will come to the Naga Hills; will ask them to shoot me first before one Naga is shot.’<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Official NSCN website.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

The Naga separatists who were impressed by Mahatma Gandhi and his principles of fair play have not forgotten the significance of this statement, despite the fact that it was not backed by any legislative or constitutional authority.

The chairman of the NSCN Isak Chisi Swu, addressing his 'countrymen' on the occasion of the '50th Independence Day Celebrations' from the 'British', said:

Fifty years on this very day, 14th August 1947, the great leader of our Naga Nation, Angami Zapu Phizo, the President of the Naga National Council, declared the independence of the Nagas under the British rule. Thank God. Had it not been done precisely on that very day, the history of the Nagas would have been one of the humiliation and of loss without a trace. A lost Nation has no glory. It is lost to servility. No philosophy and no future will praise it for as an inheritance. Thank God for His unsearchable plan. The Nagas are saved. It is a reality!<sup>29</sup>

## Independence and After

After Independence the Indian government, in an attempt to satisfy the Naga leaders, incorporated the Sixth Schedule into the Indian Constitution. This included most of the nine provisions of the Akbar Hydari Agreement, and the points submitted by the NNC prior to Independence in a memorandum to the Cabinet Mission on 19 June 1946.<sup>30</sup> However, in all probability the provisions and safeguards were not explained to the tribal leaders and the common man, which resulted in hardline elements in Naga society taking advantage of the time lag between the end of British rule and establishment of faith in the Indian political system.

Phizo's declaration of independence led to his arrest on 9 July 1948.<sup>31</sup> However, he was released soon after.<sup>32</sup>

This would be the single most costly error made by the Indian authorities, an error for which no logical explanation ever came except that it was a case where compassion beclouded a vital decision of a member or some members of the Indian civil service.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> [www.angelfire.com/mo/Nagaland/speeches.html](http://www.angelfire.com/mo/Nagaland/speeches.html).

<sup>30</sup> The Memorandum asked for, (a) Solidarity of all Naga tribes, including those in the unadministered areas. (b) Protest against grouping of Assam with Bengal. (c) Naga Hills should be constitutionally included in an autonomous Assam in a free India, with local autonomy and due safeguards for the interests of the Nagas. (d) The Naga tribes should have a separate electorate.

<sup>31</sup> [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org).

<sup>32</sup> It is revealed that Phizo was released on 'compassionate grounds' because of his wife meeting with an accident in which she was injured and one of his children died. The release proved very costly for the Indian government in their quest for normalcy in Nagaland.

<sup>33</sup> Nibedon 1983: 40.

Phizo took advantage of his hold over the NNC and was elected its president in 1950. This gave him the necessary political power, something which he had not been able to wield previously. This, combined with his anti-India rhetoric laced with negative projections of India as Hindu-dominated, which according to him would cause smaller minority Christian-dominated areas like Nagaland to be engulfed, worked to begin an uprising. In order to further substantiate his claims of the widespread willingness of people to secede, he held a 'plebiscite' on 16 May 1951, and unilaterally declared that 99 per cent of the Naga people wanted independence. Phizo's hold over the innocent and simple Nagas was by now strong enough to ensure that no candidates filed their nominations for general elections held in the country in 1952, which were thus boycotted in totality by the Nagas. This was a stark indicator of the emergence of a secessionist movement in Nagaland, and the degree to which it had succeeded in gaining a firm foothold. The movement had already entered the first phase of a low intensity struggle, and steps were now necessary to control its spread. However, these steps were not initiated by the government, which probably saw these first signs of trouble brewing as nothing more than a passing phase in the amalgamation of fringe regions into the Indian Union.

The final attempt at the Indian government and Phizo coming to a settlement was made when Phizo met Prime Minister Nehru in 1951. This led to sharp exchanges of contrasting views and Nehru said, 'In the context of affairs both in India and in the world, it was impossible to consider, even for a moment, such an absurd demand for independence of the Nagas.' This statement of Nehru's probably cleared the fog of indecision in the minds of the Naga leaders, who then decided to make their intentions clear when Nehru visited Kohima with his daughter Indira and U Nu, the Burmese Premier (30 March 1953). The reception he witnessed may not have left any doubt in his mind about the Naga reaction to the views he had expressed on Naga independence.

...as Nehru and his cavalcade started moving towards the podium, the Naga assemblage started moving out. All efforts to restrain them failed. And to top it all, the Nagas left in full purview smacking their bottoms. This gesture of the Nagas is a sign of their complete frustration and disdain.<sup>34</sup>

The Naga intent was clear and the central government responded. Within a few days the house of Sakhrie, followed by those of other leaders, were raided, driving them underground. Armed insurrection had begun in Nagaland.

Phizo used certain incidents, which were nothing more than routine law and order problems, that occurred during the next three years in the state to prove to the gullible Nagas that the Government of India intended to suppress the peace loving people of Nagaland.<sup>35</sup> He used these incidents with telling effect to incite

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.: 48.

<sup>35</sup> Praval (1987) gives details of these incidents. On 4 April 1953, the house of a NNC leader was raided soon after Prime Minister Nehru's visit, followed by the search of several villages and

violence, thereby giving birth to the first armed insurgency movement in the country. He was also clever enough to slowly integrate the long autonomous region of Tuensang into his struggle, well understanding the importance of its relatively inaccessible jungles to the guerrilla movement, and the strength the inclusion of its warlike tribes of Konyaks, Changs and Phoms could provide. In contrast, the attempts by certain leaders in the Indian government, including Prime Minister Nehru, to visit the region did not have the desired impact at the grassroots level, because of a lack of effective communication—a weakness that Phizo fully exploited. There was no leader of Phizo's stature or organisational skills with the will to oppose him in the region, especially immediately after Independence, when it was widely perceived that Naga pride had been wounded at not being granted their own independence. Indian leaders neither had the requisite standing in the region nor the undivided attention to concentrate on it, given the numerous problems facing independent India. The only exception was Mahatma Gandhi who continues to be referred to with due respect and reverence in all the underground literature of the Naga insurgents. Unfortunately, after his death, Naga leaders were not able to draw similar inspiration and confidence from other national leaders. Isak Chishi Swu, addressing the Society of Threatened Peoples on 1 August 1995, said, 'Nagas were never shaken in their faith in the non-violent doctrine of Mahatma Gandhi and in his leadership.'

Phizo very probably understood the impossibility of India granting Nagaland its independence, given the implications that this would have. Despite assurances from Mahatma Gandhi, he was aware of India's geo-political and local political compulsions. He wrote, 'Recognition of Naga independence may lead to other demands for separation from Indian minorities like the Tamils, and thus to a gradual crumbling away of the Union.' But he immediately goes on to add:

if any minority within India rejects and detests its Indian connection with a determination equal to that of invaded Nagaland, then the Union is a monstrous act of tyranny. Nagaland, anyway, cannot be compared to such areas, since it has never been a part of India.<sup>36</sup>

Phizo gave further impetus to his drive against the central government, when he declared the formation of the Republican Government of Free Nagaland on 18 September 1954 at Katunga.<sup>37</sup> The die had been cast, with Phizo determined to take the violent route towards the realisation of his objective. It has to be appreciated that at the time the central government, the government of Assam of which

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a number of arrests. Another incident involved the deployment of an infantry battalion in the Tuensang Region dominated by Konyak Nagas in early 1955. There were incidents of raids on Assam Rifle posts and massacre of anti-Phizo villagers, for which the battalion was employed to control the region.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted from Nibedon (1983: 37).

<sup>37</sup> Verghese 1996: 88.

Nagaland was then a part, the police, the paramilitary forces (the Assam Rifles) and the army were not geared up for an insurrection within the country. The euphoria of gaining Independence and the expectation of the fruits of freedom did little to prepare the nation for dissent within its borders, especially armed and violent dissent. Phizo had planned to exploit this unpreparedness to the hilt by covertly preparing for an armed struggle from the time he was elected president of the NNC without announcing his intentions in the open. He organised the Naga Federal Army (NFA), an organisation loosely based on the hierarchical structure of the Indian Army with 'brigades' and 'battalions' and other similar sub-units. Recruitment was carried out from amongst the local people and expertise was gained from desertions engineered from the Assam Police, Assam Rifles and ex-soldiers in the region. These cadres gave Phizo the ideal material with which he could commence his armed struggle. The organisation, despite its impressive names and ranks, lacked the experience and expertise to execute bold manoeuvres against a trained army. However, Phizo probably understood this shortcoming and preferred to work with the strengths of the cadres, which were the basic hunting skills of Nagas. The guerrillas were adept at living off the land, staying for protracted periods in jungles, and in basic skills of ambushes and raids, which were further sharpened during training. As has been mentioned earlier, Naga isolation came to an end to a large extent with British ingress into the area. They had further political and military exposure during the Second World War, which saw the Nagas fighting along with the British. As a suitable compensation, the Nagas were given rifles by the British, and they had also helped themselves to the caches of weapons that the retreating Japanese had left behind. Thus when insurgency commenced, the Nagas were no longer armed with the rustic spears, daos and crossbows that they had first used against the British, but with modern weapons. Their supply was further augmented from across the border, where Pakistan was more than willing to oblige them. 'Trouble on the strategic eastern border of India, where the Pakistan armies could never hope to create anything like an effective diversion, was a Godsend to the once uniformed Ayubs and the never-uniformed Bhuttos of Pakistan.'<sup>38</sup> The initial encounter between the security forces and the Nagas went in favour of the NFA. Two guerrilla wings had been organised under Thungti Chang and Kaito Sema. They were running amok in Nagaland, and had totally devastated the Assam police.

Kohima was virtually besieged by the guerrillas. Intelligence tickers could not keep pace with the numerous instances of loot, arson, intimidation and attack on police posts, Kaito Thungti and others capturing practically all the weapons and ammunition of the authorities. The Assam police was either on the run or shut up in their beleaguered camps.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Gundeveia 1975: 77.

<sup>39</sup> Nibedon 1983: 73.

The initial encounter between the army and Naga fighters took place after the Assam Rifles had found it difficult to take on an entrenched Naga position at Khekiye in the Tuensang Frontier Division in June 1955. The rebels were finally defeated with the induction of the army. Other major encounters took place at Kyutsukilong along the Zhunghi River and at Khuivi. The striking aspect of these operations was the attempt by the rebels to use conventional tactics against the army, which was probably dictated by the large number of ex-servicemen in the rebel ranks.<sup>40</sup>

As these activities became increasingly apparent to the central government, it decided to come down heavily on the 'underground' (UG) elements. On 27 August 1955, the Assam (Disturbed Areas) Act was proclaimed and the army was called in aid of civil authorities. Nagaland saw the largest deployment of the army in the region in addition to the Assam Rifles. Moderate elements like Sakhrie still professed restraint and probably knew the futility of clashing with the Indian Army. His actions were seen as detrimental to the cause of the hardliners, and this led to his assassination on the night of 18 January 1956. On 22 March 1956 the Naga Federal Government (NFG) was formed, driving the final nail in the coffin of a peaceful settlement in the immediate future.

The remainder of 1956 saw an increase in violence with the initial deployment of a brigade of the army, which had the uphill task of carrying out actions against the UG. Phizo's men followed the dictum of, '*constant vigilance, constant mobility, constant mistrust.*' This made the initial years of counter-insurgency operations very difficult to conduct. There were no discernible and recognisable targets, and intelligence reports were barely forthcoming. The aura, fear and standing of the NNC was still high amongst the common people.

Civil intelligence had yet to compile the growing list of the rebels. Entire villages in the Naga hills had sworn fidelity to Phizo and Sakhrie.... Unlike other counter-insurgency theatres, where the Government troops would know their enemies, here one would not know for sure who was being sought in the bush. This was the dilemma of India in the rugged terrain of Nagaland.<sup>41</sup>

Major K.C. Praval, suggesting the strength of the Naga cadres, wrote, 'Estimates of its strength vary sharply from 5,000 to 15,000, though a rough estimate of 9,000 may be nearer the mark.'<sup>42</sup> After initial setbacks, one of which involved typical guerrilla tactics of delay and feigning negotiations, the Naga leadership managed to escape through the army cordon in the Sema area. However, though the army was unprepared in the beginning, it learnt fast and was soon on the offensive, crippling the ability of the NFA to undertake large-scale actions. The offensive undertaken by the army also resulted in a number of guerrillas surrendering. A large number of arrests were made, which severely limited the abilities of the NFA.

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<sup>40</sup> Palit 1984; Palsokar 1991; Proudfoot 1984.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Praval 1987: 413.



Though the Nagas were used to life in the jungles, protracted exposure to the life of fugitives and the relentless pressure applied by the army, which they very probably had not expected, brought quick results. In December 1956 Phizo escaped from Nagaland, fleeing to Pakistan. This further resulted in a weakening of the offensive movement, and Naga moderate leaders had an opportunity to re-emerge and press for a peaceful settlement. Another factor which resulted in the commencement of peaceful negotiations was the demonstration of the might of the Indian Army, which had been underestimated by the people and purposely underplayed by Phizo.

The army, which was deployed in present-day Nagaland (then Assam) after an insurgency flared up in Malaya against the British government, took a leaf from British tactics of resettlement of the local population to curb support to the guerrillas.<sup>43</sup> The British were engaged in counter-insurgency operations in Malaya, a British colony, from 1948 till 1960. Malaya was a mixed ethnic society, with the Malays forming the majority, and the largest minority community being the Chinese. Indians were the second major ethnic group. The sweeping effects of communism were felt in Malaya when communist revolutionaries led an insurgency movement in the colony against the British government. The main characteristic of the movement was the limitation of popular support to the Chinese, who were mainly 'squatters' and formed a nomadic society that settled on the fringes of jungles. British counter-insurgency forces found that the revolutionaries were sustaining their operations in terms of intelligence and logistics through these squatters, who also provided a majority of the manpower for recruitment. In order to squeeze dry this popular support they came up with a policy of resettlement of squatters, christened the 'Briggs Plan' in honour of General Sir Harold Briggs, Director of Operations in Malaya. The Briggs Plan successfully achieved the mammoth task of resettling 423,000 squatters in 'New Villages' which were self-sufficient in terms of security, housing and cultivation, thereby effectively sealing off the area from the communist guerrillas.

A similar experiment was tried in Nagaland, much to the horror of the local people. The experiment, though immensely successful in Malaya, was destined to fail in Nagaland. The Chinese 'squatters' in Malaya, who were a nomadic group, benefited from their resettlement as the British government had prepared a detailed plan to effect the same. They had surveyed areas for cultivation, constructed semi-developed houses, posted officers of British and Chinese origin in the resettlement camps to ensure that the initial problems involved in the resettlement were minimised, if not totally eliminated. The approach adopted while shifting the squatters, especially the elderly, helped imbibe a feeling of respect amongst them, as they had expected harsh and brusque treatment. A number of methods were thereafter devised to ensure that neither food nor information leaked to the

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<sup>43</sup> Bendangangshi 1993. The plan has been erroneously attributed to General Gerald Templar in Malaya. It finds a similar reference in Vergheze (1996). However, the plan was formulated as the 'Briggs Plan' during the operational command of General Sir Harold Briggs.

militants. At times semi-cooked food was prepared and distributed to ensure that pilferage could not take place.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, Naga society is village-based, with the village as the hub of all activities, and the cultivation areas spread out over a large expanse around them. Even today, attempts to dislodge Nagas from their villages, despite modernisation, may be considered sacrilegious by the people, who are a close-knit society. The Indian government's policy post-Independence, of re-locating the Nagas, was viewed by them as an attempt to impinge on their right to live their age-old way of life. It succeeded in alienating them from not only the government, but also the army. And rather than stopping the flow of support to the militants, it only strengthened the case of the insurgent groups, and enhanced animosity towards the army, which adversely affected its ability to collect intelligence and amalgamate the Naga into the national mainstream.

Thus the attempted application of the principles of psychological warfare, aimed at winning over the population while simultaneously breaking down the militants through well-aimed clinical operations, suffered. The government and the army did learn lessons from the operations in Nagaland, which till date remain vital to all present and future LIC campaigns.

Another aspect which adversely affected the ability of the government and the army to solve the problem was the relative isolation of Nagaland from the rest of the country. Moreover, they had no understanding of the Naga mindset, which was attuned to autonomy. The Nagas wanted their areas to be an autonomous region, outside the 'inner line' regulation and part of the 'Excluded Areas', as in the time of the British. It has been mentioned earlier that there is a false notion that the British treatment of the Naga areas was tantamount to granting the Nagas political autonomy, which was most certainly not the case. The Simon Commission explained the British government's position in no uncertain terms when it said:

The stage of development reached by the inhabitants of these areas prevents the possibility of applying to them methods of representation adopted elsewhere. They do not ask for self-determination, but for security of land tenure and freedom in the pursuit of their ancestral customs. Their contentment does not depend so much on rapid political advancement as on experienced and sympathetic handling, and on protection from economic subjugation by their neighbours.<sup>45</sup>

Some of the British administrators were also interested in maintaining the region as part of a 'Crown Colony' along with certain regions of modern-day Myanmar (Burma). Thus while the British had handled the Nagas sympathetically, fully understanding their mindset, they had retained political control over the Naga

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<sup>44</sup> These methods may have been successful but they very much represent and are characteristic of harsh imperialist and colonial actions, which worked on denial of food, collective punishments and mass disciplining actions—actions the same countries may not be proud of today.

<sup>45</sup> Verghese (1996: 29) as quoted from Murkot (1988).

people. However, the Indian central government, administration and the army's treatment of them lacked knowledge, understanding and sympathy. It must be mentioned, though, that this was more due to the Naga people having been isolated and away from the mainstream, and not due to any genuine antipathy toward the Nagas.

There are conflicting views on the atrocities committed by the security forces and the hostilities in the region. While stray cases of high handedness cannot be ruled out, it is also relevant that most of these cases were dealt with harshly by authorities, given the stringent views of the government on the issue. On the other hand, far-fetched reports were propagated by the ultras and their propaganda machinery, which made interesting reading for people who had an idea of the realities of the region. As Y.D. Gundevia states:

In the 'Naga case', so called, the Indian Security Forces are accused of having butchered over 34,000 men, women and children in the Sema area alone. The total population of the Sema tribe was 39,632 persons according to the Census of 1951. If this figure was correct, more than three-quarter of the tribe should have been wiped out. But in 1961 Census the Semas turned up well over 47,000 strong.<sup>46</sup>

Propaganda by the militants generally turned out to be false, but it often appealed to the common people, and also to human rights groups which had limited knowledge of either the problem or the area.

## Alienation of Nagaland

There was more than one external factor responsible for the process of alienation of the Nagas. First, there was the professed sympathy of the Chinese for the Naga cause. This resulted in a number of militant groups being trained in China. It also led to the arming of Naga militants with sophisticated weapons of Chinese origin. This caused the Naga insurgency to graduate quickly to the second stage of a classical Maoist Communist Revolutionary Movement, posing a potent challenge to the Indian security forces. A letter written by the chairman of the Federal Government of Nagaland (FGN), Khedage, to the Chinese contains requests that help be extended to the Nagas, and statements as to the extent of support expected. It reads as follows:

For the friendly and sympathetic consideration of your Government and your people, I am sending a few persons with Th. Muivah, Plenipotentiary, and Brigadier T.M. Keyho from our Government to Your Excellency with the hope that your excellency will seriously look into our present difficulties. That, as a small nation it was never our intention to do anything which would offend our

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<sup>46</sup> Gundevia 1975: 80.

great neighbour. This is why, oppressed in the extreme, we have been trying to persuade the Government of India to recognise our right to regain our sovereignty after the British left us; yet the Government of India to date has not given way to reason, and as it has become impossible to resist unaided the military might of the Indian armed forces, we have to look to your Government and your people for any possible assistance in any form, so that we may guard our sovereignty through the liberal hands of our people. Our Government feels the paramount necessity of your kind recognition of the existence of the Naga nation and the legality of the Federal Government of Nagaland. So I and my people are anxiously waiting to get some encouraging news from your great and strong country, in the near future, and my people as a small nation will always be grateful to your people.<sup>47</sup>

This letter clearly brings out the last bit of support that the NFG expected from the Chinese. Prior to this they had already received weapons and equipment from the Chinese. This was proved by the capture of weapons caches and literature from the militants.

It will also be pertinent to mention the reasons behind this sudden enmity between China and India, which had touted their friendly relations with India through the much-publicised phrase of 'Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai'. China had invaded Tibet in 1950 from the east and the north-west. The Chinese forces, which entered Tibet from the north-west, had taken a route that passed through the Indian territory of Aksai Chin in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). This caused an outrage in India, which subsided with the newly-found bonhomie between the two countries in 1954. However, when the Chinese press proclaimed, with a degree of self-praise, the building of a road through what seemed to be Indian territory, proclamations of friendship ceased and investigations commenced. Indian Army patrols not only confirmed this information, one of them was also captured and its members returned after a month's captivity. This led to rise in temper on both sides and the border dispute came out in the open. Chinese atrocities in Tibet further led to an endless flow of refugees led by the Dalai Lama, the spiritual head of the Tibetans. Grant of asylum to the Dalai Lama further strained relations between China and India. Despite India agreeing to accept Tibet as an integral part of China, according to B.N. Mullik, chief of the Indian Intelligence Bureau (IB), it also commenced a policy of abetting the Tibetan resistance movement in 1955. He also confirms that Nehru himself had cleared this.<sup>48</sup> Thus it was the Chinese policy of lebensraum which dictated its annexation of Aksai Chin in an unilateral action; this, when resisted by India coupled with India's sympathetic handling of Tibetan insurgency, is what probably led China to repay India in the same coin.

The second external factor which emerged was in the form of Pakistan's bid to destabilise India by encouraging insurgency and secessionism through the

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<sup>47</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 46.

<sup>48</sup> Mullik 1971.

fertile conditions prevalent in Nagaland. This encouragement from erstwhile East Pakistan has its roots in the perils of Partition, which had given the Hindu-dominant area of the Chittagong Hill Tracts to Pakistan. At the time of Partition the Chittagong Hill Tracts had a mixed population of non-Muslims (mainly Hindus, Buddhists and Animists).<sup>49</sup> However, despite this predominantly non-Muslim population, the area was given to Pakistan when the borders were re-drawn. This led to:

Patel's effort to trigger an uprising in the Chittagong Hills Tracts, and the Muslim League's efforts to play an identical game by boosting the Durjoy Kishore-Abdul Barik clique in Tripura... later, Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi, would first cut Pakistan into two by boosting the Bengali rebellion and then personally endorse an identical type of sponsorship of tribal guerrillas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts... Islamabad's aid to Nagas and Mizos, and later to other tribal groups in North-East India, would be met not only by a more effective counter-move in East Bengal, but when the new Bangladeshi state tended to defy Indian dictates the same game would be repeated all over again.<sup>50</sup>

The game of trying to weaken each other, which had been started by Pakistan immediately after Independence, continues to this day between India and Pakistan. The legacy of this bloody history did not spare Bangladesh, which also supported a variety of insurgent movements in the North-east as a counter to Indian attempts at fanning the flames in the Chakma-dominated areas in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Third, the Nagas also consider themselves to belong to a different ethnic lineage and, therefore, do not see any commonality between themselves and the rest of the Indian people. This obvious and factual reality remained a stumbling block in all attempts to get the people of the region to foster closer ties with the rest of the country. On the other hand, historically, the relative lack of communication between this region and the rest of the country has led to it being neglected, as also to a general sense of apathy of the Indian government and people vis-à-vis this area and its people. While other states and people were referred to as distinct identities, Nagas have always been clubbed with a host of distinct peoples in the large general category of the North-east, a fact that has always riled the independent-minded Naga.

Fourth, pre-Independence India saw economic progress and development based on revenue-generating regions or through a security-centric requirement of the British. The Naga areas did not fit the bill on either count, and so they remained underdeveloped. Ironically the Nagas were satisfied with their relative autonomy under British rule at the obvious cost of economic development, which would

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<sup>49</sup> This population is estimated to be as high as 98 per cent by Bhaumik (1996).

<sup>50</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 74.

certainly have come to the region had it been integrated more closely with the rest of the country. This inward-looking, insular and short-sighted approach of the Naga people harmed them materially, as on the eve of Independence and during their limited encounters with rest of the country they saw a sharp contrast in terms of economic development and prosperity. Their backwardness is due in large part to their insistence on remaining aloof and detached from the rest of the country. Despite the problem of an insurgency in Mizoram, its modern outlook makes it a contrast to Nagaland and an interesting case study. The Indian government was unable to dilute the stubborn resistance of the Nagas, nor convince the Naga people and its leaders of its intentions and the advantages of closer integration with the national mainstream.

Fifth, a study of the economies of various Indian states will reveal that the hill regions are relatively less developed economically as compared to the plains. Business, like water, has a habit of following the course of least resistance.<sup>51</sup> Nagaland's hill economy also suffered from this basic disadvantage and instead of making the best of their strengths and resources, they always remained bitter while drawing comparisons with other regions in the country.

Last, the unfortunate and incompetent handling of India's Independence and Partition by Britain led to terrible communal riots and the establishment of the nascent countries of India and Pakistan on a weak foundation. The constituents of these countries were not ready for the transition, nor were the governments capable of following any well thought out and planned sequence of actions, which would have led to a smooth transition of power. The knee jerk reactions at the time of Independence, and the relative amateurish and disinterested fashion of carving of boundaries and states led to disputes which have resulted in numerous wars and LICs in the region. It is unfortunate that nations in South Asia in general, and regions and states in India in particular, continue to pay the price of this half-begun and half-finished exercise of which Nagaland is a prime example. Examples of regions and countries, which surround this state, are the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh (earlier in East Pakistan) and China. Simmering border disputes with both countries could have been avoided with more deliberation and care.

## Peace Efforts

With the exit of Phizo from India, at least physically, the moderates again gained prominence in Naga polity. A Naga People's Convention was held in August 1957, which was attended by a large gathering of tribal representatives that included people from the Tuensang area in Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA) now Arunachal Pradesh. Recommendations of the convention were a landmark in the history of

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<sup>51</sup> There can be any number of examples of this argument in the country. The Brahmaputra valley thrives economically even while the hill regions to the North and South are relatively backward. The Kashmir valley and Jammu are decidedly more advanced as compared to hill economies like the Doda.

Nagaland, as it was the first time that the representatives of the people had agreed to accept anything less than secession. The leaders recommended the formation of a combined Naga Hills and Tuensang Area (NHTA) as an administrative district under the governor of Assam, who would control it on behalf of the central government. Based on this recommendation, NHTA was formally created on 1 December 1957. The convention resolved: 'That the political future of the Naga people lay within the Union of India'; it was further of the opinion: 'That, pending a final solution, a single administrative unit comprising the Naga Hills District of Assam and Tuensang Frontier Division of NEFA be constituted under the Ministry of External Affairs'; and finally, 'That the Government of India might consider granting amnesty to the misguided underground elements who realised the futility of their claims.' This convention served as the building block for Naga integration with the rest of India. It gave a clear indication that the common people and the moderate leaders among the Nagas were just as peace loving and as willing enter the India Union as were any other people of the country. It also proved that given the assurance of protection of their interests in terms of their language, culture and rights, they were more than willing to give peace and tranquillity a chance to succeed. Sadly, however, even as the peace negotiations were on, the guerrillas burnt a number of schools in the state.

After another convention in mid-1958, a third convention was held in October 1959. A large number of delegates, numbering over 3,000, attended this convention. After due deliberation the delegates came up with a proposal, which finally resulted in a 16-Point Agreement with the Government of India in July 1960. This agreement later formed the basis of the establishment of Nagaland as a separate state and a part of the Indian Union. It formalised a number of important issues: apart from the formation of Nagaland as a state in due course, there would be held an election of a legislative assembly responsible to the people of Nagaland, which would be in the true sense of the word a democratically elected body. The agreement gave the Naga people their much desired special status in the fields of social and religious practices, traditional customs and even their laws. Protection was extended to ownership of land and resources, thereby allaying the fears of the people. The institution of democracy and the Naga spirit of independence at the grassroots level was given due consideration by proposing a system of local self-government at the village level. This was in the same spirit as the rest of the country, which had been revolutionised by self-governance through the 'Panchayati Raj' system. The relatively backward Tuensang area was given special status for a period of 10 years as a special provision. The central government also agreed to sympathetically consider the demand for a Naga regiment in the Indian army. This demand has ultimately been fulfilled, and there is today such a regiment, which has given a fine account of itself in various operations, the latest being in Kargil. Nagaland was finally constituted as a state of the Indian Union on 1 December 1963. Immediately after the formal declaration of statehood, elections to the state legislature were held with an impressive turnout of 76 per cent, thereby endorsing to the election process and the 60 legislators elected. Despite this clear mandate by the people, Phizo, who was

by now in the United Kingdom, and his supporters rejected the electoral process and violence continued in the state.

In an effort to stem the tide of violence and bring the UG cadres into the mainstream, the Naga Baptist Convention made an effort to bring peace. They invited Jaiprakash Narayan, a well-known and respected socialist national leader, B.P. Chaliha, the chief minister of Assam, Reverend Michael Scott<sup>52</sup> from the United Kingdom who was a close associate of Phizo, and Shankerrao Deo. With Shankerrao Deo opting out due to poor health, the other three constituted a peace mission. With a view to creating a conducive atmosphere, a successful effort was made to end hostilities between the two sides by brokering a ceasefire. This move was successful and soon guidelines were laid down for defensive operations by the security forces and norms to be followed by the UG cadres. Restrictions on the security forces related to cordon and search operations, raids, arrests and movement in areas other than those near the international border, roads and near their posts. Similarly, restrictions were placed on the UG cadres in terms of terrorist acts like looting and raids on government offices and police stations. Restrictions were also spelt out with respect to tax collection, recruitment and similar activities. After the ceasefire came into effect on 5 May 1964, it was continuously extended to give peace a chance. The negotiations centred around Naga UG leaders, sticking to their stand of self-determination and sovereignty, while the Indian side was willing to negotiate on autonomy within the framework of the Indian Constitution. A number of rounds of talks were held, with the NFG and Phizo providing their inputs to the peace mission and the Indian representatives trying to break the impasse. In an attempt to secure a negotiated settlement the newly elected Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, also entered into negotiations with Kughato Sukhai (Prime Minister of the Federal Government of Nagaland) in 1967, which marked the last phase of negotiations and attempts at a settlement by both sides.

While these negotiations were on, Naga leaders had not ceased their attempts at securing world opinion and support for their cause, including that of countries like China, Pakistan and even the USA. At this stage, however, the support expected from the western powers was not forthcoming, as Phizo's efforts at the UN and in the UK seemed to have failed. Phizo's attempts at gaining support from

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<sup>52</sup> Rev. Scott came for the talks and according to Gundevia, 'well outside his charter, he had circulated to various agencies in Delhi and the representatives of the foreign and Indian Press, a sheaf of papers neatly cyclostyled in the precincts of the Baptist Mission in Kohima, where he had been housed as the guest of the State Government of Nagaland. This among other things included a copy of a pamphlet earlier put out by Phizo's followers, accusing the Indian Government and Indian troops of the "foulest" atrocities, a favourite word with the Scott-Phizo lobby in London.... Michael Scott had, of course, not taken the trouble to verify any of the atrocious charges levelled against the Indian Security Forces, and there was not a line or a sentence in all these reams of paper which he was circulating which might suggest that his friend Phizo and Phizo's followers were ever themselves guilty of any crime whatever.' This was the standing and integrity of one of the three members of the Mission. The results finally proved what was becoming increasingly evident during the course of the negotiations.



the USA also led to a negative response. Nirmal Nibedon quotes the US Department of State in his book, *Nagaland: The Night of the Guerrillas*, saying, 'Nagaland, to us, is as inseparable a part of India as Illinois or Pennsylvania are of the US.' These failures of Phizo, and his decision to stay away from the state, alienated him from the emerging UG leaders and from state politics. Slowly but surely his influence receded, making him more and more irrelevant to the political process in the state and to the struggle. Violent incidents increased, as did reports of the movement of Naga insurgents to China and Pakistan for training. All this was seen as a blatant violation of the agreement, and eventually led to an excellent opportunity being missed for bringing lasting peace to the state. It is relevant here to analyse the reasons for the failure of the talks. The situation in the state was similar to the one that subsists today, with a ceasefire in place and respected leaders coordinating negotiations. It is felt that the central government had realised the importance of the region and the neglect it had faced in the past. The very fact that Indira Gandhi had herself entered into the negotiations proves that there was an intention to solve the problem. However, the Naga secessionist leadership passed up this opportunity for peace. The reasons for this are that first, they still had hopes of Naga sovereignty and independence, which they felt could be achieved with support from China and East Pakistan. Second, they were also encouraged by similar struggles in South-east Asia, where the Vietnamese were on the brink of achieving their independence and unity after defeating the French and foreseeing victory over the USA. They also saw the examples of North Korea, Cambodia and Laos unfolding before them, all of which gave them encouragement and support. Third, they were not ready to compromise on any of their demands. What encouraged this was their feeling that in a bipolar world with communist and capitalist aligned in two distinct camps, they could garner support from both China and Pakistan for their cause by playing on communist sentiments in China and India's traditional rivalry with Pakistan. Last, and connected to the previous point, they perceived India as enveloped by hostile neighbours ever-willing to lend more than a helping hand to any struggle within India's borders to keep it from interfering in China's affairs and growing into a regional power. Pakistan saw in the chance to instigate and help secession in Nagaland, an opportunity to weaken India by stretching its deployment in the East and thereby opening up a weaker front in Kashmir.

### Phased Consolidation

The time between the declaration of a ceasefire and the re-commencement of operations in 1968, after negotiations had failed, was employed judiciously by the FGN. Chinese assistance was sought and used for training cadres, thereby building up the strength of the UG cadres appreciably.<sup>53</sup> This build-up of forces was apparent

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<sup>53</sup> One of the assessments made by Praval (1987) is 8,000 from a previous figure of 4,000 in 1964.

when the army commenced operations against the militants. The first setback received by the army was at Jotsoma Camp on 7 June 1968.

Despite this increase in operational tempo, two incidents adversely affected the hostile movement. The first was the splitting of the FGN, which was an Angami dominated group, when the Revolutionary Government of Nagaland (RGN) was formed dominated by the Semas. Scatu Swu took over the reins of this UG organisation. This split took place at a crucial stage in the UG build-up as newly trained cadres were returning to Nagaland after training in China through Myanmar. With the Myanmar government having decided to help their Indian counterparts, and additional cooperation forthcoming from RGN, the Indian security forces were able to trap the returning guerrillas of the FGN. Major K.C. Praval says:

A Naga 'general' and his followers, who were returning from China, were arrested by the Burmese security forces and handed over to India. Mowu, another important leader returning from China with about 150 of his men, were arrested on 16 March. However, Issac Swu, another well-known figure, escaped the dragnet. The RGN also joined in the hunt and rounded up about 170 of the China-trained hostiles.<sup>54</sup>

This success was further strengthened politically when elections were held to the state assembly with an impressive voter turnout of 78.75 per cent and Hokishe Sema became the chief minister. On the operational front, security forces were raised specifically with insurgency in mind, bringing additional pressure on the UG elements and leading to their surrender and a weakening of the movement. The Naga demand for a regiment in accordance with the 16-Point Agreement was also met with the raising of a Naga regiment in 1970.

Operations ceased with the outbreak of the 1971 Indo-Pak war. The UG cadres, however, again got an opportunity to regroup once the war was underway as the government focused on its war effort. However, after the war, they made an attempt on the life of the chief minister of Nagaland Hokishe Sema on 8 August 1972, which resulted in stringent measures being adopted against them. The army, which had stopped active operations against the UG, re-commenced such operations. The NFG, NFA and the NNC were banned under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. Nagaland, which was under the Ministry of External Affairs, was placed under the Ministry of Home Affairs.

The central government scored another moral victory when the RGN guerrillas surrendered with Scatu Swu and Zuheto along with 1,500 cadres. Zuheto was made commander of a Border Security Force (BSF) battalion, with the other cadres who had surrendered being recruited by the BSF. This settlement by the government served as a major step in winning over moderate people and cadres and, at the same time, encouraged UG cadres to surrender to the government.

These events in the early 1970s helped turn the tide in favour of the government. Most people realised the futility of armed insurrection and favoured a peaceful

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<sup>54</sup> Praval 1987: 419.

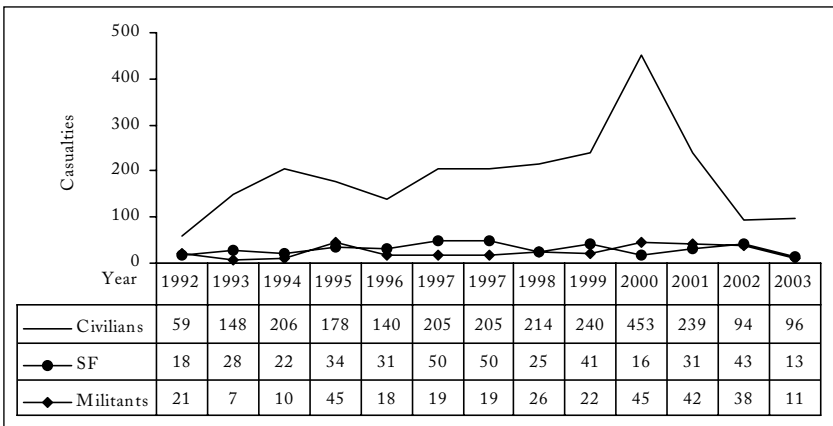
solution and settlement between UG leaders and the government. The Church also played an important role in the negotiations and in convincing the NNC to negotiate with the government. This resulted in the Shillong Agreement of 11 November 1975 (see Appendix M). The most important achievement of the Agreement, was the agreement vide paragraph 3(i), which said, ‘The representatives of the underground organisations conveyed their decision, of their own volition, to accept, without condition, the Constitution of India.’

The Agreement proved to be a silver lining in the dark cloud of Nagaland’s political affairs, for most people were desperately looking forward to peace in the state after decades of unrest and violence. However, hardline elements within the NNC rejected the agreement and termed it a ‘betrayal by the NNC’.

### Rise in Militancy

The following years were a period of alignments and organisation of militant cadres. It was also a period of emergence of three leaders from amongst the protagonists of Naga secession. They were Isak Chisi Swu, a Sema, Thuingaleng Muivah, a Tankhul, and S.S. Khaplang, a Konyak from Myanmar. They combined forces to form the NSCN on 2 February 1980. This marriage of convenience had a flawed inheritance as tribal affiliations were stronger than the cause of Nagaland—a factor which has derailed the insurgent struggle more than once. Khaplang’s writ runs in those areas where Konyaks, Hema and Ao dominate, with support coming from the Burmese Nagas. Similarly Muivah and Isak Swu represent the Tankhul-Sema

Figure 12.1  
Casualty Details—Nagaland



Source: www.satp.org.

Note: Figures for 2003 till 15 June.

combine, with further support from the Phoms. These tribes have traditionally been at loggerheads and this rivalry spilled over when the NSCN split into two groups after heavy bloodshed. This was the result of rumours that the Isak-Muivah (IM) combine was planning to settle for an accord with the central government, which involved a surrender to the Government of India after seizing the arms of the Konyaks. Though these rumours are unsubstantiated, it is true that negotiations were underway for talks between the government and the (IM) combine during this period. In a daring and pre-emptive strike, Khaplang attacked Muivah's group on 30 April 1988 and killed about 140 of his men; Muivah almost lost his life in the attack. This triggered a split in the organisation, with Khaplang forming the NSCN(K) dominating Mokochung, Tuensang and Mon areas and NSCN(IM) dominating the Zunheboto, Wokha, Ukhrul, Dimapur and Kohima regions under Isak Swu and Muivah. Angami and Chakesang Nagas, who were more inclined to a peaceful settlement, dominated the last and original group, the NNC. This incident was a major blow to the Naga struggle, which became fractured as a result. Since this split was along the lines of tribal loyalties, it caused a north-south divide, with the Khaplang faction dominating the north and the (IM) faction the south of the state, including the Northern Hill Districts of Manipur.

The setback to the (IM) faction on the eve of its creation that almost killed its co-founder Muivah was soon overcome, and their strength in the area received a boost with support from China. They bounced back to become the dominant force in not only Nagaland and Manipur, but in the entire North-east region, developing a well-oiled operational, administrative, propaganda, recruitment and financial machinery.

Before focusing on the activities of this dominant group in Nagaland, it will be interesting to discuss its philosophy, which has clearly been spelt out in the literature it generates, available on its official website and in the pamphlets it circulates. The NSCN(IM) commences its well-structured argument with a preface that states "The concepts of "Human Race", internationalism and the myth of nations could in no sense deprive the Nagas of the basis of being a family and a nation of their own existence."<sup>55</sup> As regards the aim of their struggle they say, 'We stand for the unquestionable sovereign right of Naga people over every inch of Nagaland (Nagalim) wherever it may be and admit of no other existence whatever.'<sup>56</sup>

Introductory paragraphs to their manifesto state the reasons that led to the emergence of the NSCN, chiefly citing the failure of NNC as the main reason. However, the manifesto does acknowledge the role played by the NNC immediately after its formation, saying:

The Naga National Council was the only authentic political organization of the people of Nagalim. It was this Council that boldly took up the historic national trust, that is, the safeguarding of the right of the sovereign existence of Nagalim.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Official NSCN website.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

The manifesto describes the 1975 Shillong Agreement as the 'most ignominious sell-out made in the history of Naga people'. There is obvious reference to the absence of Phizo from the scene with 'aloofness from the people' being justified by what it calls 'selfish considerations'. Further attacking the NNC, the manifesto says, 'Traitors are propped up. Patriots condemned; and the principle of upholding the freedom of every inch of Nagalim is deliberately withdrawn.' Stating these arguments and the fact that the NNC is never to be forgiven for signing the 1975 agreement, the manifesto takes it upon itself the task of guiding the Naga struggle for 'independence'.

The NSCN(IM) is clearly influenced by Maoist principles of governance like most revolutionary groups, which began their struggle in the immediate aftermath of the Chinese revolution. Principles of socialism, which invariably look good on paper, are a sure means of attracting poor and impoverished people into the fold of revolution. This is probably the reason why some academics have termed the movements arising during this period 'Communist Revolutionary Warfare', thereby classifying it as a specific form of revolutionary struggle. The NSCN(IM), however, saw the pitfall in blindly following the Maoist model in Nagaland as most of the Nagas are devout Christians. Therefore it coined the phrase 'Nagaland for Christ', while maintaining the quest for socialism as the preferred economy to ensure 'fair equality to all people'.

The NSCN advocates a peculiar method of governance which it terms 'the principle of people's supremacy, that is, the dictatorship of the people through the National Socialist Council and the practice of Democracy within the organization until the goal is achieved and as long as it is deemed necessary'.<sup>58</sup> These stated aims are obviously a tool to keep the NSCN(IM) in power, as it regards itself as not only the true representative of the people of Nagaland, but as also the only group capable of administering the region. This is all the more apparent for its denouncing the 1975 Shillong Agreement and the signatories thereto, who represented the UG.

The manifesto clearly outlines the means that the group proposes to employ to achieve its declared aims.

We rule out the illusion of saving Nagaland through peaceful means. It is arms and arms again that will save our nation and ensure freedom to the people. However, if India and Burma sincerely realize the folly of the use of brute force and stop killing and torturing the Nagas, we shall not fire a single shot as we did for a decade before the start of our violent resistance.<sup>59</sup>

This, briefly, is what the NSCN(IM) stands for. Though it will not be fair to the organisation to brush aside their philosophy of 'freedom' and their 'revolution', it must also be mentioned that certain of the means that they and their rival and

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

sister organisations in the region have adopted do raise questions about the much-touted righteousness of their struggle. By now it is common knowledge that extortion and coercion are the common means of functioning of the organisation. Government servants, professionals and businessmen alike are made to pay 'taxes' based on their financial position, which are found out from their bank accounts.

Although logistics support comes from Pakistan it is not adequate to sustain the movement. Hence, the insurgent groups have resorted to extortions and open collection of 'income-tax' from all those living in Nagaland including government servants, where they have to pay half a month's basic pay (church workers excluded) or be faced with dire consequences, i.e., death.<sup>60</sup>

Besides this regular 'taxation', smuggling and drug money have also become a major source of income for the cadres. These funds are used for procuring military hardware from the underground 'arms bazaar' through Bangladesh. These activities are supported by corrupt politicians in the states of Manipur and Nagaland, who in collusion with these cadres have provided them with money out of funds allocated to developmental projects and welfare funds, thereby harming the states in the process. The vicious cycle becomes apparent when it is seen that the dissatisfaction of the common people, resulting from a lack of facilities, was again exploited by the cadres to blame the central and state governments for their apathy and step-motherly treatment. At the end of the day it is a win-win situation for the militant cadres who not only fleece the people of their rights by stalling developmental works and funnelling money out of the same, but also incite the people against the government for the lack of development in the area.

Militancy has become a business in the state, with much rivalry between militant groups in the extraction of the spoils of corruption and smuggling rather than on ideological grounds. The beneficiaries of this collateral economic damage to the region are not low-level cadres who have been converted to the illusionary cause of Naga independence. The real beneficiaries of this 'business' are political leaders and top echelons amongst militant leaders, who reside outside the country in comfort and direct the 'freedom struggle' from there.

Another facet which has been exploited by the militants is the relatively high level of unemployment in the state. The state has a good literacy rate of 67.11 per cent and the emerging new generation is keen to take up white collared jobs. However, with a weak industrial base and a civil administration mired in a web of controversy and corruption, jobs are not available to the educated youth, which further leads to their becoming disgruntled and adopting bitter and violent means of expressing their frustration.

The NSCN(IM) has slowly but steadily consolidated its position in the post-1988 period in the state and in the Northern Hill Districts of Manipur. In its bid to outgun and outwit the other groups for a major share of the smuggling booty,

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<sup>60</sup> Acharya 1995: 227.

it clashed with the Kukis at Moreh in 1993 and in other parts of the state in 1994. Moreh is a border town in Manipur, and a centre of smuggling activity on the Indo-Myanmarese border. The area has a majority Kuki population, who quite obviously resisted an infringement on their area of influence and control, leading to bloody clashes. In turn, the Nagas have accused the Kukis of encroaching upon their lands in Naga areas. On the other hand, the Kukis blame the British for dispersing them and forcing them to settle in these areas, as has been explained earlier. These clashes, coupled with the lure of easy money and the already prevalent gun-culture in the region, encouraged the Kukis to start militant groups of their own. The Kuki National Front (KNF) led the way when it was formed in 1987. However, very soon Kukis too realised that financial muscle and political patronage emerged from the guns of the militants, resulting in the formation of the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) and Kuki National Army (KNA) in 1992. It was these organisations which were at the forefront of control of Moreh and its smuggling rights. For the NSCN(IM) who was already controlling the lucrative areas of Dimapur and Kohima, Moreh was last of the economic fronts, the conquest of which would consolidate their hold over the length and breadth of the state, as also the neighbouring areas in Manipur which were populated by sympathetic tribes.

The NSCN(IM) therefore viewed the rise of Kuki organisations as a means employed by anti-Naga forces, including the Indian security forces and intelligence agencies, to counter their growing influence and sway in the area. Rivalry between the two groups took on political overtones when there were reports of political patronage being provided to the groups by rival political parties and state governments representing the Naga and Meitei-Kuki ethnicity respectively.<sup>61</sup>

The NSCN(IM) again scored over its rivals when it gained admission to the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO), an autonomous body with its headquarters at The Hague, and has been addressing its concerns to this body. The chairman of the NSCN(IM) has made speeches outlining their case for sovereignty and independence, and has also made representations at the United Nations Human Rights Commission. Despite these successes, which have been publicised as such, there has been no major movement forward of the NSCN(IM) towards its proclaimed goal of independence. With the passage of time the Naga people are increasingly intermingling with the Indian mainstream, making the task of recruitment and extortion that much more difficult. The central government, which was guilty of indifference in the past, has been endeavouring to make amends and ensure that the fruits of development reach the people.

The failure of communism all over the world and the crumbling of communist giants such as the erstwhile USSR and sweeping changes in China have taken the wind out of the sails of most communist revolutionary movements. Support for

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<sup>61</sup> Verghese (1996), writes, 'The situation in Manipur is unfortunately somewhat murky with the former Governor, Lieutenant General (Retd) V.K. Nayar, charging Rishang Keishing with backing the NSCN(M) and his rival, Dorendra Singh, a Meitei (a former Chief Minister), with aiding the Meitei and Kuki underground. This is dangerous political gamesmanship.'

the NSCN(IM) from China has also waned, not so much because of a greater affinity towards India but probably because of the Chinese perceiving how remote the chance of success of the NSCN(IM) struggle is. India has also been able to improve its relations with all of its immediate neighbours with the exception of Pakistan, including Myanmar. The events that occurred in USA on 11 September 2001 have resulted in a global rejection of terrorism as a weapon of revolution and nation building. Globally, groups that use terror to achieve their aims are no longer tolerated. All these events have certainly had an impact on the NSCN(IM) and other groups in Nagaland, forcing them to sue for peace and a reasonable settlement. Peace negotiations between the NSCN(IM) and the government commenced after much spadework had been done by the Narasimha Rao and the Deva Gowda governments. The real breakthrough was achieved when a Ceasefire Agreement was signed between the NSCN(IM) and the government on 25 July 1997, which came into effect on 1 August 1997. This agreement placed restrictions on the security forces in making arrests, and limits on their patrolling of the international and state boundaries. It also restricted the NSCN(IM) from carrying out extortion, raids, recruitment and other violent activities. The agreement gave the security forces the freedom to take necessary action in the event of a violation of its terms by the NSCN(IM). This agreement was accompanied by the commencement of talks between the representatives of the government and the NSCN(IM) outside India as per terms agreed upon. The NSCN(IM) terms for entering into talks were, '(a) Talks will be held without any preconditions. (b) Talks will be held at the highest level; at the prime ministerial level. (c) The venue will be anywhere outside India.' Talks did commence with some of these demands being met. The initial rounds of talks were held at neutral locations outside India. However, the talks were held between NSCN(IM) representatives and representatives of the Government of India and not at the prime ministerial level as demanded.

The Chairman of NSCN(IM), Isak Swu, referring to the commencement of peace parleys and the ceasefire, said:

We praise the Indian leadership and the generals who have at last taken the initiative to seek for a positive political solution through dialogue. The admission to the fact of the fifty-years of confrontations is certainly the right step, which has finally been taken. We think there is statesmanship in the approach. We are positive to such an attitude—even from the start in 1947, because we believe in peaceful means. Solutions to any problem, anywhere, is a must. But it can only be achieved through sincere negotiations. Therefore, to this end a cease-fire agreement has also been declared from both sides on the 25th of July, 1997.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Speech by Chairman of NSCN(IM) Isak Chishi Swu at the 15th Session of 'Working Group of Indigenous Populations' from 28 July to 1 August 1997.



The subsequent agreement by the NSCN(K) brought much needed relief and peace to the region. This has created the requisite atmosphere within which talks can be held and peace has a real chance to gain a permanent foothold. The Indian position all along has been that 'cessation' is not an option during negotiations. Despite no major headway having been made during the talks, the main stumbling block to the peace process seems to be inter-group rivalries rather than the government's attitude. A clash of interest of various factions and the traditional rivalries of the tribes has the potential to derail any talks and any successes with any one group. Chances of one group accusing the other of selling-out are always a distinct possibility, and this has already occurred in the past. It happened with the NNC after it negotiated a settlement with the government through the Shillong Agreement, which was signed amidst much hope of peace returning to the state, hopes that were sadly belied. The NSCN(K) faction has already accused its rival NSCN(IM) of negotiating with the government against interests of the people and the struggle.

Besides factions within the state, there is strong regional rivalry between Nagaland and Manipur. Nagaland claims the districts of Ukhrul and Senapati in Manipur, which are dominated by Nagas. However, Manipur is fighting this claim. Nagaland's Home Minister Neiphiu Rio expressed support for the merger of Naga-inhabited areas in Manipur with Nagaland. He quoted Article 13 of the 16-Point Agreement of 1960, which reads, 'facilitating the Nagas inhabiting the contiguous areas in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to come under a single administrative umbrella, should they so desire'. This controversial and explosive point is likely to become a political contest, putting the government in a bind over the demand for 'Greater Nagaland', including in it certain areas of Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar.

Talks between the Government of India's representative Mr Padmanabhaiah and the NSCN(IM) have progressed through a number of rounds outside India, with a significant one having been held between 9–11 July 2002, at Amsterdam. The declaration made at the end of the meeting displayed positive signs of progress. First, the ceasefire was extended for a year with effect from 1 August 2002. Second, there were signs that in future talks may be held in India and 'The peace talks would continue in an accommodative manner recognising the unique history of the Nagas and efforts would be made to arrive at a honourable solution.' The atmosphere was further made conducive after the Chief Minister of Nagaland, S.C. Jamir, offered to withdraw all criminal cases against Muivah and Isak Swu on 14 April 2002. On 14 June 2002, in another gesture of goodwill and accommodation, he offered to resign prior to the completion of full term of his government if the negotiations and circumstances so desired.

The hopes for talks were not belied as the next round was held at New Delhi in the second week of January 2003. These talks were historic in that Issac Szu and Muivah both came to the capital and held talks with all the major leaders of the Government including the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Home Minister and Defence Minister, amongst others. The leaders held talks with the Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani on 10 January 2003, and accepted a vital decision to

'neither participate nor interfere' in the state elections in Nagaland scheduled for 26 February 2003. They described their talks as 'very fruitful', and the attitude of the Deputy Prime Minister as 'very positive'. However, there seemed to be little headway on the question of 'Greater Nagaland' and the demand for 'independence'. Muivah said, 'There is no greater or lesser Nagaland. It is the place of our natural habitation.... Our own territory. We are asking nothing more than that or nothing less than that.' He added, 'For example I have been born in Ukhrul (Manipur). My forefathers were also born there. It is not the land of the Meiteis.'<sup>63</sup> Commenting on the aspect of independence, he added that Mahatma Gandhi had acknowledged that the 'Nagas had every right to be independent. We declared our independence a day ahead of India. When in 1950, the Union of India was declared, we were asked to join. The Nagas refused.'<sup>64</sup>

They also held consultations with a number of representatives of Naga groups, such as the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPMHR), Baga Mothers' Association, Naga Students' Federation and Naga Haho—the state's apex tribal council on 11 and 12 January 2003.

Despite potential pitfalls the ceasefire has held, even if by a slender thread, and talks have progressed over the past years. A solution to the Naga insurgency may not immediately be in sight, but it is certainly a more likely possibility with opinion in the state and the major world powers firmly against terrorism of any kind. Kashmir has proved to be a case study worth close examination by the Naga separatist leaders. It is only a matter of time before the will and power of the people forces a peaceful settlement to the problem. The culture of extortion, illegal taxation and forced recruitment will crumble when pitched against the desire for progress and development.

A ray of hope is visible in the statements of the NSCN(IM) leaders during their talks in New Delhi. Isak Szu said, 'I want to tell you that there will be no more fighting between Indians and Nagas. That is the understanding we have reached now.' He added, 'People of Nagaland have been praying that the leaders of India and NSCN(IM) successfully conclude their talks.'<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *The Times of India*, 11 January 2003.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *The Times of India*, 12 January 2003.

## Chapter 13

# Manipur

### Background

Manipur is geographically quite similar to its neighbouring state of Nagaland. It lies to the immediate south of Nagaland, and many Naga people live here, especially in Manipur's northern districts. Both Manipur and Nagaland border Myanmar, with which they share a historical legacy which has influenced their history as also their present government. Manipur is home to the Meitei people, who are concentrated in the fertile Imphal valley, through which flows the Manipur river. The Meiteis are culturally rich, and an ethnic group distinct from others in the region, such as the Naga and the Kukis. This factor adds a further degree of complexity to the tribal rivalries that exist in the region. Apart from the Nagas who are represented by the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), which originated in Nagaland, other ethnic groups in the region are also 'represented' by militant organisations, which draw their support base from the local population.

Manipur, like Nagaland, is landlocked, and has greater potential and natural resources. Despite this, the state faces serious problems on the front of economic development and progress. The local terrain and political apathy have conspired to deny it vital rail links, while road links are limited and sometimes pass through areas of Nagaland dominated by rival insurgent groups. Unlike Nagaland, insurgency in Manipur did not start at the time of Independence. The areas that make up present-day Manipur were either administered directly by the British or by a long dynasty of kings from the plains. Independence brought both regions together, bound by a new constitution within the Indian Union. However, Manipur had to wait till 1956 to be granted the status of a Union Territory and till 1972 for complete statehood. A sense of disillusionment set in amongst the people because of a number of factors. Some can be attributed to its geo-political location and others to a corrupt administration. Self-serving politicians and New Delhi's apathy both contributed to a lack of development and very little infrastructure in the region, finally leading to the state's political, economic and social degradation. Internal rivalry and wrangling in state politics, along religious and ethnic lines,

has divided the state's polity and administration. This has worsened with pressure being exerted by various militant groups to achieve their own political ends. Corruption is rampant and developmental funds are being siphoned off, leaving the common man disgruntled. The blame for all of this is conveniently shifted on to the shoulders of the central government, further fanning the flames of insurgency.

Manipur is an example of opportunities lost, rather than of inherited problems. It was one of those states in the North-east, which with a progressive, multi-ethnic and culturally rich society, could have developed significantly, acting as a beacon for other less-developed regions. Blessed with considerable natural bounty, Manipur had the potential of developing in the areas of power generation and farming.

At present however Manipur's squandered legacy, its splintered, ethnically divided society and the degradation caused by years of corruption, apathy and neglect have made it a sad case study of a low intensity conflict (LIC).

## Historical Legacy

Manipuri society is probably the oldest of the organised societies in the North-east. It is thought that it was an amalgam of seven tribes of Tibeto-Burman origin. The fertile lands and pastures for cattle may have caused these tribes to move into the area, as the pressure of population increased in their original homelands. The Manipuri social system, language and culture is, in sharp contrast to the other tribal societies in the area, very developed. Manipuri history is well documented: it has been ruled by a long line of 74 kings through a period stretching from 34 A.D. till a little after Independence in 1955. This history has been recorded in vivid detail in the *Cheitharol Kumbada*, an ancient Manipuri historical chronicle. Besides, mention of Manipur is also found in Ptolemy's account of India.<sup>1</sup> Considering Ptolemy's place in the timeline of history, it can safely be concluded that though, Manipuri civilisation was thriving in the period prior to Christ, it gained prominence and emerged as a major power in the region in subsequent years. There is also reference to trade ties between present-day Manipur and China, through the Kushan Empire. The Kushans ruled during the period starting approximately 50 A.D. They ruled in areas comprising parts of present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan, and some parts of North-west India. Vital trade links between India and China passed through this region. More important, however, are the well-established trade links that the Manipuri people had with others, because this further strengthens the assertion regarding the status of this region and its level of development at this stage in history.

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<sup>1</sup> Details of trading ties between Manipur and China are found in his book *Geography of Further India*, which gives details of trade including the items exported from the region.

The Manipuris worshipped the deity Sanamahi and converted to Vaishnavism in the eighteenth century, during the reign of Maharaja Garib Nawaz.<sup>2</sup> Their rich cultural heritage boasts of a distinct language, which has been recognised in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, and Manipuri dance that has been recognised as one of the four classical dance forms of India. Manipur's trade links with China and Burma indicate a thriving society based on modern methods of trade and commerce unlike Nagaland, which was more inward-looking and closed. B.B. Kumar quoting Johnstone, in an attempt to dispel the myth of the isolation of Manipur from the rest of India—an idea widely believed and propagated, says:

... Manipur was also not an isolated and closed area. It was linked up with the rest of the country and with Myanmar through the land routes. Johnstone writes: 'in the days when the Indian branch of the Aryan race was still in its progressive and colonising stage, the district (Manipur) was reportedly passed over by one wave after another of invaders intent on penetrating into the remotest part of Burma.'<sup>3</sup>

The long line of kings belonging to one dynasty also indicates a society with a degree of stability and cohesive homogeneity in ancient times. However, it is not that Manipur did not have its share of political and territorial upheavals during this long period of history.

There had been bitter rivalry between the Manipuri kings and the Burmese over control of the Kubaw valley. This is the region between the Chindwin river and the present-day Manipuri border with Burma. This rivalry continued till the British finally ceded it to the Burmese in 1834, a fact which still rankles in Manipuri minds.

Precise details of Manipuri history are not available. While the lineage of kings is available before Garib Nawaz, there are no detailed accounts of the period until the reign of Maharaja Garib Nawaz. In the period after he came to the throne, there were see-saw battles between the Manipuri and Burmese kings. This involved invasions into each other's territories to wrest control of fertile regions. From available accounts, this struggle seems to have lasted for centuries, with the balance ultimately tilting in favour of the Burmese, whose raids into Manipur territory became more frequent and fierce, culminating in their conquering certain parts of it.

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, as has already been mentioned, Garib Nawaz was a king of Naga origin whose original name was Panheiba. He ascended the Manipur throne in 1714 A.D.

<sup>3</sup> B.B. Kumar, 'Northeast India: Crisis of Perception and Credible Action', article appearing on [www.northeastvigil.com](http://www.northeastvigil.com). Further amplifying his contention he says, 'Sir A. Phayre has mentioned that the route by which Kshatriya princes arrived (in Burma) is indicated in the traditions as being through Manipur.' Capt. Dun has written 'There can be no reasonable doubt that a great Aryan wave of very pure blood passed through Manipur into Burma in prehistoric times. There were at least three routes connecting Surma Valley with the Manipur Valley and two connecting Manipur with Kubaw Valley in the Chindwin river valley. A road connected lower Burma and India via banks of Irrawady, bank of Chindwin and Manipur, according to D.G.E. Hall. Yet there was another route to China through these hills, according to K.M. Panikar.'

## British Incursion

Burmese punitive action reached its zenith, when Gumbhir Singh the Manipuri king was decisively defeated in 1819. The king requested the British for help, which they did extend but at a heavy price. The British involvement culminated in the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, bringing peace to the region and in turn giving the British control over Manipur. They recognised the Maharaja of Manipur and granted him autonomous rule in 1851, but at the cost of the loss of the Kubaw valley, which was handed over to the Burmese by the British as a gesture of goodwill. After the revolt against the British by the Manipur ruler, Tikendrajit Singh in 1891, the British took over administration of the state in totality. In the years that followed, the British adopted their characteristic methods of administration in the area. They pronounced a small boy of six, Chura Chand, as the next ruler, and he was sent to Britain in 1907 to be educated. On his return in 1917, while he remained the ceremonial head, real power rested with a '*darbar*', headed by a president, nominated by the Government of Assam. Another development, which still continues to influence the history of Manipur, is the Kuki revolt against the British in 1917, the cause of which was their being sent as labourers to France. The British crushed the revolt, and as punishment disbursed the Kuki population all over the state. This action was to have far-reaching consequences for this community. It is because of this that the Kukis are no longer a majority in any region and thus lack political clout in the state. Immediately after the revolt, as a concession, the Manipuri king was allowed to administer the plains, while the British continued to administer the hills, and along with British control, the Christian Church also made its entry into the hills. Formal politicisation began in Manipur with the establishment of the Nikhil Hindu Manipuri Mahasabha in 1934, which was subsequently renamed as the Nikhil Manipuri Mahasabha in 1938. This organisation was a forerunner to the Manipuri Congress established after Independence. Political awareness received a fillip with the Second World War, which reached the doorsteps of Manipur when Imphal was isolated in a decisive war. The Japanese had reached Nagaland during the Second World War and had virtually isolated regions other than present-day Assam. They were subsequently defeated and pushed back after the battle of Kohima.

## Independence and After

Unlike Nagaland, the end of war and India's impending independence did not give rise to any demands for the independence and secession of Manipur from the Indian Union. The Maharaja signed the Instrument of Accession on 11 August 1947 and responsibility for defence, foreign affairs and communications was handed over to the Indian government. However, a Standstill Agreement was also signed with regard to certain other aspects. Manipur adopted a new Constitution applicable to both the hill and plains regions; this was followed by elections, which were the first

in independent India for any region. The Manipur Congress, which favoured a complete merger with India, won 24 seats in a 53-member state legislature. Its rival, the Krishak Sabha led by Hijam Irabot Singh won five seats. Irabot Singh was the Maharaja's brother-in-law and had leftist leanings. After the elections, a coalition government came to power in Manipur. It was a loose formation named the Praja Shanti Sabha, under the leadership of Maharajkumar Priyobrata Singh who took over as the state's first chief minister. However, leftist leanings of certain members of the government soon alarmed both the central government, as well as the moderate elements in Manipur.<sup>4</sup>

The circumstances under which the full merger of Manipur with India took place are often discussed (see the Manipur Merger Agreement of 1949 in Appendix O). It is evident from an analysis of the circumstances that emerged in Manipur immediately after Independence that a complete merger with India would have been thought prudent, least divisive and a suitable check for leftist tendencies that threatened the fledgling state. An accusation that is sometimes made by certain academics and politicians is that Manipur's maharaja was made to sign the Instrument of Accession under duress. It is further argued that as the state had at the time an elected assembly, the Maharaja did not have the power to sign this instrument without consulting with them, and that even if he had signed it, it would have required subsequent ratification by this assembly.

Whatever the argument over Manipur's accession in the aftermath of the state elections, the central government and the moderate elements were increasingly alarmed at the leftist tendency of certain members of the state government. Thus, the Maharajkumar Priyobrata Singh ministry was dissolved and a commissioner was appointed to administer the region. Irabot Singh slipped into Myanmar, where he resolved to resist the merger and take up arms, but his premature death in 1951 did not give him adequate time to establish a movement. However, the nature of the merger and the status of Manipur as a Part C region in 1950 with the adoption of the Constitution of India did not satisfy the people. Its subsequent designation as a Union Territory in 1956 after representations were made, gave the impression of step motherly treatment to Manipuris who probably expected greater autonomy. B.G. Verghese writes:

There was a deep sense of hurt that, despite its long and unbroken history as a distinctive if not always an independent political entity, Manipur was not only denied the autonomy it sought, with maybe a Kashmir like Article 370 status, but had to agonise for full 23 years before it was granted statehood within the Indian Union, a status earlier accorded to Nagaland, Meghalaya and Himachal.<sup>5</sup>

Yet another reason for discontent was the issue of the Kubaw valley. The area is presently in Myanmar, and Manipur 'sought retrocession' of the same. However,

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<sup>4</sup> Manipur fully merged with India on 15 October 1949.

<sup>5</sup> Verghese 1996: 116.

Jawaharlal Nehru during a visit with the Myanmar premier U Nu in 1953, gave up Manipur's claim over it. 'It dealt a psychological and a physical blow to the Manipuris and still rankles in their mind.'<sup>6</sup>

It is interesting to note that in the case of certain regions, all their demands were only granted belatedly, after an agitation threatened to snowball into full-fledged mass movement, and became the cause for secessionist propaganda. Manipur is one such example. In the first place its hurried merger played up an anti-government sentiment, not so much because of the action, but more because of the way in which it was executed. This was followed by the grant of statehood on 22 March 1972. Regions in the Indian Union seem to have been granted a higher degree of self-governance when agitations were on the verge of full-blown insurgencies, rather than on the basis of how early and how much they deserved it. Manipur seems to have suffered on this count, because of the relative peace and tranquillity that had prevailed in the region. It again suffered the same fate when demands were made for the inclusion of the Manipuri language in the Eighth Schedule. It required a statewide agitation to finally get the demand accepted in 1992. These delays have been interpreted as the apathy of the central government to Manipuri culture, language, customs and sentiments despite an age-old and respected heritage.

These grievances of the people, coupled with central rule, made the people receptive to communist and revivalist movements, which stressed the exploitation of Meiteis, Manipur's dominant ethnic group, at the hands of the government. The seeds sown by Irabot Singh took root and 'Meitei Sub-Nationalism' started to take shape. On 24 November 1964, Samarendra Singh formed the United National Liberation Front (UNLF). He aimed at 'national self-determination' and a 'socialist society'. In order to achieve his aim, he tried to seek assistance from the erstwhile East Pakistan, though without much success. However, a splinter group of the UNLF, which split from the parent organisation to form the Revolutionary Government of Manipur under Sudhir Kumar was able to get assistance from Pakistan and attempted to carry out terrorist acts during the 1971 Indo-Pak War in Cachar and Tripura.

## Reasons for Discontent

Almost immediately after the 1971 Indo-Pak War, Manipur was granted statehood on 22 March 1972. This step eventually gave most Manipuris what they had been demanding for a number of years, though vital time had been lost in the intervening period, leading to growing dissatisfaction and a deep sense of hurt, which had left its mark on the Meitei psyche. There were a number of other problems faced by the state, which were directly or indirectly attributed to the years of central rule, rather than to the more specific reasons of a weak administrative and political system, aggravated by an explosive ethnic mix steeped in years of bitter rivalry. Some

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<sup>6</sup> Nayar 2000: 96.



policies of the central government inadvertently aggravated this situation resulting in a widening of the existing rift. At this stage, before the history of Manipur is discussed, it will be relevant to understand the underlying reasons for this simmering discontent.<sup>7</sup>

First, unlike Nagaland, Manipur is a volatile ethnic mix. The Manipuris are divided into four groups, which are further subdivided into various sub-tribes. First are the Meiteis, they include the Loi (classified as Scheduled Castes), the Bishnupriya (who are mainly settled around the town of Bishnupur), the Pangal (Manipuri Muslims) and the Hill Tribes (which include the Nagas). The Manipuri tribes can further be divided into the 'Naga Group' tribes (which include the Rongmei and Puimei), Kacha Naga (Liangmei and Zemei) together called Zeliangrong and the Mao, Maram, Tangkhul and Maring. The second main division is the 'Chin-Mizo-Kuki' group. These include the Gangte, Hmar, Lushai (Mizos), Paite, Simte, Thadou (Kuki), Vaiphei and Zou. Last are the Intermediary tribes, that include the Aimol, Chiru, Koireng, Kom, Anal, Chothe, Lamkang, Koiraol, Puram, Mongsang and Moyon.<sup>8</sup> This has led to competition for spoils, of both the legal and illegal kind.<sup>9</sup> Economic reasons apart, this ethnic mix provides politicians with vital vote banks. Thus, both economic and political leverage is tied to these ethnic groups.

Second, there are divisive forces even within the state, which are the result of its mix of various different tribes and ethnic groups, each with different aims. Traditionally, the Kukis have been the more enterprising race and have prospered as a result. On the other hand, the Nagas have the support and sympathy of ethnically similar races up north in Nagaland, which have been demanding a 'Greater Nagaland', including in it the Naga-dominated regions of Manipur. This leaves the Meiteis, who consider themselves the oldest inhabitants of the region and the true inheritors of its resources and opportunities. Rival militant groups have exploited this ethnic divide to gain a foothold, and also funds, logistics support and cadres from their respective ethnic groups.<sup>10</sup>

Third, it is an irony that the central government and its agencies in an attempt at bridging disparities between various groups and putting a stop to insurgency, have inadvertently fuelled this problem. The first step taken, which created a divide amongst the people, was job reservations for Nagas in Manipur, who were considered more backward than the Meiteis. While the Meiteis were given the status

<sup>7</sup> One of the major policy decisions was dropping the claim over the Kubaw Valley in favour of Burma by Jawaharlal Nehru as Prime Minister in 1953. This was seen as a sacrifice by the Centre at the expense of the Manipuris.

<sup>8</sup> Joshua 1997: 299–300.

<sup>9</sup> The claim of the NSCN over the hilly regions of Manipur in the north as part of 'Greater Nagaland' is based on Naga population in the northern districts of Manipur. This has led to growing resentment between the Meiteis and the Nagas in the State. 'If the hills are cut away, the blood will flow into the valley', was one of the reactions of a Meitei leader. (R. Parasama, 'Watching the Nagas', *The Week*, 27 July 1997, as quoted by Nayar [2000: 99].)

<sup>10</sup> Nayar 2000: 135.

of Other Backward Classes (OBC), the hill tribes (including the Nagas) received reservations under the Scheduled Tribe category, creating reservations for them in government jobs and in educational institutions. The result of this was an uneven distribution of jobs in the state in favour of Nagas, leading to much frustration and dissatisfaction.

Fourth, another related provision of the Manipur Land and Revenue Regulation (1960) debars Meiteis from buying land in the hills, while no such restriction exists for the hill people, to stop them buying land in the plains. This has led to the germination of fears of infringement on the traditional Meitei areas, and unfair treatment of the Meiteis by the government.

Fifth, in an attempt at countering the Naga insurgents, the central government and the intelligence agencies have attempted to prop up the Kuki groups leading to a widening of the ethnic divide.<sup>11</sup>

The end result of all these games has been losing one group in the attempt to win the other, all at a heavy cost to the government. The blame for aggravating the situation has to be shared by the security forces for the partisan role that they have played. They have been known to take sides with certain militant organisations at the behest of political parties. 'The sad part of the situation was that the Security Forces including the Army not only let the situation escalate but were partisan in handling it and thus became a pawn in the hands of local political players.'<sup>12</sup>

Sixth, Manipur has traditionally been an important trade route into erstwhile Burma (now Myanmar) during the British rule. Trade routes through Manipur linked the state to seaports in Myanmar and Bangladesh. With independence, Manipur suddenly found itself cut off from these trade links. On the other hand, it took time for reliable communications to be established, though even those that do exist are being used as a rich source of 'tax collection' by the NSCN(IM). Air links are unaffordable and rail links do not exist, and the state of the roads is at best pitiable. It is not difficult to understand why the people of Manipur feel isolated from the rest of the country. 'The remote areas in the hills had not been visited even by the district officials for over a decade. The state of roads was distressing and at places these were non-existent. The Government was prominent by its absence.'<sup>13</sup>

Seventh, there are no major industries in the state. In this case however, the blame for this lack of development and employment opportunities must be shared by the government and the militants, who have ensured through their activities that no private entrepreneurs come to the state. Moreover, whatever attempts have been made by the government have met with resistance, leading to neglect and suffering.

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<sup>11</sup> Nayar (2000) writes, 'The Kuki militants have received moral and material support like the Nagas, both in the State of Manipur and from central agencies. The KNO President Mr Henglen has claimed that he met the then Army Chief General S.F. Rodrigues in Delhi on 24th December 1992. KNA also reported to have asked for rupees seven crores from RAW.' He quotes *The Hindu* of 8-9 April 1993 and *The Hindustan Times* of 22 July 1993 to substantiate his assertions.

<sup>12</sup> Nayar 2000: 128.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*: 127.

Eighth, literacy levels in the state are relatively high. The potential of this literate population could have been tapped by both private and public enterprise. Due to the lack of industrial development, this has not happened. It is a well-established fact that the non-availability of jobs for educated people leads to unemployment and frustration. Such a situation is ripe for exploitation by wily and charismatic leaders, who channel such feelings of discontent into communist and other 'revolutionary' movements.

Ninth, another factor linked to the underdevelopment of the region is the rampant corruption and the incompetent administration.<sup>14</sup> V.I.K. Sarin in his book, *India's North-East in Flames* writes, 'During the first five-year plan Rs 15.5 million were allocated for Manipur. But New Delhi appointed bureaucrats could spend only 5.2 million. In the next three five-year plans, Rs 320 million were allocated but Rs 40 million were surrendered.'<sup>15</sup> In terms of percentages, a minuscule percentage was actually spent in the first 23 years, and of whatever little was spent, apparently a sizeable amount was misappropriated. The feelings of a number of academics and local people of the state are appropriately summarised by Ved Marwah when he says, 'New Delhi cannot totally disown the responsibility for this state of affairs. The political and administrative structure should not be left in the hands of self-seeking, corrupt and inefficient political leaders and civil servants.'<sup>16</sup> This initial mismanagement, which incidentally lasted a long while, has left an indelible mark on the minds of the people, who continue to blame the most convenient target, the government, egged on as they are by self-serving politicians and militants.

Tenth, Manipur has not been exempt from the common bane of the North-east—illegal immigration. Illegal immigrants have poured in from Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar. Most have settled in areas adjoining the Cachar district of Assam. 'According to All Manipur Student's Union and the All Manipur Student's Coordinating Committee, there are 3,00,000 foreigners who have come from Bangladesh, Nepal and Burma.'<sup>17</sup>

Eleventh, a binding factor which has brought Manipur closer to the Indian mainstream, is religious affinity. The majority Meiteis are staunch Vaishnavites (followers of a branch of Hinduism). However, as the Pan-Mongoloid movement spread, encouraged by self-serving elements, the Meiteis were encouraged to revert to their pre-Hindu religion. Some of them went back to the worship of *Sanamahi*, and simultaneously to festivals, traditions and customs linked with it.<sup>18</sup> The attempt to cut Manipur off from the mainland was obvious, primarily due to a sense of disillusionment and disenchantment with the government.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.: 135.

<sup>15</sup> Sarin 1980: 118.

<sup>16</sup> Marwah 1995: 293.

<sup>17</sup> Amiya Kumar Das 1992.

<sup>18</sup> A number of militant groups prefer to call Manipur by its old name—Kangleipak. This, too, is a symbol of the emerging Manipuri nationalism.

Last, another aspect which has already been discussed, was the hurried and untidy merger, delayed grant of statehood and again, delayed inclusion of the Manipuri language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. As already mentioned, all this was seen as evidence of a general apathy of the central government toward the state and the Manipuri people. This was seen as a poor reward for the solidarity Manipur had displayed toward the government of India, as compared to other states, which had been up in arms since Independence.<sup>19</sup>

## Consolidation by Secessionist Groups

The liberation of Bangladesh came as a temporary setback to most insurgent organisations operating from there. Another setback was the granting of statehood to Manipur, as this removed many of the causes of disenchantment of the people. As a result of these developments, the UNLF was also forced to shift base temporarily. At this juncture a member of UNLF, Bisheshwar Singh, who was dissatisfied with its methods, began to assert himself. He decided to form an independent organisation with help from the Chinese and proceeded to China for training in 1975.<sup>20</sup> On his return, he formed the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in 1978, with the aim of liberating Manipur. Meitei revivalism did not remain limited to formation of the PLA, other groups were also formed, for example, the People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK), under the leadership of R.K. Tulachandra and Maipak Sarma. Another underground organisation, called the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP) was formed, led by K. Binoy. A number of other minor groups and parties, fed by communist ideals and with the aim of an independent Manipur, also emerged.

This period, till the end of the 1970s, was one of consolidation and preparation for the militant groups. While the new government in the state came to grips with its new found responsibility, fighting these groups was probably not the first priority on its agenda. Thus when the first major violent incidents occurred in the state, the government's initial reaction was one of shock and disbelief. It was during this period that the guerrilla fighters returned from China, trained, armed and raring to go. The first terrorist incident was the shooting of two policemen by unidentified gunmen, in Imphal town. The gunmen also managed to take away the weapons of these policemen in a daring and audacious move. The state of the authorities is well described by the then Inspector General Police, Mizoram, Ved Marwah. He says, '...I got an impression that Manipur Police did not quite know how to cope with this new phenomenon. They were ill-equipped and ill-trained to handle urban terrorism.'<sup>21</sup> This incident was followed by a series of attacks by the militants,

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<sup>19</sup> Nayar 2000: 96.

<sup>20</sup> The PLA has leftist leanings and these are partly attributed to Bisheshwar's interaction with leftist prisoners in Tripura's jail where he was placed after arrest. This influenced his thinking, which subsequently resulted in his move to Tibet for Chinese assistance.

<sup>21</sup> Marwah 1995: 290.

which suddenly raised the stakes of counter-militant operations.<sup>22</sup> However, within a short period, the security forces had not only come to grips with the situation, they had also achieved their biggest success in an encounter in which they had surrounded a camp of underground militants at Tekchan in July 1981. In this encounter, a number of top ranking militant leaders, who had been trained in China, were killed, breaking the back of militant operations in Imphal valley. On 6 July 1981 Bisheshwar Singh, leader of the PLA, was captured in what was seen as the biggest breakthrough until then, by the security forces in the Imphal valley. Another crippling blow was dealt to the militants when Thoundam Kunjabehari was killed along with eight of his accomplices in an encounter on 13 April 1982.<sup>23</sup> With this, terrorist activities in Manipur once again became low-key. While the PLA and UNLF were able to pull along, the PREPAK and KCP were almost decimated by the blow.

It must be understood that security forces cannot be expected to resolve separatist movements and insurgencies in isolation—the involvement of the government is also essential. And at this moment, it was the right time to regain the sympathies and involvement of people of the state, with most militant groups having been successfully sidelined by security forces. An initiative was taken to convince the militant leader Bisheshwar Singh, who had been earlier captured by the security forces, to join the political process. He successfully contested the elections held in the state in 1983 and won, even though he was in prison. However, his interest in joining the Congress(I) and denouncing secessionism met with failure. It is difficult to understand the breakdown of this initiative. It may have been his failing health, or the threat his popularity posed to the existing Congress leadership? Ved Marwah writes, ‘... efforts to bring the underground to the political mainstream could not succeed because the system in the state had been hijacked by unscrupulous persons, who have been manipulating the system for their own selfish ends’.<sup>24</sup> Bisheshwar Singh ultimately came to a violent end, probably at the hands of his former comrades in August 1994, in yet another case of mindless violence ending short-sighted policies.

## Stormy Nineties

The wasted 1980s led to the violent 1990s. There were a number of developments which led to a spurt in violence in the state. Inter-ethnic group clashes and political rivalry, plunged the state into the worst period of violence in its history since Independence.

In Nagaland, the split in NSCN in 1988 was followed by the meteoric rise of NSCN(IM), despite the fact that one of its leaders, Muivah, was almost killed in

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<sup>22</sup>The number of incidents in the following years were 14 in 1979, 36 in 1980 and 50 in 1981 (Ibid.).

<sup>23</sup>Nayar 2000: 126.

<sup>24</sup>Marwah 1995: 293.

a pre-dawn raid by the rival Khaplang faction. This rise was not limited merely to Nagaland, but to neighbouring districts in Manipur, like Ukhrul, dominated by Tangkhul Nagas. The Tangkhuls have traditionally supported the Isak Swu-Muivah combine, with Muivah himself hailing from this proud tribe, with its rich martial traditions. The NSCN(IM) not only dominated the hills north of Imphal, they also controlled most vital arteries coming into the state of Manipur. The national highway, NH 150 runs through Ukhrul, coming from Jessamie—both NSCN(IM) strongholds. Another road runs from Shangshak near Ukhrul till Tengnoupal. NH 39 connects Kohima and runs through Senapati, yet again under the control of the NSCN(IM). Thus the rise in NSCN(IM) clout put the state government, security forces and the people under pressure. It also opened it to criticism, with allegations of collusion at the highest levels flying thick and fast. Movement along these roads without security cover became risky. The NSCN(IM)'s 'tax collection' along these roads further embarrassed the government, with the group openly claiming that it was running a parallel government in the regions it dominated. It also raised the stakes, with all rival groups and political parties virtually propped up by one or the other group, vying for government contracts and funds from a favourable government in power. The common man of Manipur suffered as the groups competed to squeeze both the people and the state of funds. Militancy had become a business propped by the gun. The state of affairs degraded to such an extent that the Governor of the state, Lieutenant General V.K. Nayar, was forced to make a candid and realistic report of the situation to the President of India. He wrote:

In my opinion, in the conditions prevailing in Manipur at present, the real issue is not of the change in leadership or of alternatives but to find an end to periodic manipulations for power by different groups or individuals, as this has resulted in lack of political direction to the Government and guidance to the administration (.). It has also given opportunity to unscrupulous amongst them on the behest of insurgents to use the Government machinery and administration as an extension of their political authority, thereby strengthening anti-national sentiments (.).<sup>25</sup>

The period also saw complex alliances and strategic combines being forged amongst the various militant groups. The battle for political, economic and psychological control of the entire region was underway, with deft alignments overcoming traditional rivalries, which had marred all efforts at establishing peace in the past. The other faction of the NSCN the NSCN(K), which saw its control and standing fast eroding, decided to forge an alliance with the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), and the KNA (Kuki National Army) and UNLF in Manipur. This combine that came into existence in May 1990 was christened the Indo-Burma

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted from Nayar (2000). Extracts from the Manipur Governor's Special Report to the President of India, dated 5 October 1993.

Revolutionary Front (IBRF). The name of the group signifies not only its area of operations, but also those areas which were the targets of proposed unification of some of its constituents. While Khaplang of the NSCN(K) is himself a Burmese Naga, other groups were also using bases on the border inside Myanmar as sanctuaries and for training. Khaplang, with a sympathetic population on his side, could help these groups escape the dragnet of the security forces and also help procure weapons and equipment. On the other hand, Kukis are anti-Naga and their rivalry is ages old because of clashing interests. However, Khaplang in a deft manoeuvre exploited Kuki rivalry with the NSCN(IM), rather than allowing it to engulf his interests. This gave the Kukis a chance to counterbalance the influence of the NSCN(IM), and it also gave the NSCN(K) a much-needed base in Manipur, where its influence had hitherto been negligible. The ULFA while taking advantage of Khaplang in Burma could help him neutralise the NSCN(IM) in Assam, where it was gaining strength. This was something that the NSCN(K) required, especially in the bordering districts of Cachar and North Cachar Hills District of Assam.

The NSCN(IM) was also active, and was in fact ahead of the NSCN(K) in quickly neutralising its opposition. The NSCN(IM) and Kuki rivalry was dormant till Muivah decided to take control over the smuggling haven of Moreh on the Indo-Burmese border.

The Kuki–Naga conflict is an extension of NSCN(I) design to increase their domination, fight of control of NH-39 and Moreh for illegal resources borne out of smuggling of narcotics and contraband trade and to get major share of compensation of Rs 12.5 crores of Maphao Dam in Thoubal District (.)<sup>26</sup>

Although Moreh is Kuki-dominated, the lucrative spoils of the smuggling trade attracted the NSCN(IM) to it. Stung by this infringement, the Kuki militants, who were numerically inferior, decided to approach the Paites for support, which was declined. This led to Paite-Kuki clashes, with the better-equipped and trained Kukis gaining the upper hand. Paites, who were neutral in the ongoing Naga–Kuki clashes, asked for help from NSCN(IM), which of course, they readily agreed to, seeing the prospect of gaining a foothold and support in Churachandpur district, which was dominated by the Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes. The NSCN(IM) also helped Paites train, arm and organise to take on Kuki attacks. The Paites formed the Zomi Reunification Army (ZRA) with help from the Zhou, another sister group.

The third party to the conflict were the Meitei groups, who had seen themselves sidelined by these realignments. The PLA too decided to forge an alliance by overcoming their differences and forming the Revolutionary Joint Committee (RJC), in conjunction with the PREPAK and KCP. The Meiteis realised that unless they located safe sanctuaries, they would end up repeating past mistakes, resulting in their easy capture by the security forces. The Kukis—a group with which they

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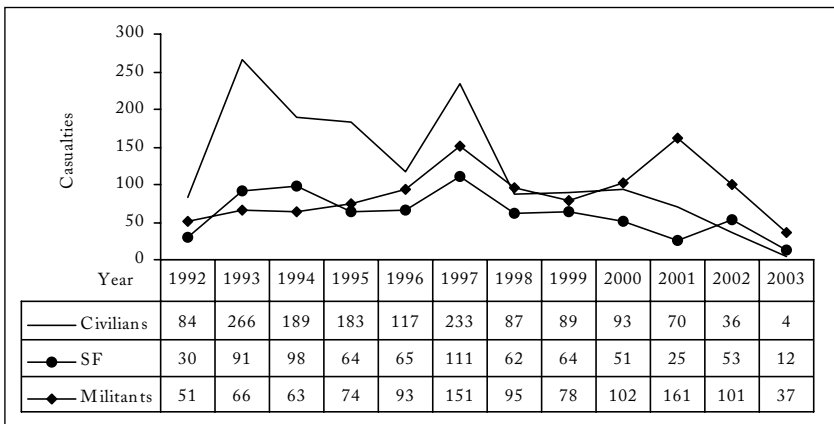
<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

had no reason for animosity—provided them this opportunity. This strategic alliance was also convenient in view of their ongoing rivalry with the NSCN(IM). The Meitei groups helped relocate a number of Kuki families, after the ongoing Kuki–Naga clashes in 1993–94. Describing the clever ploy, Mr E.N. Rammohan, Former Advisor to the Governor of Manipur, writes:

The PLA and UNLF never had any bases in Churachandpur district. They had for long been eyeing the sparsely populated vast track of hills and jungle from Churachandpur to Senvon, Tipaimukh in the south, the Thangjing hills to the east, the Tipaimukh Jiribam road to the west and NH 53 to the north.... This was ideal guerrilla country. The PLA and UNLF with admirable foresight, taking advantage of the ethnic clashes between the Nagas and Kukis extended help to the Kukis.... The Kuki chiefs were grateful and could not refuse the PLA and UNLF when they asked permission to purchase land.... They had now got foothold in the Kuki-Chin-Mizo area.<sup>27</sup>

The end result of these alignments and realignments was a sudden surge in violence, both amongst various groups and with the security forces. The levels of violence surpassed the levels of the early 1980s (see Figure 13.1 for details of casualties).<sup>28</sup>

Figure 13.1  
Casualty Details—Manipur



<sup>27</sup> E.M. Rammohan, 'Blueprint for Counterinsurgency in Manipur', *USI Journal*, April–June 2002, p. 244.

<sup>28</sup> www.satp.org writes, 'Six security forces personnel were killed in Senapati District on 1 February 1983 by NSCN(IM), NSCN(IM) militants attack Bongli Village in Chandel District and kill six children, NSCN(IM) kill 26 security forces personnel on NH 39 on 29 June 1993. From 6–8 August, 41 Kuki people killed during attack by NSCN(IM). On 13 September, 17 Kukis killed by NSCN(IM) near Imphal. On 16 September, 16 Kukis killed by NSCN(IM) in Gelneng Village in Senapati District and KNA set ablaze 45 houses in Sadu Kurai.'



This ugly situation came as a blow to the law enforcement agencies, with accusation and counter-accusation between the security forces and the politicians muddying the already murky waters of Manipur. Ved Marwah quoting the chief minister of the state says, 'Reshang Keishing recently said, 'We have no say vis-à-vis the army.... They have their own way of working, they will not tell us or listen to us, although they are supposed to be aiding the civil administration.'<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, reports of politicians colluding with militants to achieve their political aims were also not without substance. E.M. Rammohan writes:

In the elections of 2000, the different groups were hired by politicians of all hues, both state and national.... This was the case again in the elections of 2002, with the different groups firing at each other on the polling days with abandon on behalf of their candidates. It is even reported that the leaders of some of these groups stay in the houses of senior politicians of the state in the nation's capital.<sup>30</sup>

As neighbouring Nagaland hopes for peace and stability after five decades of militancy through a ceasefire between the government and the NSCN(IM), the situation in Manipur refuses to improve. A fragile polity, strictly divided along ethnic lines, neither has the will nor the capability to rid the state of its problems. Elections in 2000 and 2002 did little to bring peace to the region, as polarisation continues to remain high. Attempts by the state government to give peace a chance failed, when militant groups rejected a unilateral ceasefire declared by the chief minister of Manipur. In another attempt the Governor, Ved Marwah, addressing the state assembly, invited all militant groups for talks during the month-long ceasefire on 19 March 2001, with little success. Manipur seems to heading towards a fractured state, where the narrow interests of individual communities seem to be the overriding concerns.

Another disturbing trend is the subversion of the electoral process through the power of the gun. Allegations of a politico-militant union in the elections held in 2000, and literal use of the gun by militants on hire to the 'highest bidder', have cast a shadow on future elections in the state and the representative character of elected members. 'The KNO when first formed talked of Zelengam, a homeland for the Kukis. All this ideology has long since been abandoned. The myriad Kuki groups now have only one objective—extortion and hiring themselves to the highest bidder.'<sup>31</sup>

The people of Manipur may have a point when they claim that neglect and the foisting of inefficient governments on the state during years of central rule have led to their present problems. However, in the past few years, it is the state, its politicians and its bureaucrats who must share the blame for many failures, even as they share the credit for many successes. While successes are few, the failures are obvious and more than perceptible to the common people of the state. The

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<sup>29</sup> Marwah 1995: 295.

<sup>30</sup> E.M. Rammohan (see n. 27), p. 245.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

discontent such short-sightedness breeds is readily exploited by militant groups claiming to fight for the cause of their respective ethnic groups. What most common people have failed to realise is that such situations have no winners but only losers, who usually are the common people. With globalisation proceeding apace there is no room for isolated, inward-looking dreams of progress. They are seen as examples of regression, which threaten to pull Manipuri society backward in time, even as other states reap the benefits of a fast-emerging and developing India. Geography and history may not have been very kind to Manipur, as neither understands, perceives, feels and values the good of its people. In contrast, the people of Manipur cannot claim to be ignorant of these realities, especially those who claim to be fighting for the cause of their respective ethnic groups. The histories of LICs are being written and will be written in future as well. Militant groups and corrupt politicians, who hope to find their names etched in the pages of history as having fought for the good of their people, would instead find their names blemished when accounts such as these document struggles. This objective attempt at analysing the struggle has found no substance in the hollow claims of militant groups.

Manipur is a painful saga of blatant and ruthless exploitation, and is now a mere shadow of its glorious past. Moreover, the future of this divided society does not look promising. The history of LIC in the state is a painful one of opportunities lost and potential wasted, and a failed experiment in the peaceful coexistence of multi-ethnicity.

## Chapter 14

# Mizoram

### Background

Another state in the North-east, Mizoram, is located on the fringes of the Indian Union. Bangladesh is located to its west and south-west and Myanmar to its east and south-east. Tripura, Assam and Manipur surround the state from the west to the east respectively in an arc. Most of the state is covered by the erstwhile Lushai Hills, which were later renamed the Mizo Hills. These hills run parallel to Chin Hills that lie to the east in Myanmar (erstwhile Burma). The Mizo people are still psychologically connected to the Chin Hills area in Myanmar, for reasons that will be enumerated later in this chapter. This hilly region is characterised by thick undergrowth and vegetation, making it ideal guerrilla country. The hills follow a north-south pattern as do the rivers and serpentine roads, which meander through them. Aizawl is the state's capital and the hub of economic and political activity.

The Mizos are predominantly Christian. Religion has thus proved a unifying feature and has provided a rallying point for the people of this state. The state has made tremendous progress in the field of education and boasts of the second highest literacy rate in the country.<sup>1</sup> This high degree of literacy has always acted as a moderating and stabilising influence, especially in the face of attempts by hard line elements to mislead and incite the people.

The Mizos are however relatively new entrants into the area which now makes up the state of Mizoram. They had migrated into the south of present-day Mizoram from Myanmar in the eighteenth century. From the south they subsequently migrated northward. In the pre-Independence period the Mizos were a loose confederation of tribes ruled by tribal chiefs. They did not have a kingdom or kings as was the case in Assam, Bengal, Tripura and Manipur.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mizoram has a literacy rate of 88.49 per cent as per the 2001 Census and is second only to Kerala.

<sup>2</sup> Chakraborty (1997) says:

They used to govern themselves according to their unwritten but unambiguous customs and culture. Because of their mobile nature, the Mizos were unaware of any Stateform. They used

The Mizo tribes were aggressive and were never fully subdued until the British extended their rule into the region towards the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> On the eve of Independence, Mizoram voluntarily acceded to the Indian Union. Post-Independence Mizoram became a district within the state of Assam and the peace, tranquillity and self-governance characteristic of Mizo society continued. Therefore, the subsequent unrest and violence, which resulted from the emergence of the Mizo National Front (MNF) came as a shock to many. The emergence of this organisation can primarily be traced to the perceived indifference and mishandling of the '*Mautam*' (rat famine) of 1959, by both the central government and the Government of Assam.<sup>4</sup> It was Laldenga, a former soldier in the army and then a clerk in the District Council who set up the Mizo National Famine Front (MNF) in 1961. First set up merely to fight the rat famine it was subsequently transformed into the MNF, a guerrilla organisation fighting for 'Independent Mizoram'. By the mid-1960s armed aggression was well underway, and the MNF launched Operation Jericho. It was a model of planning and secrecy which shook both the Indian Government and the Government of Assam.

The Mizo armed struggle lasted for almost two decades. During these two decades, the tactically well-executed but strategically poorly planned operation finally resulted in little by way of the objectives that it had set out to achieve. Referring to this, Bawichauka, the Secretary of the Mizo District Council, in an interview with Subir Bhaumik says:

The MNF was all the time preaching that independence from India would be the best solution. We as members of the Mizo Union held the view that secession would be impossible. These were the contrasting views of the two parties. My assessment was that we did not have the strength and the wealth; we did not have the capacity to force secession: the population [was] too small, so how [could] the Mizos secede from India? We did not have the machinery.<sup>5</sup>

However, the lure of revolutionary warfare coupled with inept handling of crisis situations in the state led to another state in the North-east succumbing to an insurgency as per the 'domino effect'.<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that the rise in communism and related revolutions found fertile ground in most states of the

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to be recognised as an independent group of people but without any defined territory of their own.

<sup>3</sup> The Deputy Commissioner of Cachar writing in 1871, at the time when Mizos were still not under British rule, 'the Lushais have always been looked upon as independent people but it is not certain that they occupy independent territory'. Quoted in Chakraborty (1997: 109).

<sup>4</sup> The mishandling of the '*Mautam*' or rat famine of 1959 is regarded by most analysts as the final trigger to the rise of insurgency in the state.

<sup>5</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 144.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'Domino Theory' came into existence after the fall of the French regime in Vietnam at the hands of communists. The USA felt that the fall of France would lead to the communists toppling other governments in South East Asia one after the other, like dominoes. It also resulted in signing of the South East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in 1954.

North-east. The result was militancy aimed at overcoming what was perceived as the forced occupation of the region. However, most militant groups overestimated the level of support from within and outside the country and underestimated the ability of the Indian Government to defend the country's territorial integrity. Much of the desire for independence of the states in this region stemmed from the years of autonomy that they had enjoyed under British rule. The people of this region had misunderstood of the British attitude which had arisen from a disinterest caused by their lack of visualisation of profit from the region. They were satisfied to use these areas as a buffer zone, which could be exploited for economic reasons if and when the opportunity presented itself.

Some of the Mizos, like many of their neighbours in the rest of the North-east, felt that advancement and progress lay in independence and isolation. What disproves this theory is the amount of budgetary aid these states receive from the Centre. Small landlocked states with limited resources have no alternative but to throw in their lot with economic giants in the region, India being one such. Sentiments, however justified, are no substitute for economics. Even the British understood this, when they selectively dealt with the North-east, modernising regions which gave them or had the potential of giving them returns and ignoring other less economically viable areas, leaving them outside the 'inner line' or calling them 'excluded areas' (see chapter 10).

The end of Mizo militancy brought the state back into the national mainstream and once again placed it on the road to progress and economic prosperity. Currently, despite its physical distance from the capital at New Delhi, Mizoram is fully assimilated into the India Union. Mizo students pursuing education are a common feature in the educational institutions of the country. Mizos are also a common feature in the country's sporting arena. Thus Mizoram is an example of an area in which the people have turned their backs on a low intensity conflict (LIC) and are investing in the future and availing of every opportunity that peace and progress brings in its wake.

## Pre-Independence Period

Like the history of many other tribal groups in the region, Mizo history also suffers from a lack of documentary evidence. However, educated guesses and indicators from traditional folklore suggest that the Mizos were originally from Chhinglung in China from where they migrated into Burma.<sup>7</sup> They are a nomadic people whose traditional means of subsistence have been cattle rearing and shifting or 'jhum' cultivation. This inefficient method of cultivation is still practised in certain parts of the country. It caused the tribes who practiced it to be continuously on the move

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<sup>7</sup> As per L.B. Thanga, *Wild Races of Southern India* (1870), p. 56. 'The Mizos according to scholars and anthropologists, migrated from Chhinglung, a place somewhere in south western China, before 1000 A.D. and came down to Burma where they lived for nearly 200 years.'

in search of new agricultural lands with the resultant pressure on new areas. This resulted in the Mizos migrating, during the eighteenth century and thereafter, from Burma into the area which is now southern Mizoram and thereafter, further north into the area of Mizo Hills and Aizawl.<sup>8</sup> As per local traditions, it is believed that the Mizo chiefs 'are said to have descended from Thangura who lived at Ealam (in Burma's Chin Hills) in the early part of the eighteenth century, before Lushais began the Westward sweep....'<sup>9</sup> Historians believe that after a stay in Burma of about 200 years, the first Mizo tribes to migrate into present-day Mizoram belonged to the Kuki-Chin family, these included various sub-tribes such as the Hrankhols, Betes, Hmars and others. Amongst the tribes that migrated to the area after these were the Lushais who constitute the largest group amongst all Mizo tribes.<sup>10</sup>

The history of the hilly states of Mizoram, Tripura and the Chittagong Hill Tracts is closely interlinked with that of the kingdom of Burma. These states continuously attempted to capture important ports, towns and regions with a view to increasing their influence, trade and revenues. Alliances were formed and dissent encouraged in rival camps to achieve a favourable balance of power and strategic advantage. The Lushais<sup>11</sup> found themselves at the centre of this power game. Lushai soldiers were also known to serve as mercenaries in other armies. 'The region has also witnessed the frequent use of the Lushai tribesmen as mercenaries in Tripura and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, both by rebellious royalist pretenders and by the kings.'<sup>12</sup>

The advent of the British East India Company, into the region added another dimension to the power struggle here. In the early nineteenth century, the Burmese had established themselves as the premier power in the region with only the British as their challengers. The Burmese defeated the states of Assam, Tripura and Manipur and their writ ran across the region. However, the successful sponsoring of Arakanese insurgents against the Burmese by the British made a full-fledged war between the two powers inevitable. The study of Arakanese insurgency is

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<sup>8</sup> The description of these migratory people as Mizos is not very accurate as they migrated in phases as different tribes and it was only later when the issue of unity of the people came up that they started calling themselves Mizos as was the case of the Gorkhas in Darjeeling. S.N. Singh (1994: 123) writes, 'For instance, the Mizo, a generic name for a conglomeration of different linguistic groups of Tibeto-Burman branch of Mongoloid race retained tribewise distinct racial and cultural traits.'

<sup>9</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 56.

<sup>10</sup> A general break-up of tribes is as follows: Lushais 68.89 per cent; Chakmas 7.14 per cent; Pawi 6.9 per cent; Lakher 5.1 per cent and Hmar 2.65 per cent. Of these, the Lushais occupy the core of Mizoram and are located near Aizawl and Lunglei. The Hmars are located in the northern and north-eastern portion of the state.

<sup>11</sup> The Lushais were one of the prominent tribes that migrated to present-day Mizoram. It was as a result of the various sub-tribe's search for a common identity that the word Mizo came to be used to describe them collectively, as also the name of the area in which they lived was changed from the Lushai Hills to the Mizo Hills.

<sup>12</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 57.

interesting as it bears more than a passing resemblance to the ongoing cross-border terrorism that Pakistan employs as a weapon of state policy against India.

The hostilities ultimately erupted in the 1824 Anglo-Burmese War, which resulted in the British defeat of the Burmese and the signing of Treaty of Yandabo in 1826. As per the provisions of this treaty, Burma surrendered Cachar, Manipur and Assam to the British.<sup>13</sup> This war opened up the region to British influence, rule and ultimately complete control. They captured the area of Mizoram in 1891 and subsequently captured the Southern Lushai Hills in 1895 and the Angami areas of Nagaland in 1904.

It was the Lushai chieftains who precipitated the British attacks on the Lushai Hills through their frequent raids on British governed areas in the tea growing belts in the plains of Assam. The areas raided by the Lushais also included Tripura, which had a settlement with the British for assistance against a common enemy. The first of the acts, which caused British punitive action against the Lushai tribal chieftains Lalchokla and Botai, was a raid by them on Kacchubari, resulting in the deaths of 20 people. In the ensuing expedition against these chieftains, the British were successful in capturing Lalchokla in 1844. After a brief pause in punitive actions, necessitated by the Mutiny of 1857, the British launched a major expedition in 1889–90, successfully capturing the Chin-Lushai region. With this the British established their control over the Lushai region, thus ending their independence.<sup>14</sup> However, the last remnants of the struggle continued in the region, as Lushai soldiers proved to have both grit and stubbornness in equal measure, refusing to give in to British rule. This won them the respect of the British, who acknowledged that their valour was in the same league as that of the Naga warriors. However, their stubbornness invited savage punitive action on the part of the British to bring the area under control. Finally in 1895, the entire area was brought under British rule and was placed under the administration of the Assam government.

With British control over the Lushai Hills came large-scale conversions of the Mizos to Christianity.<sup>15</sup> The British regarded the Mizos, as in the case of tribals in other areas, as people in need of 'enlightenment'. This translated into a policy, which 'turned to encouraging Christian missionary effort in these areas'. There are conflicting views regarding the missionary effort in the area, ranging from conversions using coercive means to motivations of bringing about the genuine welfare of the tribals. 'The British imperialists appeared in Mizoram with a sword in one

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<sup>13</sup> The Anglo-Burmese War and its effects have been discussed in the section on Assam in greater detail.

<sup>14</sup> Unlike certain other regions, there seems to be no proof of economic factors behind the British incursion into the Mizo areas. It is thus more or less certain that the marauding Mizo tribes brought British punitive action and subsequently domination on their own heads by their raids on adjoining British governed areas.

<sup>15</sup> Conversions to Christianity in Mizoram followed its spread in the Kerense territory in Burma. The influence of Christianity is far reaching because of the opinion-shaping middle class forming the core of conversions in the region.

hand and the Bible in the other.<sup>16</sup> Probably the truth lies somewhere in between these two extremes. It goes without saying that missionary efforts, even in the remotest of areas in the region, brought about a revolution in the way of life of the otherwise backward people. It brought them education and health care and a common religion that acted as a unifying factor, which was probably the greatest blessing in an otherwise fractured, clan-based society. However, it is debatable whether Christianity was imbibed as a voluntary gesture or as a result of protracted indoctrination, during which welfare was used as bait. In either case religion certainly went a long way towards unifying and modernising Mizo society.

The missionaries were also given the additional responsibility of educating the people. This brought about a total change in the outlook of the people. Christianity converted the people from animism to a progressive and modern religion. Education changed the outlook of the people from a backward, illiterate and divided people, to a unified people with a modern sophisticated outlook. This change to a common religious and educational system, as introduced by the Christian missionaries, bound the fragmented tribes together giving them a common 'Mizo' identity.<sup>17</sup> This feeling of unity and sub-regional nationalism subsequently found expression in various events that occurred thereafter.<sup>18</sup> This is best explained by the unity displayed by Mizo tribes to collectively challenge the might of the Assam government as well as the central government during insurgency in the state. On the other hand, the state has progressed as a united Mizo amalgamation irrespective of tribal divisions.

At this time many Mizos were attracted to service in the armed forces as a profession. As soldiers in the British army they fought in the First and Second World Wars. This further broadened their outlook, as they came in contact with the outside world. This experience brought with it both knowledge and awareness. It opened their eyes to the 'power of money' and gave them a 'new outlook on life'.<sup>19</sup> It made young Mizos question the authority of their chiefs who were till then all-powerful in Mizo society. 'The closeness of the Japanese troops and the political enslavement of the Mizo people at the hands of British Superintendents and the Chief created political consciousness and a consequent awakening in the hills.'<sup>20</sup>

Both the Reforms Act of 1919 and the Government of India Act of 1935 gave an impetus to movements for self-government in the North-east. There was a growing demand for a Provincial Legislature amongst the educated classes. It

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<sup>16</sup> Buragohain 1994: 62.

<sup>17</sup> These threads of religion and education have bound the Mizos together, making them one of the most united, progressive and educated societies in the North-east. Despite a relatively late start, both in education and religious cohesion, they have progressed well over the years.

<sup>18</sup> Buragohain 1994: 62-63.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* A total of 2,100 Mizos participated in the First World War and approximately 4,000 in the Second World War.

<sup>20</sup> Nibedon 1980: 26.



also led to public meetings in 1920 and 1935 that were suppressed by the Government, which wanted no disturbance in the peace of the area that had till then been maintained through the autocracy of the tribal chiefs. Further the British Government, 'did not like the tide of rising Mizo nationalism as it appeared to be synchronic with the Indian national movement'.<sup>21</sup> Despite the suppression of the movement for self-government, the seeds that would finally bring to an end the rule of the chiefs had been sown.<sup>22</sup>

Mizoram had a distinct advantage in terms of an educated and progressive middle class. The balanced approach of this class was similar to that of the opinion-shaping middle class in the rest of India, which despite comprising only 20 per cent of the total population, influences decision-making to a very great extent. The reasons for this are not difficult to find. Education brought liberalism and pragmatism to the Mizo polity and the educated middle class revolted against the autocratic and absolute powers enjoyed by chieftains, who were far removed from the sweeping democratic changes taking place in the rest of the world.

The Lushai Hills district was, based on the recommendations of Simon Commission, designated as an 'Excluded Area' after promulgation of the Government of India Act of 1935. The term 'excluded' originated from the term 'backward', which had previously been used to designate such areas under the previous Government of India Act of 1919. The designation of an area as such was the prerogative of the British Governor General. As has been discussed previously, this area also fell outside the 'inner line regulations', which gave it a degree of autonomy.<sup>23</sup> However, these regulations only served to isolate the region, without any real provisions for autonomy and self-rule being made. They remained subject to the autocratic rule of their chiefs, supported by the British, their aspirations left to fester unaddressed.

The formation of the Mizo Union, Mizoram's first political party, in 1933, spearheaded a political awakening in the region.<sup>24</sup> The Mizo Union emerged as a political force in April 1946.<sup>25</sup> It has the distinction of remaining a force to be reckoned with even today, after its merger with the Congress. Its moderate character and progressive outlook have played a vital role in bringing the Mizo struggle back from the brink of self-destruction. The party was strongly opposed to the rule of the Mizo chiefs, who were under the British in de-facto control of the state. The (Assam) Tribal Area Sub Committee (set up in 1947), headed by Gopinath

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<sup>21</sup> Buragohain 1994: 65.

<sup>22</sup> An example of an exploitative feudal system that prevailed in Mizoram at the time was the system of *Bawis*, which was very similar to slavery. Under the system, all the Mizo people were *bawis* under the control of the chiefs.

<sup>23</sup> Despite these reforms, self-rule was not introduced into Mizoram, and in a strategy of divide and rule, instead of providing the people a provincial legislature, a Chief's Durbar was formed in 1941 to give more unity and uniformity to the system. This came as a big blow to the movement for self-rule in the area.

<sup>24</sup> Buragohain 1994: 62.

<sup>25</sup> Lalnithanga 1994: 87.

Bordoloi, Assam's first Chief Minister after Independence, gave the tribal chiefs an upper hand in the administration, as part of the 40-member strong District Conference. However, the misgivings of Mizo Union were soon proved true, when the chiefs pressed for the merger of Mizoram with Burma. It also made it clear that the chiefs were more inclined to maintain their feudal control over the people, rather than to encourage democratic means of governance.

On the eve of Independence, the pragmatism of leaders of the Mizo Union triumphed, who despite being courted by the Naga separatist leader, Phizo, to unite and declare independence, turned their back on the same. It was this pragmatism which made leaders like Bawichuaka, Secretary of the Mizo Union, realise the futility of any move of this kind. In a remarkable statement, which stands out for its clarity of vision, he said, 'Destiny drew us to India, and Phizo to a course that would bring disaster to his people.'<sup>26</sup>

It is interesting to understand the conflicting views prior to Independence regarding the future of Mizoram. The Mizo Union flirted with the idea of independence at one stage, however they could not muster the requisite support for it. Rev Zairema, 'was the first person to use the term autonomy' for the Lushai Hills. However, his demand was restricted to 'full-autonomy' of the Mizo within Assam. One of the leaders of the Mizo Union, Vanthuama, did however openly pitch for Mizo independence when he said:

As for the future position my personal view is that so long as we are economically backward, we should proceed under the guidance of the Centre but we should have the right to secede from the Indian Union within ten years or so.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, the Mizo Union demanded the amalgamation of the Mizo dominated areas of southern Manipur and the Chin Hills area of Burma with the other Mizo areas. The British, despite the recommendations of H.M. Durand (who was nominated by the British government to demarcate the boundary line between Burma and Assam) to incorporate the Chin Hills area into the Lushai Hills, carried out a boundary demarcation of Burma and Assam in 1898 and severed this area from the Indian side. This remains a sore point for the Mizos who claim that their areas were partitioned for no good reason, other than a lack of understanding and probably because of realpolitik overcoming reason and logic. The division also had an economic impact on the lives of the Mizo people.

For with it came severe restrictions on barter trade between the tribesmen living on either side of the Indo-Burma border. In the early days there was free and open trade between the Mizo Hills of India and the Chin Hills of Burma. Movement of tribals within 25 miles of the 270-mile-long border with Burma was exempt from passport and visa restrictions. The open frontiers were slowly closing. Rice, the staple diet of the Mizo tribesmen, for which they depended

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<sup>26</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 72.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted by V. Venkata Rao (1996: 7).

on the Chin Hills, was coming in less and less. This created a deep scar in the Mizo psyche.<sup>28</sup>

The Mizos also wanted reservation, as they doubted their ability to maintain their cultural, linguistic and socially distinct way of life. In a memorandum to the Constituent Assembly, they did ask for a choice, to decide their future at the end of 10 years, though this issue has never since been raised.

## Independence

The decision of the Mizo Union to join the Indian Union was widely endorsed by the Mizo people at large, contrary to the untruths that certain secessionist groups have propagated during years of armed struggle.<sup>29</sup> This was proved by Mizo Union's landslide victory in elections held to the state assembly and the district council in 1953. The Union won all three seats to the Assam state assembly and 23 out of the 24 seats on the district council, thereby silencing its critics amongst the chieftains.

The maturity shown by the Mizos was immediately rewarded by the central government. Special provisions were made in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to protect the distinct tribal culture of the tribes of the North-east.<sup>30</sup> Before the Mizo areas were granted the status of a separate district of Assam, the Lushai Hills District Advisory Council was formed (1950). The Pawi-Lakher Regional Advisory Council was also formed in 1951, along similar lines. Finally, an autonomous district council within Assam was also formed (in 1952), giving the Mizo people a degree of self-rule.<sup>31</sup>

In a major move, the district council (1955) abolished hereditary chieftains and granted financial compensation to the erstwhile chiefs. This came as a double

<sup>28</sup> Nibedon 1980: 33.

<sup>29</sup> The decision to endorse the Bardoloi Committee recommendations by the Mizo Union brought about a smooth merger with the Indian Union. The report recommended autonomy for Mizoram within Assam through the formation of District Councils.

<sup>30</sup> Though Gopinath Bardoloi was the architect of the provisions, which gave regional autonomy to the tribals in the North-east, yet there was resentment expressed by certain members of the Constituent Assembly in Assam. For example, as quoted in Venkata Rao (1996: 8):

We want to assimilate the tribal people. If you want to educate the tribal people in the art of self-government, why not introduce Municipal Act? If you want to keep them separate they will combine with Burma. They will never combine with the rest of the country.

<sup>31</sup> Dr Ambedkar had a major role to play in adding the provision of autonomy and the formulation of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Pointing out the logic for this decision, he explained the civilisational differences between the tribal people of the North-east and the tribals in the rest of India. He felt that the tribals in the former area had not been influenced by either Hinduism or Islam, and that their customs and traditions sufficiently set them apart from people in the rest of India to 'devise a scheme which would suit their genius'. He compared them with the Red Indians of North America, who had been given similar reasonable safeguards.

blow to the chieftains; first, they lost the elections which they had fought under the banner of United Mizo Freedom Organisation (UMFO) and the pre-Independence council responsible for administering the district ceased to exist in its original form. The final blow was the loss of hereditary rights, reducing them to the status of commoners. Thus, the chieftains became the first aggrieved group in Mizo polity, who put their weight behind the militant struggle in the state that continued for over two decades.

## Laldenga

After a smooth transition and a change in the power equation with the hereditary control of the chiefs now a thing of the past, the first signs of stress became apparent in the governance of Mizoram. Faced with a *Mautam* or the dreaded rat famine, the state machinery was crippled. Despite being forewarned, it was unprepared and unable to act to solve the problem. Assam could not gather together the necessary resources to tide the people over the severe food shortages, with the result that many died of starvation. Both the central and state governments' inability to provide adequate supplies was termed an 'economic blockade' by people like Laldenga who along with the chieftains were waiting for an opportunity to set a revolutionary movement in motion. This famine commenced in 1958 and supplies only arrived in 1960. This perceived desertion by the central government and the Assam state government had a terrible impact on the psyche of the Mizo people: hardliners and moderates. Batches of Mizos crossed over into the Chin Hills of Burma bringing back bags of rice, in an act of solidarity across frontiers, whereas the domestic government had failed to provide for its own people. The famine and, more specifically, the government's unpreparedness and ineptness in dealing with it resulted in many avoidable deaths and much misery. This tragedy also became the immediate cause for Laldenga's meteoric rise, as he exploited the government's inability to meet the basic needs of the people.<sup>32</sup> Matters were made worse, with reports of a near empty treasury of the district council, which implied that there were no resources to tide the people over the crisis. Laldenga had formed the MNFF (1960) to conduct famine relief activities after resigning from the district council. Some academics believe that Laldenga's motives were apparent, a good five years prior to the commencement of the armed struggle, with the launch of Operation Jericho, when he added the word 'National' to the name of the famine relief front. Subir Bhaumik says, 'The use of the word "National" betrayed Laldenga's concept of the Mizos as a separate nation—a view shared by most Mizo radicals and the chiefs, who had made an abortive bid to merge with Burma.'<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Though Laldenga exploited the situation, the MNFF that he started did carry out commendable work during the famine and endeared itself to the people. It was this groundwork, which assisted the MNFF in winning over the people during their subsequent struggle.

<sup>33</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 143.

Laldenga's power grabbing attempts further crystallised with the formation of the Mizo National Front (MNF) on 12 October 1962. This was followed by its winning two seats on the Assam State Legislative Assembly and 145 seats in the Village Council elections to Mizo Union's 228. Though, it did not change the electoral arithmetic, yet it had certainly heralded an era of hardline politics at best and of outright militancy at worst.

It can safely be concluded that Laldenga was a hardliner who had radical, revolutionary and anti-establishment ideals. His brand of politics had no place for anyone else, even if it happened to be his closest confidante and aide who could be sacrificed in a game of one-upmanship, that he continued to play as long as he was at the helm of the MNF. He did not have the patience to wait and establish himself in order to win popular support. Instead, he immediately chose armed struggle. Laldenga was a charismatic opportunist, who took advantage of circumstances and the simplicity of the Mizo people using these to shape events to his advantage. During the course of the struggle, it did at times seem that he had realised the futility of an armed struggle. He had initially set out to use militancy and armed aggression as an instrument of statecraft. This however, rather than being a dormant tool in his hands, became an uncontrollable monster, ultimately threatening to devour both him and the Mizo people. His initial stated aim was political power and statehood for Mizoram as a proof of his noble intentions for the common people. 'Thereupon Laldenga, in a bid to bring about a consensus, put forward a policy of independence of Mizoram with statehood as the real objective.'<sup>34</sup>

Laldenga, was impressed by ongoing revolutionary movements elsewhere in South-east Asia. He probably expected the Chinese to step in and aid him in achieving his aims but he failed to realise that with the exception of Vietnam, China had refused to offer significant worthwhile help even to revolutionaries of Chinese origin in Malaya, who probably had a greater claim to it than the Mizos. The condition was even more difficult to manipulate given the fact that Mizoram had amalgamated with the rest of the country voluntarily. Therefore, any premise of assistance from China or a popular uprising were limited.

It is also surprising that Laldenga underestimated the Indian Army, especially since he had been a part of it. The only reason which could have led him to this was the army's humiliating defeat at the hands of China in 1962, and as a corollary, he may have expected China to go out of the way to help him against an old and bitter adversary. Laldenga's failure was his lack of strategic vision and geopolitical understanding. He did not realise that countries like China have permanent national interests and not permanent friends and foes.<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, it was probably a well thought out and planned move. 'I think he had rather grandiose ideas. The reason why he did it was that he realised that in Nagaland it was only when

<sup>34</sup> Lalthangliana 1994: 175.

<sup>35</sup> It has since been revealed by P. Lalthangliana that during Laldenga's visit to China in 1970, the Chinese were willing to provide logistic support and assistance in training, but were not willing to give recognition to the Mizo government in exile.

they picked up a weapon that the Government started listening to them. So he said that I would do the same. In his own mind, he really did not want complete independence.... But he felt that the only way to do this was by an armed insurrection. I feel in his own mind he did not feel that it would be successful. But his success is shown, they have got as much autonomy as they wanted.<sup>36</sup>

## Factors Leading to the Uprising

Before discussing the struggle proper, it is pertinent to analyse the causes for the uprising. First, Mizoram was a region which amalgamated with India in the smoothest of transitions, and the only people who resented this merger were the tribal chieftains, since it heralded an end to their traditional power. Their resentment did transform into support for militancy for obvious reasons, as discussed earlier. They must have ensured that whatever following they had was employed to assist and support militancy. The time was ripe for payback to both the Government and the liberal minded leaders who had snatched power from their hands.<sup>37</sup>

Second, Mizoram is mostly bordered by present-day Bangladesh and Myanmar. Its trade routes, markets, means of replenishment of everyday supplies and ethnic links, all lay across the erstwhile porous borders prior to independence. Partition changed this arrangement forever, as Mizo people found themselves isolated and cut-off from their traditional trade routes and bereft of worthwhile links from the rest of India. 'Most of the trade between Mizoram and Burma was done clandestinely.'<sup>38</sup> This was bound to have left the people dissatisfied with the arrangement. The country too had its limitations, in terms of creation of facilities, which could overcome these logistic and administrative problems within a viable time frame to

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<sup>36</sup> Lt Gen (Retd) Mathew Thomas, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, in an interview with the author. The General is considered one of the pioneers of counter-insurgency warfare in the country. Besides having varied experience in such operations in the North-east, he had also set-up the elite, Counter Insurgency and Jungle Warfare School. In a frank and forthright interview, very much characteristic of straight-talking parachute regiment officers, he brought out the weaknesses and shortcomings of the army in the initial days in Mizoram. He also admits to the failures, a very rare gesture. It is not surprising that he and his battalion were subsequently able to learn from the mistakes and became a security force to reckon with in the Mizo hills. This is a fact acknowledged, not only within the army, but even by their adversaries who gave them the nickname of the '*Bhoot Paltan*' (ghost battalion). Details of the same have been covered in the text.

<sup>37</sup> The resentment of the chieftains arose from their severely curtailed powers post-Independence and the formation of the district council. This was in sharp contrast to the earlier conception of the chief having a divine dispensation to rule the tribe, an idea that the British encouraged—as the continued hold of the chiefs over the area, which ensured stability therein, was essential to their administration.

<sup>38</sup> Lt Gen (Retd) Mathew Thomas, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, in a personal interview with the author.

give a visible, perceptible and immediate effect. Food grains were moved to Mizoram, to cater for requirements of the state; however, cost of basic amenities was amongst the costliest in the country. This high cost of living did little to endear the common man to the central and state governments.<sup>39</sup>

Third, the erstwhile district remained under administrative and financial control of Assam for a greater part of its initial years, till the time it became a Union Territory in 1972. Assam used to govern Mizoram in a very loose manner, and the road system was not there, the drinking water was not enough, literacy rate was very low at that time, it was a neglected area totally.<sup>40</sup> Despite efforts by Assam to understand problems of this region, for which it set up a committee to look into its peculiar and specific problems, after the outbreak of '*Mautam*' little changed and the impression that Assam was biased against the district gained ever-increasing credibility.<sup>41</sup>

Fourth, this impression was further aggravated when Assam Legislature passed legislation making Assamese the official language of the state.<sup>42</sup> It is worth mentioning at this stage of the study that all states in the North-east have developed their very own distinct cultural and linguistic patterns over the years. This facet was respected and encouraged by the British—people who came from across continents to rule India. It is not comprehensible how states within the union could hope to carry out internal cultural colonisation. It is also not understood how these moves could have enhanced their political, cultural or linguistic clout. Even if this was presumed to be the case, its disastrous consequences had far-reaching lessons—lessons, which will remain etched in the history of low intensity conflicts in the country. 'I think it was basically because of the fact that the Assamese tried to force their language as the language of the Government.'<sup>43</sup>

Fifth, this move became all the more ill timed as it came along with the blow of '*Mautam*'. 'I think the biggest cause was the *Mautam* famine that took place.'<sup>44</sup> The combined effect of the outrage, dissatisfaction and isolation produced total and complete disenchantment with the state government. This was exploited to the hilt by forces which were waiting for an opportunity to seize power and work towards

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<sup>39</sup> The Mizos were not only cut off from their traditional trading areas, they were also formally separated from the ethnically similar Chin tribes across the border in Burma.

<sup>40</sup> Lt Gen (Retd) Mathew Thomas, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, in a personal interview with the author.

<sup>41</sup> While the Mizos were initially satisfied with the arrangement of autonomy within Assam, however, with the passage of time statehood for neighbours like Nagaland and growing demands for self-rule gave rise to resentment.

<sup>42</sup> This move was both surprising and unfortunate, as it did not take into account the aspirations of the people of the region. Even within present-day Assam, the Bodos and other tribal people have been resisting the imposition of the Assamese language. It is also ironic that Assam, which had made the imposition of the Bengali language on the ethnic Assamese during British rule a major issue in their protest, should have then tried to thrust Assamese on people with distinct and different linguistic backgrounds.

<sup>43</sup> Lt Gen (Retd) Mathew Thomas, PVSM, AVSM, VSM, in a personal interview with the author.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

selfish goals. Both Laldenga's MNF and UMFO, having failed to win power through the ballot, now chose to try alternate means to lead this movement.

Sixth, Mizoram dealt with the Government of Assam for resolution of all its problems. However, their contact with the central government was limited, if not negligible. After independence and accession of Mizoram to the Indian Union, Mizoram was projected and indeed was a model district which had taken a sensible and appreciable course that had endeared it to the government. However, as years elapsed, Mizoram became just another district and lost its distinct nature for the central government. This estrangement increased the feeling of isolation when coupled with other factors, which led a section of people to doubt their decision of accession.<sup>45</sup>

Seventh, Mizoram like some other states in the North-east saw itself as a distinct ethnic identity, with little in common with majority of the people in the country. It has been mentioned earlier that the region had lobbied for merger with Burma keeping in view their close ethnic proximity with the Chin Hills areas. Some sections in Mizoram saw its union with the country as an accident of partition rather than a logical culmination of an exercise in nation building.

## Preparation for Struggle

The first major overt action taken by Laldenga, which was to raise doubts about his intent, was his secret visit to East Pakistan towards the end of 1963 with Lalnunmawia and Sainghaka (both of whom were senior commanders in the military hierarchy).<sup>46</sup> This visit was aimed at tying up loose ends with the Pakistani intelligence agencies, to organise training and supply of weapons and warlike stores. However, the plan was delayed temporarily, when Laldenga and Lalnunmawia were arrested immediately on their return to India. Laldenga was to prove his ability to emerge like a phoenix time and again, when his future seemed to have ebbed. This time also he was able to convince the Chief Minister of Assam, B.P. Chaliha, of

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<sup>45</sup> The areas designated as 'excluded' were directly under the Governors or in other words the central British administration during British rule and the states concerned had very limited control over the same. This ensured their special status, which was subsequently lost post-Independence when these areas came under the control of the respective state legislatures. A memorandum (issued by the MNF) in 1965 said:

...step-motherly treatment meted out to the Mizo Hills is responsible for the unfortunate feeling of discontent that we are being treated as second rate citizens. It would be impossible to remove this feeling unless the political aspirations of the Mizo people are fulfilled through the early creation of a Mizoram state.

Giving an inkling of events to come it continued:

While there is no longer any desire to remain as a part of Assam, there is still that sincere desire in the hearts of the majority of the Mizo people to feel themselves as Indians but which they cannot feel in the present circumstances.

<sup>46</sup> Nibedon 1980: 45.



his intention to visit fellow Mizos in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.<sup>47</sup> Laldenga was released on 14 February 1964. Subir Bhaumik quoting Sainghaka (one of Laldenga's senior and trusted lieutenants) in his book *Insurgent Crossfire*, gives the background to the visit. 'Senior Pakistani intelligence officers told us we would have no problem so long as we fought India. One of the officers was a brigadier, who promised us bases inside the Chittagong Hill Tracts, and said that Chinese were agreeable to assist us through East Pakistan. We were given a number of contact codes and asked to set up groups of volunteers who could be organised for guerrilla warfare on the Naga pattern. The plan was delayed because of Laldenga's arrest but was revived immediately after his release. It was a case of now or never.'<sup>48</sup> Laldenga's release was immediately followed by groups of cadres crossing over into Pakistan for training. This was further complemented by arrival of weapons and equipment, which enabled arming of newly formed battalions of the MNF, by the end of 1964 and beginning of 1965.<sup>49</sup> 'Following this clandestine visit, a group of 22 MNF volunteers crossed into erstwhile East Pakistan from different points at the end of 1964 and camped near Dacca where they were given training in the use of arms and explosives. The group was given arms and explosives as much as they could carry.'<sup>50</sup> All this was co-ordinated with the help of Pakistani intelligence, which was more than eager to open up new fronts of unrest in the country. This was followed by another batch of 200 led by Sapzova and Sappawia in the 'last part of 1965'. A final batch of 160 crossed in February 1966.<sup>51</sup>

Ongoing Pakistani attempts at cross-border terrorism and the recent Chinese aggression was reason enough for serious concern for India. Probably Indian planners suspected a combined and concerted attempt by Pakistani and Chinese strategists to cut off the entire North-east region through a multi-pronged strategy of aiding and abetting insurgency, along with a limited or full scale military action leading to the grand finale. This suspicion was being reinforced with every case of militancy which emerged in the North-east. It was this doubt substantiated by concerted attempts by Pakistan to destabilise India, which prompted a strategic goal of creating similar problems for Pakistan, as a result of emerging Bengali

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<sup>47</sup> There are conflicting claims justifying the release of Laldenga. One of these suggests that the reason was that an attempt was being made to convert him into an ally against the powerful Mizo Union, which was making the post-*Mautam* days uncomfortable for the state government. However, another claim suggests that Chaliha was a simpleton who made the mistake of trusting the wily Laldenga—a mistake he was to later regret. See Bhaumik (1996: 146–47); and Marwah (1995: 234).

<sup>48</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 147.

<sup>49</sup> The weapons were brought back over the border by a group of 22 MNF volunteers who had earlier crossed over into East Pakistan immediately after the release of Laldenga from prison. 'The trainees returned with 21 rifles, two LMGs, 15 sten guns, 45 pistols and as much ammunition as they could carry' (Lalthangliana 1994: 178).

<sup>50</sup> Based on an interview with R. Zamawia, Ex-MNF Defence Minister, dated 11 October 1991. Quoted by Hluna 1994: 191.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

nationalism. This ultimately bore fruit, when India was able to not only reasonably blunt emergence of militancy, but also sliced the alma mater of terrorism and unrest in the region after the 1971 Indo-Pak War. This gave India a much-needed respite on a volatile and vulnerable front, easing out much of its pre-1971 strategic worries.

Prior to the launch of Operation Jericho, the armed wing was fully prepared for the military offensive. The MNF had organised its military wing into battalions much on a similar fashion as battalions of the Indian Army. This case of trying to ape the organisation and hierarchy stemmed from the fact that a large number of volunteers who joined in the armed struggle were either ex-serviceman or dismissed personnel of Assam Regiment battalions for lack of discipline. There were also a number of Mizo soldiers from the Burmese Army, who joined the MNF. This ideal mix gave the battalions an enviable strength in terms of professional abilities and basic military training, which takes years to inculcate in nascent organisations. It also brought inherent military virtues of detailed operational planning, sound logistic backup and disciplined cohesive amalgamation. All these qualities were more than perceptibly visible, immediately after launch of Operation Jericho.

The battalions formed were named after Mizo heroes and the first letter was usually employed to designate it. These were Vanapa or 'V' Battalion, which was the first to be raised. The others were 'Z' or Zampuimanga, 'C' or Chawngbala and 'T' or Taitseña. A group of specialist guerrillas were selected to form the Special Force (SF), again on the Indian Army pattern to especially cater for security of Laldenga. These cadres were selected for their expertise and dedication to Laldenga and were supposed to be the elite force amongst the MNF guerrillas.

With preparations progressing as per plan and growing confidence, slowly Laldenga's tone and tenor began to change as he adopted a more proactive stance. Though, he still held cards close to his chest and probably contemplated on the methodology of his final course of action, the option of armed action began to surreptitiously emerge from the shroud of secrecy. One of the first open reflections of armed action that became visible was in the form of a memorandum addressed to the Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri by Laldenga. It began with a background explaining that, 'Mizos from time immemorial have lived in complete independence.' It further emphasised the point when it said that its 'territory had never been conquered or subjugated by neighbouring states'. It also raised the issue of division of Mizoram by British when, after it was brought 'under British political control in December 1865, a little more than half the country was arbitrarily carved out and named Lushai Hills and the rest of their land was parcelled out of their hands to adjoining people... without obtaining their consent.' The memorandum finally adds more than voicing the author's intent. 'The Mizo stood [as] a separate nation, even before the advent of the British Government, having a nationality distinct and separate from India. In a nutshell, they are a distinct nation, created, moulded and nurtured by God and nature.'<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Memorandum dated 30 October 1965, sent to the then prime minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, by the MNF.

This memorandum could have been a distinct and timely reminder to the government regarding the intent of Laldenga and MNF. However, the relative isolation of the district from central agencies and the loose control of Assam probably led to failure of identification of the degree of fissures emerging at a rapid rate at this stage. It is impossible to imagine that even at this stage, anti-state activities were not being planned and executed in the corridors of underground power politics. This stands out all the more in its ineptitude, considering that similar movements were already engulfing neighbouring districts in their fury. This intelligence failure was a very costly one, as it was proved immediately after the launch of Operation Jericho—a masterstroke in principles of security, surprise and tactical execution.<sup>53</sup> Though as events would prove, it was ultimately destined for failure. The principle of selecting the right aim in low intensity conflict had been neglected and the militants paid a heavy price for an otherwise brilliant display of tactical symphony whose notes should sound as a lesson for all students of military history.

The degree of preparation was probably not visualised by the government, however, the tone and tenor of the memorandum addressed by Laldenga to the prime minister brought a number of representatives of the government to the region probably with an aim to judge the degree of isolation and suggest a solution for it.<sup>54</sup> The final visit on 7 February 1966 brought a 'fresh offer on the Scottish Pattern' vis-à-vis statehood, however it was too late for negotiations by this time.

Launch of Operation Jericho was accompanied by a near complete military preparation on the part of MNF, which enabled them to launch the operation on a specific date—an expression of confidence and clinical planning not witnessed hithertofore, in the Indian subcontinent. Every aspect of the operation had taken its place on the assigned date and its launch was a marvel in military planning, in terms of its ability to achieve surprise. It was unlike the characteristic stages of a low intensity conflict, which slowly and evenly raises the tempo of a struggle and rarely has the ability of strategic surprise, even if tactical surprise remains a distinct possibility at various stages of the operation.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> There are clear indicators that reports of the emergence of Laldenga and his military group were given to both the central and state governments; however, the government either because of an underestimation of the movement or because of an overestimation of their own abilities failed to take any tangible action at the time. It may also have been because of a combination of both, further aggravated by relative disinterest in the affairs of the district.

<sup>54</sup> There were visits by Shri Tarlok Singh, member of the Planning Commission, on 19 January 1966, followed by Vishnu Sahay, Governor of Assam on 2 February 1966. Shri Pataskar finally came to the district on 7 February 1966.

<sup>55</sup> For example, it is difficult to assign specific dates to the beginnings of all other struggles in India including those that emerged in Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Assam, Kashmir and Punjab, though they gave ample prior warning and indications to that end. The only exceptions were struggles between India and other countries, including Siachen and Kargil between India and Pakistan, which do have specific dates on which they began.

## Operation Jericho

Operation Jericho was formally launched on 28 February 1966. The scale of the operation was way beyond the abilities of the district administration to handle. Later events proved it to be even beyond the abilities of the police and para military forces which were completely overwhelmed by the flood of armed force.<sup>56</sup>

The launch of Operation Jericho was aimed at the towns of Lunglei and Champhai on the first night of operations. This was carefully planned to draw a compromise between the political and psychological mileage that these large towns were likely to accrue and comparatively less resistance that may be offered vis-à-vis Aizawl. Tenets of common sense and basic military teaching rather than bravado also dictated that lightly held posts were captured and large posts pinned down by effective fire. This facet often gets overlooked when operations are planned and executed by novices who fail to understand, visualise and appreciate the strength of positional defences and the combat ratio required for overrunning them. However, again any soldier will grant the Mizo cadres full points for this sensible plan which took off with looting of the government treasury at Lunglei, which yielded a large sum of 18 lakh rupees. Similar success was encountered at Champhai, where the Assam Rifles post was raided and captured and the treasury looted. The entire operation was planned by the head of Mizo National Volunteers (MNV) 'General' Sawmvela and specific responsibility of conducting the operations at Lunglei was delegated to Thangkima, chief of 'Eastern Command' of MNV. The Operation yielded a rich haul of tangible results on the very first night. 'One Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) and 85 other ranks surrendered to the guerrillas.... Six light-machine guns, seventy rifles, eight sten guns, two 2-inch mortars, six grenade firing rifles and two .38 pistols, as well as vast quantities of ammunition were captured from the post.'<sup>57</sup>

Though, there was strong resistance from Swamvela to hit Aizawl on the very first night, opposing views from other cadres forced him to launch a major raid on the town. Guerrillas, who had collected on the outskirts of Aizawl on 27 February, swooped on the town the next day, in a bold and confident manner. The guerrillas mounted in jeeps made a dash for the Assam Rifles camp in the centre of the town, preferring to play the confidence trick on the sentry to get into the camp. However, the sentry displaying rare presence of mind against overwhelming odds opened fire, thus averting a major catastrophe. The post stood up to the tremendous pressure applied by the numerically superior force of the guerrillas. Fall of the post would have paved the way for the MNV cadres to capture the town and achieve a tremendous moral and political victory, which would have helped galvanise the

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<sup>56</sup> After reaching the rendezvous, it was found that none of the cadres could operate the light machine guns. Therefore the Armed Police camp was raided to get a sizeable cache of rifles to kick-start the operation (Lalthangliana 1994: 182).

<sup>57</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 154.

tribal people all over the district in their favour. This was denied to them by the saviours of Aizawl.<sup>58</sup>

Simultaneously, the guerrillas had also aimed at the administrative unit of the town. They successfully captured the sub-divisional magistrate from his bungalow and thereafter cut off the area from the rest of the country by severing the lines of communications. Lieutenant General Mathew Thomas recounts, 'They organised themselves very well. To give you an example, Aizawl was surrounded by about ten thousand armed Mizos. When 61 Mountain Brigade was pushed in with 8 SIKH in the lead and 2 PARA behind them, 8 SIKH could not get into Aizawl because of the fact that Assam Rifles were still holding out, but the Mizos were all around, with the women and men and with old carbines. We had to bring in the Air Force. It strafed them and it was only after that we were able to push in and get into Aizawl... the situation was very volatile.'<sup>59</sup> Ultimately the siege of Aizawl was lifted, after the army arrived to relieve the beleaguered Assam Rifles post.

The reaction to the uprising was as severe as the degree of surprise achieved by the guerrillas. It may have been because of the deep humiliation and hurt felt by the government, which had always projected Mizoram as one of those regions which had merged into the Indian Union voluntarily and which could have served as a role model for others. 'In spite of this instruction (use of minimum force), the officers and men of the Army let loose atrocity and punished civilians indiscriminately.'<sup>60</sup> After an initial period of inaction for two days, which passed off in planning and initiating operations, the armed forces finally commenced their counter action. Critics have often criticised the slow reaction of the government, wherein the army reacted after two days. On the contrary, despite the degree of surprise achieved by the guerrillas and lack of communication within the army thereafter, it was creditable that within a week the army was again in control of Aizawl, despite the resistance offered. It will also be unjust to disregard the valiant resistance of the guerrillas, who despite the vastly superior firepower and strength of the army, fought on to retrieve their honour, even though they were driven away from major towns.

Simultaneously, along with the military struggle, political 'freedom' was claimed with the declaration of 'independence' by the MNF, on 1 March 1966.<sup>61</sup> Various

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<sup>58</sup> It has been contended that about five hours before the operation, while practising the use of explosives, an accident took place, which caused the death of one commando and injuries to another two. 'Had it not been for this accident the headquarters of the 1st Assam Rifles should have been an easy prey for the MNF force. The accident created an alarm among the public, and the Assam Rifles also immediately stood ready' (Lalthangliana 1994: 182).

<sup>59</sup> Lt Gen (Retd) Mathew Thomas, PVSM, AVSM, VSM in an interview with the author.

<sup>60</sup> Lalthangliana 1994: 183. The words in brackets are the author's own.

<sup>61</sup> The MNF 'Government' was called the 'Mizoram Sawrkar' and it had eight members. These included the president, vice president, home minister, defence minister, finance minister, foreign minister, information minister and the chief justice. The 'Government' mostly comprised ex-servicemen, which was reflected in rules and regulations adopted by them.

administrative and executive bodies required to carry out distinct functions had already been designated in the most orderly though ambitious manner. The very first meeting resulted in changing the name of MNV to Mizo National Army (MNA).

Two days after the launch of hostilities, the district was declared a 'disturbed area' giving additional powers to security forces in the area. On 6 March, MNF was declared an unlawful organisation, further strengthening the hands of security forces in their crack down on elements both under ground and over ground aiding and abetting the movement. These administrative measures were accompanied by almost a divisional sized force being pumped into the area. The first task accomplished by the force was to open the Silchar–Aizawl route, which had been closed after the guerrilla action. As Indian forces closed in towards the jugular of militant stranglehold, their movement saw a southward retreating action, which finally petered off with the capture of Demagiri on the international border, on 8 March.<sup>62</sup> The army surprised the guerrillas by their paradrop over Lunglei, followed by action to clear Lunglei and Champhai immediately after that. After limited actions, Lunglei was captured on 14 March, Champhai on 17 March and Demagiri on 20 March.

All major pockets of resistance had been cleared of Mizo guerrillas and along with this, MNF dreams of taking over the district by force were also eliminated. What started as a brilliant tactical manoeuvre failed due to the lack of foresight and suitable selection of terminal objective. It was one of the few low intensity conflicts which commenced with near conventional operations, including an attack on security forces, and thereafter slowly petered down to typical guerrilla operations of hit and run tactics. It is improbable that at this stage Laldenga knew that it would take another 20 years of long wait and avoidable bloodshed before he would see the end of the struggle. Laldenga could have achieved a political settlement at the very beginning of the struggle, which he finally did towards its end. Laldenga may have overestimated the power of revolution and underestimated the resolve of the government. However, it is very surprising that he ended up underestimating the power and potential of the very organisation in which he had served prior to setting off on a political career.

The start of the struggle was marked by large-scale participation of educated youth. They probably felt that they had been wronged and neglected by the state government. Their education and awareness was responsible for mass scale uprising amongst the masses. However, as the struggle progressed, it was seen that this very educated class got disillusioned with the movement not moving towards its logical conclusion—*independence*. This resulted in emphasis shifting to lesser-educated youth and sidelining of these cadres, as doubts arose about their loyalty. The participation of the intelligentsia is considered a must for any region to shape the course of its struggle. The initial euphoria about the ULFA too, resulted from large-

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<sup>62</sup> In a rare show of force and strength, air power was employed on Aizawl and Demagiri (Tlabung) with incendiary bombs dropped in the area. This was way beyond the capability and expectations of the Mizo guerrillas (Lalthangliana 1994: 182).

scale participation of students, which waned as the hollowness of their claims came out in the open. The MNF armed struggle also suffered from this weakness. They were not able to sustain their ideology and charisma for the masses, which had the requisite perspective to understand the fallacy of their declared aims, as the struggle progressed.

The severe reaction of the army was accompanied by air raids by the air force, which strafed Aizawl and its surrounding areas to break the stranglehold of militants before the army could enter it.<sup>63</sup> It was probably an angry reaction caused due to the virtual loss of the town, which prompted the government to take as drastic a step as it finally did. It did little for the people who had already been alienated by the state government and only caused more damage—both mental and physical—to the town. It is one of those rare occasions when air effort has been employed in operations of this nature in close vicinity of areas of civil population. However, it has to be clearly understood that it conveyed two contrasting messages to the people, even if the intent was not to do so. The first was that the nation would use requisite force available at its disposal to uphold the unity of the country. The second was from the point of view of the people of the region. It probably conveyed to them that the security forces were willing to employ harsh and punitive measures to teach them a lesson for their betrayal.<sup>64</sup> It is this second aspect which alienated moderates amongst the population, an action which increased the hold and grasp of insurgency in the area despite the fact that people did realise with the passage of time that independence would only remain in the realm of dreams. 'In the initial stages the Army was not liked at all, because of the fact that we had to take very harsh measures to cull the rebellion. We were just three battalions and the fourth battalion came later and it was a huge area that one had. We had to open all axes from south to north and had to clear all the major villages along the central route. In doing that, people were alienated, to a certain extent, due to the fact that we were not very sure about how to go about things. None of the battalions that were from 61 Mountain Brigade had any experience of counter insurgency.... But we learnt on the way, we learnt very quickly I would say.'<sup>65</sup>

The immediate aftermath of the rebellion saw the army rapidly sanitise the district of major MNA power centres and all pockets of resistance were soon cleared. After an unsuccessful bid at rushing the power centres to gain power, Laldenga and most of his guerrillas infiltrated into East Pakistan in March 1966.<sup>66</sup> The first phase

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<sup>63</sup> It is one of the rare instances where aircraft were employed against an insurgency in the country.

<sup>64</sup> It was probably in this attempt that some atrocities did take place in Mizoram in the initial phase of operations despite orders to the contrary. 'Looting, burning of villages and barns, persecution of disloyal and loyal citizens alike and molestation of women knew no bounds' (Lalthangliana 1994: 183).

<sup>65</sup> Lt Gen (Retd) Mathew Thomas, PVSM, AVSM, VSM in an interview with the author.

<sup>66</sup> This was the first of Laldenga's migratory tactics with an aim to escape heat in the region and garner international support for the movement.

of armed struggle had ended rather quickly and in an anti-climax for the rebels, with little to show as results, except for the captured weapons and money. It was already evident to all moderate leaders amongst the MNF, including Laldenga that the solution lay in a peaceful political settlement. However, his open acceptance and admission of this fact would have destroyed his reputation and he preferred to convey this through his lieutenants to emissaries of the government with varying conditions during the next 20 years, to enable a face saving termination of the armed struggle. The first attempt was as soon as two weeks after commencement of Operation Jericho. Subir Bhaumik writes, 'Within a fortnight of start of the uprising, he sent out feelers to the administration indicating that he was agreeable to negotiation. Both the Assamese Government and the Central Government in New Delhi promptly rejected his overtures.'<sup>67</sup>

### Support from Friendly Countries

The second phase of struggle in Mizoram is marked by regression in intensity of operations from open conflict to characteristic hit and run tactics associated with insurgency struggles. The guerrillas were quick to establish their base in the Chittagong Hills District, of erstwhile East Pakistan and received official patronage of Pakistan and local support from people of similar ethnic stock in the region. Laldenga wrote to the Pakistani President Ayub Khan and requested for, 'recognition of Mizoram's independence, possibility of meeting diplomats of friendly countries and passage permit for MNF persons in Pakistan including arms and explosives'.<sup>68</sup>

The initial euphoria was still prevalent at this stage and volunteers were not difficult to come across. A large number of volunteers crossed over from Mizoram to take training in East Pakistan setting the stage for protracted operations. Military training for Mizo recruits was simultaneously accompanied by frantic efforts by the newly formed MNF 'Government', to gain support from 'friendly countries'. Pakistan expectedly topped the list with General Ayub Khan extending full support to underground activities in the region, in the hope of repeating another Kashmir.<sup>69</sup> What followed can easily be gauged in the present scenario with active Pakistani cross-border terrorism in Kashmir ever prevalent, yet officially denied with the expertise of an experienced straight-faced lie perpetuated with dogged persistence for world consumption.

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<sup>67</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 155.

<sup>68</sup> Based on Laldenga's letter to the Pakistani President dated 20 September 1966. Quoted by Hluna (1994: 192).

<sup>69</sup> It was not long before Indians too got an opportunity to exploit their 'Kashmir' inside Pakistan when West Pakistani pseudo superiority suppressed the Bengali population in East Pakistan to an extent that it exploded giving India an opportunity to assist the Bengali freedom struggle. This ultimately resulted in the creation of Bangladesh in a time frame which may have come as a surprise to not only the Pakistanis but also to Indians and the Bangladeshis themselves.



Assistance for the MNF was not limited from Pakistan alone. MNF took advantage of the situation developed in the aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian war to exploit the prevailing animosity. In June 1968 Laldenga made his maiden visit to China<sup>70</sup> after contact was established from Dacca through the Chinese Consulate. Laldenga's visit proved to be fruitful and the Chinese assured Laldenga of political and military assistance through Pakistan. This was followed by visit of the MNF 'Ambassador' Lalthangliana Phillip to Cjina and he was assured 'training in guerrilla warfare and subversion in Yunan Province and Lhasa'. In September 1970, Laldenga visited China and met the Chinese Premier Chou-En-Lai and similar promises were repeated.<sup>71</sup>

The MNF also made an endeavour to seek assistance from the USA. Despite a positive response in Dacca at the US Consulate, Laldenga's insistence on going to the USA himself scuttled the plan and deprived the movement of possible assistance.

The 1971 Indo-Pak War upset a number of calculations on the part of Laldenga, China and Pakistan to work against India. The war and the subsequent dismembering of Pakistan resulted in the MNF going on the defensive. The few instances of violence perpetuated by the MNF were more of a defensive reaction as a result of ominous signs of defeat. They also wanted to use these incidents to pressurise the government and extract whatever best was possible as a concession when negotiations began. However, till the time regular assistance came from belligerent neighbours, the MNF remained a potent force.

## Second Phase Begins

After Laldenga realised that the objectives of Operation Jericho had not been achieved and compromise seemed improbable, he chose to carry on a protracted struggle. However, for the common people, 1967 made circumstances all the more difficult in the region, as the pressure of MNA logistic and operational requirements began to increase along with simultaneous pressure from security forces, who were by now settled in their counter insurgency grid. Another major step was initiated on similar lines of Nagaland and earlier in Malaya.<sup>72</sup> This was the establishment of 'Protected and Progressive Villages'. This work commenced from 3 January 1967. The government and security forces probably felt that they needed to secure the lifeline connecting Mizoram with the rest of the country. With this aim in mind villages along the Silchar, Aizawl and Lunglei route were initially grouped together in protective camps established by the army.

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<sup>70</sup> Lalthangliana 1994: 193.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Given in detail while discussing Nagaland as part of 'Protected Village' plans, which were adopted on similar lines as the Briggs Plan in Malaya initiated by Sir General Harold Briggs and carried forward by General Gerald Templar.

It has already been covered in detail in the previous chapter on Nagaland, how a similar action was initiated and executed in Malaya to move Chinese 'Squatters' into protected villages called 'New Villages'. The detailed planning and meticulous execution has also been covered in detail. In contrast, in Mizoram the security forces and administration were given the unenviable task of moving the majority ethnic population, which subsisted mainly on '*jhum*' or shifting cultivation. Thus, people were forcibly moved from their traditional areas, which had been tilled by their tribes over years causing deep resentment. Principles of conduct of psychological operations, prevalent and practised today were totally ignored probably because of a feeling that, to an extent, the people were responsible for sustenance of the insurgency. In fact, it is for this very reason that more humane methods to win over the people and isolate militants from them could have been employed. These protected villages were established along important road axes, grouping a number of existing villages and thereafter providing them with land in its vicinity for cultivation. Water sources were catered for and posts established to ensure its security and isolation from militants.<sup>73</sup>

By the end of 1970, four major projects were undertaken to group villages called by different names. The first project covered 106 villages and a population of 52,210. This was grouped in 18 Protected and Progressive Villages commencing from January 1967. The second round covered 184 villages from 1967 till August 1969, with a population of 97,339 grouped into 40 'New Grouping Centres'. The third covered 120 villages with a population of 47,156 to establish 26 'Voluntary Grouping Centres' from 1968 till August 1970 and the last covered 63 villages with a population of 34,219 grouped into 17 'Extended Loop Areas' from 1969 till 1970.<sup>74</sup> The progressiveness of the villages is a debatable matter.<sup>75</sup>

Widespread criticism and condemnation of the policy brought a bad name to the army, making it more difficult for it to fight insurgency. Ved Marwah writes, 'Mizoram is one of the few places in the country where the army deployed for internal security duties is even more unpopular than the police and paramilitary forces.'<sup>76</sup> Thus the army fought two enemies simultaneously. The first were the militants and the second and more importantly was its anti-people image, which was created because of misdirected force and the quantum of force. Describing the difficulties faced Lieutenant General Mathew Thomas says, 'I think the biggest problem we faced initially was not to shoot at first sight. I mean a jawan (soldier) would pick up his rifle and shout to a chap, "roko", stop and if he didn't stop he

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<sup>73</sup> Though there was widespread resentment against the movement, a large number of people continue to stay in the grouped villages given the advantage of being on important road axes of the state.

<sup>74</sup> Verghese 1996: 142.

<sup>75</sup> From the people's point of view the villages adopted may not have been very progressive but the names certainly did not project so. With every new grouping the names became more and more ambitious in their declared goals. The example of Malaya was employed in peculiar circumstances and should have been studied in detail before implementation of the same in India.

<sup>76</sup> Marwah 1995: 239.

fired at him. That chap was scared to death that's why he was running. So in the initial stages, we had this difficulty of how to tackle these things.... It was only through a little tactical knowledge that the CO had or the 2IC had or the company commander had that that you were able to do this. We did not have any concept really speaking how to fight this type of a war. Even though Nagaland had taken place but most of us had not put it into practice.<sup>77</sup> Thus, it is revealed that most cases of highhandedness in Mizoram were probably because of a lack of experience and training rather than any concerted intent at purposefully perpetuating atrocities.

Controlled movement and restricted land for tilling made the already limited availability of food grains a controlled commodity. Rations supplied by the government were restricted and its issue was related to co-operation of villagers with security forces. Collective punishments and restrictions on carriage of meals or distribution of semi-cooked meals may make effective tactics against militants, but it cannot be justified in a post-colonial and the post-imperialist world and that too with the people of one's own country. These practices may have succeeded in Malaya, but they were deeply resented in Mizoram. It has to be clearly appreciated that any insurgency is a battle for the hearts and minds of the people and with these policies one ends up winning neither.

Simultaneously, from the point of view of concern and unbiased justice, worse was yet to come. In all probability, a vast majority of people in the rest of the country were oblivious to the harsh methods employed, which sadly included most of the media. It is no wonder that people in most of the North-east complain of apathy, wherein the entire region is described in one sweep of the map, with little concern for individual sensitivities and feelings. While Nagaland may be partially guilty of a desire to remain aloof and isolated, the same cannot be said about Mizoram—a region, which willingly amalgamated with the Indian Union soon after Partition. The least it deserved thereafter were concerted efforts from the Indian majority to imbibe it as part of the national mainstream—an action in which it failed.

The grouping of villages did not have any crippling impact on Mizo insurgency. As has already been brought out while discussing the demography of Mizoram and neighbouring areas, both Southern Manipur and Tripura came to the assistance of the guerrillas. These areas were inhabited by Mizos, who were taken in by Laldenga's rhetoric of 'Greater Mizoram', which would comprise of these Mizo dominated areas, besides areas in erstwhile Burma. As pressure increased due to army operations, which became both effective and far reaching with every passing day, Mizo guerrillas dispersed in small groups in these areas, besides using Chin Hills and Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Another aspect, which hurt the image of the army, was widespread accusations of infringement of human rights. Militants and their sympathisers mostly engineered this 'blame game', but some cases did come to light which made the task

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<sup>77</sup> Lt Gen (Retd) Mathew Thomas, PVSM, AVSM, VSM in an interview with the author.

of winning over the people to defeat the militants in the battle of hearts and minds more difficult.<sup>78</sup>

1967 saw a keen battle being fought between the militants and the army in Mizoram. After Operation Jericho, the army settled down in its counter insurgency grid and ferocious counter insurgency operations were launched. On the other hand, militants too regrouped after Operation Jericho, taking full advantage of the moral victory of having held the state to ransom for two weeks in the preceding year. They started striking army columns both on roads across the region and also deep in jungles, through meticulously planned operations.<sup>79</sup> The Laldenga led political wing and the military wing remained highly motivated at this stage. They were still expecting some breakthrough, either through support from China or Pakistan in terms of diplomatic or military help or through weakening of the Indian stance.

However, despite the best efforts of Laldenga, which included constant liaison in East Pakistan and his having virtually shifted base to Dacca, Pakistan refused to give his 'government' recognition. A similar response came from China. Another institution which consistently aimed to moderate and tamper militant activities in the district was the church. They not only acted as emissaries for the MNF, they also tried though initially with little success to tone down the militant stance. One of the important religious figure who worked hard to help bring peace was Reverend Zairema. He was employed as an emissary and did a commendable job.

## Operation Chin Hills

Another major operation was planned by the MNA, though this time in Chin Hills of erstwhile Burma. This was yet another strategic mistake committed by the MNA and, in all probability, without taking Laldenga into confidence who was reportedly upset at the idea of conducting operations on Burmese soil. 'Operation Chin Hills' was conducted on similar lines as Operation Jericho with four towns of Burma being targeted simultaneously. However, this time MNA had the advantage of possessing more sophisticated weapons and more experienced and battle hardened cadres. This was amply demonstrated during the operation, which commenced on 1 June 1968 with 'C' Battalion led by 'Lieutenant Colonel' Lianhnuna capturing Falam with a

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<sup>78</sup> Some of units inducted into Mizoram were deployed in counter insurgency areas for the first time and in the initial phase there were some incidents of use of excessive force and high-handedness.

<sup>79</sup> According to Bhaumik (1996) major successes during this period were named by the MNA in a similar fashion as the army. These were Operations Gideon, Humnalhna, Monsoon and Crusade. The first ambush took place on 5 May 1967 at Zanlawn on the Aizawl-Silchar highway killing 17 soldiers, the second on the same highway at Bilkhawthilir killing 15 soldiers. In the third in June 1967 five government officials and seven members of the Mizo District Council were kidnapped and in another ambush on 26 July 1967 on the Imphal-Tamenglong road 20 soldiers were killed.

rich booty of 200 weapons and large amount of Burmese currency. Similar successes were replicated at Tuibual, Tamu and Tiddim. The MNA probably aimed to capture weapons and establish their moral and military superiority amongst the sizeable Mizo population in the area. They did not make the same mistake of taking on the Burmese Army as they had done with the Indian Army after Operation Jericho, having learnt from past mistakes.

This operation and period marked the watershed of MNA superiority after which their influence, control and ability to destabilise the administration waned. 'I would say that the Mizo rebellion was crushed by 1968, except for the gangs that went into China.'<sup>80</sup> The launch of Operation Chin Hills itself was a mistake, as it isolated the MNA. The Burmese Army intensified their counter insurgency operations against them and the Chin Hills no longer remained a safe haven they used to be. It also brought out fissures, developing over a period of time between the moderate and hardline face of militancy in the region, forcing Laldenga to bring about sweeping changes in the organisation of MNF and MNA to retain his stranglehold. In March 1970, Laldenga changed 'Vice President' Lalnunmawia from his position in the MNF and 'Major General' Sawmvela from leadership of MNA. Slowly the frequency of operations began to drop, as the Indian Army gained the upper hand. Lt Gen Mathew Thomas describing the change of tide in the situation says, 'The tide changed because our tactics changed. For instance, my battalion was called the *bhoot paltan* (ghost battalion). The Mizos would not like to ambush you at night because they would like to show it, they want weapons. So in the darkness they can't. So all our movement would be by night and by first light we would be in position. So we never really lost much and we gained tremendously.'<sup>81</sup>

However, the worst was yet to come. Relations between India and Pakistan had suddenly taken a nosedive, especially in East Pakistan, with Pakistani atrocities on the increase and Bengali nationalist movement gaining ground. India had been presented with an opportunity to not only cut Pakistan to size, but also break once and for all, the nexus of militancy and Pakistani support on its eastern frontier. Training camps sprung up—this time in India for the Mukti Bahini, and refugees poured in after the crackdown by the Pakistani Army, in what was reported to be one of the worst post Second World War atrocities by General Tikka Khan. The dawn of 1972 saw Pakistan having been divided into two and the creation of Bangladesh with Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rehman as its President. This sudden turn of events, which saw large-scale surrender of Pakistani forces, left the Mizo political and military top brass stranded in Bangladesh. The hunter had suddenly become the hunted.

Under these adverse conditions, the MNA and MNF escaped despite severe pressure from Pakistan and their own organisation to surrender to Indian forces. The credit of this heroic escape under immense duress goes to Baikchhunga, who was considered instrumental in organising the expedition. His cool temperament

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<sup>80</sup> Lt Gen (Retd) Mathew Thomas, PVSM, AVSM, VSM in an interview with the author.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

under adversity gave him the command of MNA and the cadres escaped to Arakan, in Burma from East Pakistan.

Meanwhile in Burma, Lalsangliana was given the task of contacting the Pakistani Consulate and manage security and safety for Laldenga and some more members of MNF. Lalsangliana posing as a Bawm tribal from Chittagong Hill Tracts did manage to contact the Pakistanis, who in turn made false passports for Laldenga, enabling him to fly to Pakistan in the month of April 1972.

It may have been a personal triumph for Laldenga, thanks to the grit shown by some of his followers who refused to give up at the time of adversity; however, times could not be worse for the MNF. The Mizo Union won a resounding victory in elections in Mizoram, winning 21 of the 30 seats. The Indian Army, which had been allowed access to Chittagong Hill Tracts, raided a number of MNF camps, destroying them successfully. Similarly the Burmese Army launched successful raids in Chin Hills, further pushing MNA cadres back into Mizo Hills. The people of the newly formed union territory had given a clear verdict for peace against mindless violence. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi took a number of initiatives to take advantage of weakened militant leadership and rank and file. After formally announcing the new status of Mizoram as a union territory on 21 January 1972, she also got a North Eastern Council (NEC) formulated to look into developmental aspects of the area which were common to the region. The Lt Governor of Mizoram was to head this Council, with Chief Ministers of all states in the region as members.

## Step-up in Violence

Ironically the pressure applied on the MNA pushed them from the periphery into the centre of power in the union territory. MNA cadres, who were operating from the jungles of Mizo Hills, literally took over the streets of Aizawl and Lunglei. This brought about a sudden increase in violence in the towns, contrary to general belief that the MNA was on the defensive after the combined pressure applied by the army and Burmese forces. This increase in violence also seems to have been a desperate attempt on the part of the MNA to re-invigorate and rejuvenate its cadres who faced increasing disillusionment. One such daring and publicity garnering action was the killing of the previous 'Vice President' of MNF Lalnunmawia on 25 June 1972 in his hospital bed in Aizawl. It also seemed to be a last ditch effort to squeeze out the best possible settlement from the government, which seemed inclined and favourable for a political settlement with the MNF. Animesh Ray, a senior civil servant in the state, has given the objectives of MNA at this stage in his book *Mizoram: Dynamics of Change*. He lists four objectives that include 'paralyse administration through terrorist activities, to show the MNA's capability to strike back, to restore morale in the rank and file and to force the government to come to terms with the MNF'.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Ray (1982) as quoted in Bhaumik (1996: 174).

From 1973, Laldenga, who was now in Pakistan, wanted to come to the negotiating table without losing much political advantage and ability to negotiate a favourable bargain. It had already become apparent to him that Pakistan's sole purpose of helping him was for their personal gains and not due to any sensitivity or sympathy towards the Mizo cause. He became all the more frustrated, sitting thousands of miles away from the scene of action, with ever-increasing chances of his rivals taking initiative and sympathy away from him and the MNF. He also had fears of MNF leadership being usurped in his absence, through the 'Phizo Effect', an appropriate lesson for him. In this desperate state, Laldenga assigned the task of opening negotiations with the Indian government to Zoramthanga.

The first of these two attempts were mired in misfortune, as during both attempts violent incidents took place, which scuttled attempts at negotiations. During the first attempt, when Zoramthanga was in Kabul to negotiate with Indian officials, the army arrested MNA 'Z' Battalion Commander as he alighted from the official vehicle of the Health Minister Vaivenga during the Republic Day Parade. This unleashed a violent reaction on the part of MNA, which in turn ambushed the motorcade of the Lt Governor S.P. Mukherji, who barely got away in the incident. In the second attempt, the MNA committed an audacious murder of the Inspector General of Police at Aizawl, Mr G.S. Arya along with his senior aides on 13 January 1975. However, in a subsequent encounter with the army on 6 March 1975, the chief suspect Lalheila was killed.

Events moved at a fast pace hereafter. Laldenga took the initiative after meeting RAW officials in Geneva, where he was able to go, after convincing his Pakistani mentors of his efforts to try and internationalise the issue. His express desire to negotiate within the framework of the Indian Constitution was appreciated; however, knowing his previous slippery dealings, he was asked to put his desire in writing. Accordingly, Laldenga wrote to Mrs Indira Gandhi saying, 'Since November 1973, my officials have been meeting your representatives...I have already written a letter mentioning therein my willingness to discuss the solution of the problem within the Constitution of India. In order that I can contact my underground colleagues to tell them of my belief and convictions so that they come around to my line of thinking, I would request to be able to come to India....'<sup>83</sup>

In addition, he asked for a safe passage to be able to meet his cadres and asked for instructions to be passed to the security forces to halt operations, even if this had to be done in a discrete manner.

On 24 January 1976, Laldenga came to New Delhi and after negotiating with his senior colleagues, a formal agreement was signed on 18 February 1976. The most important achievement of this agreement was the acceptance of Mizoram as an integral part of India and to find a solution to the problem within the Indian

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<sup>83</sup> Confidential letter by Laldenga to the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, as quoted by Bhaumik (1996: 177-78).

Constitution.<sup>84</sup> However, it still remained an uphill task for Laldenga to convince his more hardline leaders of the advantages, incentives and imperatives of such an action, which was likely to look like a sell out to lower level cadres. It became all the more difficult for Laldenga to accomplish this task, given his long absence from the scene, especially from the MNA, which had borne the brunt of action of security forces, while Laldenga remained isolated from the heat they had all experienced.

However, the political genius and personal charisma of Laldenga again came to the fore when he was once again able to outmanoeuvre his opponents at Calcutta, the scene of the conference, to come out victorious with signatures of all important leaders on the agreement between him and the government.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the apparent triumph of Laldenga in the political circles of power in MNF, the MNA was far from under his absolute control, as he would have liked the government to believe. Differences soon came to the fore when MNA leaders and cadres slipped away into the Arakans and refused to lay down arms, as a precursor to the political settlement. This led to a breakdown in the peace talks, which received a further setback with the fall of the Indira Gandhi Government and the Janata Party coming to power.<sup>86</sup>

In a surprising turn of events, Brigadier Sailo, who had returned after 31 years of honourable service in the army, took up the cause of human rights violations by security forces and also took it upon himself to help bring peace in the region. However, Laldenga saw a potential adversary in him and tried to sideline him from the political scene, as a result of which Brigadier Sailo was arrested on the pretext of trying to 'jeopardize the success of the peace talks' prior to the fall of Mrs Gandhi's Government.

With Morarji Desai in power, Brigadier Sailo was released, much to the discomfiture of Laldenga. In a move to outmanoeuvre him, Laldenga attempted to negotiate peace and surrender of militant cadres on the condition that the existing government in Mizoram is sacked and he is given a major responsibility in the new interim arrangement. However, the central government did not agree to this and instead announced elections to be held to the union territory. This totally upset Laldenga's plans who was playing a dual card by displaying a hardline stance to MNA and at the same time attempting to gain power by convincing the government of his firm belief in the Constitution. These plans received a setback with the government firm on holding elections and not supporting Laldenga in his crafty plans. In May 1978, Brigadier Sailo won the elections with a comfortable margin taking 23 of the 30 seats.

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<sup>84</sup> This was an embarrassing problem for Laldenga, since 'he had arrested nearly all educated and intellectual persons on the charge of accepting a settlement within Indian Union' (Lalthangliana 1994: 187).

<sup>85</sup> Laldenga in a meeting with Indian delegates and MNF representatives on 1 July 1976, agreed to give up violence and collect all underground cadres in mutually accepted camps within a month with all arms and ammunition and thereafter give up the same to the Government.

<sup>86</sup> The change in Government at the Centre was a major blow to peace efforts as was proved by the stance of the new Government after elections.



In the meantime, Laldenga's duplicity had also been exposed as his speeches to his cadres and letters to the government were released to the press and public. This led to yet another and possibly the biggest upheaval in MNF and MNA ranks. Laldenga realising the gravity of the problem took drastic and harsh measures to retain his iron grip over the organisation. He sacked the commander-in-chief of the MNA Biakchhunga, two 'brigade commanders', Zamana and Vanthanga, and the Aizawl town commander Lalsangliana Sailo—Brigadier Sailo's son. This was followed by a counter action when on 28 June, the sixteenth general assembly of MNF removed Laldenga from his position of President of MNF. This was followed by MNF Vice President Tlangliana ordering the arrest of Baikchhunga. However, finally it was the maturity of Baikchhunga, who refused to get into a confrontation with Laldenga for personal gains, which saved possible bloodshed within the organisation. Despite an amicable settlement, Baikchhunga was disillusioned and surrendered with 201 of his cadres on 1 August and 14 August 1978.<sup>87</sup>

Laldenga further employed his wily scheming abilities to cause defections within the Sailo government and brought it down leading to promulgation of president's rule in the union territory. The following years saw torturously long negotiations and political brinkmanship. Both Laldenga and the government, in order to gain a favourable position of strength to negotiate from, kept up the pressure on each other. Laldenga used the MNA to cause killings and disturbances, while the government increased pressure through the security forces to bring about increasing surrenders and captures.

The worst sufferers in the entire process were the people who wanted peace to return to the region at any cost. They were willing to give anyone who could lead them to it a chance. Elections in 1984 again brought a ray of hope, with relative peace in the area after widespread bloodletting. During these elections, the Congress(I) came to power, winning 19 of the 30 seats. The destination towards peace now seemed much closer. Fate again played spoilsport when Mrs Indira Gandhi was assassinated and peace negotiations had to take a back seat.

It was now left to Rajiv Gandhi to take on the mantle, from where his mother had left. He displayed bold statesmanship and initiative to iron out differences, which came to the fore and finally succeeded in getting a political accord between the two parties signed on 25 June 1986. The accord entailed resignation of Lalthanhawala, the Chief Minister. His place was to be taken by Laldenga, as the interim Chief Minister, along with a total of five ministers of Congress(I) and three, in addition to Laldenga, from the MNF. The final Memorandum of Settlement was signed on 30 June 1986, between Laldenga as the President of MNF and Shri R.K. Pradhan as the Home Secretary of the Government of India (see Appendix P). On 7 August the Parliament passed a Bill for upgrading Mizoram to a state within the Indian Union, with a 40-member assembly.

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<sup>87</sup> Internal differences, which had been simmering because of duplicity in policy of Laldenga, finally came to the fore and resulted in the breakdown of the formidable military machinery of the MNF.

Elections were held in the newly formed state and Laldenga's MNF won 24 seats, to emerge victorious and create history. The accord has since held and the militants have abjured violence. Mizoram has made purposeful strides and the state is well on its way to prove that peace and tranquillity is the only solution to progress and fulfilment of aspirations of the people of any region, rather than waging conflicts. Mizoram remains one of the sterling examples of a successful fight against a low intensity conflict anywhere in the world. It also highlights the case of responsible and mature people, who understood the futility of violence and forced their representatives to bring peace to the troubled region. 'The story of autonomy movement of the Mizos is the saga of the transition of a gerontocratic social order tinged with occasional political extremism or insurgency of horrendous nature.'<sup>88</sup> The history and role of the people of Mizoram is an example of how contradictions can be resolved and overcome by a mature democratic process. 'The peaceful conversion of an insurgent outfit steeped in the philosophy of secession and boldly resolution into a democratic party both as ruling and opposition, is a landmark in the history of the evolution of nationalism of the great Mizo people.'<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Thanga 1994: 84.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter 15

# Tripura

### Background

Tripura is another state which is bounded more by international borders than by state boundaries within the country. The state's entire south-western, western, north-western and northern boundary is contiguous with Bangladesh. Its eastern regions are bounded by Mizoram and the north eastern region by the Cachar district of Assam. The intervening plains and the Chittagong Hill Tracts separate the Indian state of West Bengal from its landmass, which in all probability is the reason for its cultural, ethnic and linguistic proximity with erstwhile East Pakistan and present day Bangladesh. Present day Tripura was originally a part of the erstwhile princely state of Tripura. Its hilly regions, generally corresponding with modern day Tripura, are inhabited by tribal people and were called Hill Tippera during the pre-Independence period.

Tripura has two distinct geographic divisions, and this has played an important role in creating the ethnic divide that has plagued the state in the past few decades. One of the divisions is the fertile plains region found towards the western reaches of the state while the other division is the hilly areas which lie towards the east and north east. The western region is contiguous to the plains of Bangladesh, with which it had ancient trade links through the towns of Chittagong in the south, Comilla to the west and Sylhet to its north.<sup>1</sup> The hilly region increases in altitude and becomes rugged as it extends towards the east and merges with the low-lying hills of Mizoram around Aizawl.

Tripura is one of those few regions which appropriately illustrates the stark realities of ethnic colonisation within the Indian Union. It is because of these examples of blatant encroachment that such states have risen in revolt, fearing the loss of identity. This sad saga of internal colonisation makes the act all the more unfortunate as Tripura boasts of a rich history with a long lineage of kings who

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<sup>1</sup> The erstwhile rulers of Tripura conquered some of these regions as well before they had to finally accede to British suzerainty and the Maharaja was left with the present day state to rule.

ruled the area and prided themselves on their well established, recognised and respected cultural identity.

Upheavals in history have always been known to transform ruling classes in kingdoms. However, it is not often that within a short period of time the subjects, or as will be relevant in the post-Independence period, the electorate, itself undergoes a sea change, transforming the very nature of representation. When such changes are thrust upon regions along with encroachments on agricultural land, the conditions become ripe for mass uprisings. When this is coupled with a contiguous international border and neighbours looking for opportunities to foment trouble, a low intensity conflict is ready to take root.

Unlike a region like Nagaland, Tripura is an example of peaceful integration of a region with the Indian Union. It acceded to the Indian Union on 13 August 1947 and subsequently chose to fully integrate on 15 October 1949.<sup>2</sup> This, however, occurred only after the pulls and pressures of court intrigue and attempts to claim the throne of Tripura after the last ruler Raja Bir Bikram died on 17 May 1947, having made up his mind to accede to the Indian Union.<sup>3</sup> Durjoy Kishore, a descendent of the royalty in the state and a claimant to the throne of Tripura interfered with the integration attempts. When he failed in his objectives, he tried to assist the Muslim League, which had plans to merge Tripura with East Pakistan. However, these plans were rendered ineffective due to timely action by the Indian Union and the late Raja's queen, Rani Kanchanprabha.<sup>4</sup>

Tripura also has a history of a deeply embedded communist movement. This established itself in the last two decades before Independence and people's angst found expression through its mouthpiece. The movement began to take root after the king Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya decided to assist the British in their war against the Japanese. This decision to participate in the war effort resulted in increased taxes on the people and the worsening of their already poor economic status. The resultant movement led by a tribal ascetic Ratanmoli Noatia rallied the

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<sup>2</sup> Tripura was one of the few regions where transformation to statehood was a smooth transition without it being forced through the barrel of the gun. It achieved the status of a Union Territory on 1 November 1956 and statehood on 21 January 1972. It was probably the effect of agitation in the neighbouring regions which made the government give it its due well in time rather than make it an issue for agitation.

<sup>3</sup> There are contentions that despite the peaceful merger, there were some elements which favoured independence and some a merger with East Pakistan. 'Tripura tribals soon after the Partition desired not to merge with the Indian Union while some non-tribals favoured merger with Pakistan. But interestingly enough a section of tribal leaders desired to remain independent to resist alien politics. The parliamentary system was practically opposed by a section of tribal elites of royal origin' (Roy 1996: 310-11).

<sup>4</sup> While the princely state merged with India, the merger did little to give the people their much cherished desire for democracy. Even though the state became a Part C State, it was under the governance of a Chief Commissioner much to the disappointment of the people. This may have indirectly assisted in giving a fillip to the communist movement in the state and to rising discontentment.

people and instigated them to refuse payment of their taxes to revenue collectors of the Maharaja.

Though the king successfully suppressed this 'revolt', the seeds of communism had taken root. In subsequent references this revolt is said to be the beginning of the communist struggle in Tripura. The communists conveniently hijacked this peasant movement for electoral and ideological gains. However, even if this revolt is taken as a simple uprising without any ideological underpinnings, it certainly became a powerful means of unifying the people against the established governing agency. It set precedence for popular uprisings, which has been followed since, in the tribals' demand for their rights.

The problems in Tripura did not result from the throes of Partition. On the contrary, Tripura, much like Mizoram, commenced its journey with the Indian Union on a strong foundation of legal and moral accession, duly supported by the people. Tripura's problems stem from dissatisfaction caused by years of neglect and misrule, coupled with partisan governance of the ruling elite which caused a stark change in demographic politics of the region. This resulted in change of percentage of the tribal population from two-thirds to one-third in three decades after Independence.

The seeds of insurgency after having taken root began to germinate. The first action of frustration and rising dissatisfaction was the formation of the Tripura Upajati Juba Samity (TUJS) or Tripura Tribals Youth League in June 1967. The TUJS demanded creation of an autonomous district council under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, adoption of Kok Borak as the official language, restoration of tribal lands that had been alienated and development of the area. The subsequent years also saw the rise of Bijoy Hrangkhawl, who was a Christian tribal unlike most of the others in the region. After the TUJS failed to either make a mark on the political front or to achieve its objectives, Hrangkhawl took a different route to achieve his aims. On 10 November 1978, the Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) was formed with an aim to 'fight for Tripura's freedom'. The TNV created its bases in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region and commenced its operations. Meanwhile, the TUJS continued to fight for their demands as they were not satisfied with being given recognition under the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. A compromise was arrived at, with the formation of the Autonomous Hills District that was given recognition under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution in July 1985.

After a decade of violence, Hrangkhawl did accept peace with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the government on 12 August 1988. However, the state was not destined to have peace. Two more secessionist organisations, the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and the All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF), were formed in 1989 and 1990. These two groups have led a bloody and protracted movement against the government, with sporadic incidents of violence and occasional surrenders of its cadres. Despite a perceptible cooling down of insurgency-related struggles in the region, armed expressions of dissatisfaction continue in Tripura.

The problems in Tripura have been complicated with accusations of militancy having entwined itself with politics, as is the case in Manipur. It is a sad commentary on the state of affairs of the region, where the interests of a large number of people have been neglected to achieve parochial and partisan interests.

## Pre-Independence

The ruling lineage of Tripura is widely considered to be the oldest in the region. This lineage of 187 Tripuri rulers represents a vivid, rich and historic period, especially during the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth century when the empire was at the heights of its power.<sup>5</sup> The history of the latter part of this period is recorded in the royal chronicles of the kings—the Rajmala.<sup>6</sup> The Tripuri people also claim that this lineage dates back to 590 A.D., which makes it three years older than the kingdom of Bengal.<sup>7</sup>

In the detailed account of the rulers and the kingdom available through these chronicles King Dhanya Manikya, who ruled around the late fifteenth century, stands out as the most outstanding ruler. His empire included major parts of present day Bangladesh till the line of Meghna river, which includes important areas such as Sylhet, Comilla and Chittagong. It also included areas till the eastern edge of Arakan, which is in present day Myanmar, and Cachar in the north, which is now a part of present day Assam.

Tripura's history is inextricably entwined with the history of Bengal, including present day Bangladesh. During the reign of Dhanya Manikya and his immediate successors, the kingdom of Tripura enlarged its dominions at the cost of Bengal. This trend was however reversed to quite an extent with the Mughal Governor of Bengal wresting the plain areas. However the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, and after him Shahjahan, failed to penetrate the eastern limits of the kingdom, which continued to wage guerrilla warfare from a terrain specially suited for this purpose—the terrain continuing to play an important role in the current situation of conflict. This was probably the first time that this form of warfare was employed by the people of the state to defeat the designs of the Mughals.

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<sup>5</sup> There is mention of Tripura in epics like the *Mahabharata*. 'However, if the puranas of the Mahabharata are to be taken as of historical value, then based on the mention of Tripura kings in that epic, Tripura Raj existed in 600 B.C.' (Narhari 2002: 174.)

<sup>6</sup> Ironically even the royal priests of the kings were Bengali Brahmins. They were responsible for religious functions and also played a dominant role in documentation and administrative functions. It is not surprising that for the special skills of the Bengali Brahmins or the '*bhadralok*' the British were to again employ them for similar duties. These people are now represented in the present day *babudom*.

<sup>7</sup> There are 18 major tribes in Tripura, of which 12 are indigenous and the balance were brought to the region as labourers. The Tripuris formed the ruling class of the region and there are reasons to believe that lesser tribes like the Kukis, Reangs and Jamatias were discriminated against. This will subsequently be brought out when the revolt of the Reangs is discussed.

This area changed hands again soon after the British recorded their first major victory in India in 1757, at the Battle of Plassey against Siraj-ud-Daula, the Governor of Bengal. This was followed by ceding of Chittagong to the British in 1760, to include most of the plains areas of the erstwhile kingdom of Tripura east of Meghna other than Chakla Roshanabad, a strip of land running from Sylhet and Comilla till Noakhali. The British recorded another victory with the defeat of Mir Kasim at the Battle of Buxar in 1764, thus completing their conquest of Bengal. This changed forever the territorial equation of Bengal vis-à-vis Tripura.<sup>8</sup> Though Bengal too was divided after Partition, Tripura not only lost most of its fertile land, it also lost its access for trade and commerce to the outside world. On top of that the Tripuri tribal people lost whatever little land they had to the plainsmen, who wrested their fertile land through guile and cunning measures. This deeply felt hurt, which still exists in the minds of the people was greatly responsible for the subsequent problems, which includes the related issue of demographic change in the state.

British interests in the region had a variety of facets to it. First, it was control of trading lines of communication emanating from Calcutta and Chittagong—the twin engines of growth—which were to power British growth in the region. Chittagong remained a very important centre for trade for states like Tripura, but this vital link was denied to them after Independence. Second, Britain had an ambitious policy of nurturing trade with China through existing trade routes. This could have been done through states in the north-east. Because of its location Tripura presented that window of opportunity. Third, there was a perceived advantage of control over the region. It was felt that the region provided protection through its relatively impregnable barrier of mountains and jungles.<sup>9</sup> Fourth, the area provided the government with vast revenues and resources in terms of natural treasures like oil and minerals. It also became a producer of tea, which was exported in bulk from India and continues to be exported till date. The backwardness of the region also provided an opportunity for honourable duties like educating and improving the living conditions of the people—a task that the missionaries took upon themselves. Though this factor is applicable to a lesser degree in Tripura, despite its large tribal population.

It is for this reason that British conquests stopped at the doorsteps of Tripura, leaving the hilly regions of present day Tripura along with Chakla Roshanabad to be administered by the king. It was not for any reason of inability to take the region that this decision was made, as was the case in other states where inaccessible areas were left for local administration, through tribal customs and laws. As earlier

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<sup>8</sup> This event left in its trail a feeling of lost grandeur and strength in the region. It remains a sore point for the people of the region, which and the need for regaining the old glory may be one of the reasons behind the use of violence.

<sup>9</sup> This presumption was proved wrong to a large extent when the Japanese, experts at jungle warfare, not only penetrated the jungle barrier of north-east India, but also crossed it to give the British a resounding defeat before they were themselves finally defeated. This also proved, yet again, that no barrier can stop a determined adversary.

highlighted, this was also the reason that regulations like 'Inner Line' and 'Excluded Area' were promulgated. It was merely a neat cost-benefit ratio worked out by the British in the north-eastern regions. After the British took the fertile and economically progressive areas, the balance was left to the king, which is largely present day Tripura.<sup>10</sup> Alexander Mackenzie writes in his book *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of North-East Frontier of Bengal*, 'We found Roshanabad a *zamindari* and treated it as such. But of the barren hills that fenced it on the East, we took no cognisance. Further, the company sought rupees, not elephants and so the hills were left with the native rule.'<sup>11</sup> The aims of the British could not have been made any clearer.

Tripura is the only region amongst the tribal dominated states at the time of Partition which was strongly influenced by an educated middle class who were from a different ethnic background and social class. Bengali influence on the state was always present. However, this influence was in the form of improving efficiency and filling voids which the tribal population presented. As early as 1875, the percentage of tribal population was 63.77, which clearly indicates the extent to which non-tribals had settled in the area, a majority of whom were Bengalis. They were involved in routine affairs like education, upkeep of records of the state and trade and commerce. The king had possibly also brought Bengalis to till the plains through modern methods of cultivation in contrast to '*jhum*' practised by the tribals. This was with a basic aim to improve productivity and revenues. Yet another reason attributed was the desire to gain royal recognition by the king through high caste Bengali Brahmins, who were given land in exchange.<sup>12</sup>

The gradual increase in non-tribal population thereafter is the result of a number of factors. The first was a requirement of the state of Tripura, which needed people who could till the available land, which was under-utilised, to improve productivity and revenues. This was subsequently augmented by cultivation of tea, which suddenly became a viable cash crop. The second requirement was of an educated class that could help administer the state and assist in fields like education. It is surprising to note that till 1949, when the kingdom of Tripura finally merged with the Indian Union, Bengali was the language of the royal court and not Kok Borok, something which became a major grievance after Independence.

These requirements of the state received a symbiotic thrust in subsequent years when economic deprivation, problem of lack of agricultural land in Bengal and communal pressures in present day Bangladesh forced a large number of people to

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<sup>10</sup> The accuracy of British economic assessment has been proved even after five decades of their withdrawal. The regions which were designated outside the inner line and were part of the excluded areas are still hankering for the same status not realising that this very isolation over decades has destroyed whatever little economic potential the region did have. The ability of this region to sustain itself too remains suspect despite the heavy aid from the Central government to run the states.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from Subir Bhaumik 1996: 59-60.

<sup>12</sup> Roy 1996: 369.



migrate. According to census figures available, the percentage of tribal population declined from 53.16 per cent in 1941 to 37.50 per cent in 1951. This probably signifies the increased influx of outsiders during the period of Partition.

Petty politics has played a vital role in aggravating a number of problems in India's north-eastern states. The case of Tripura is no different. Political parties are divided over the issue of support for outsiders in the state. As soon as it was realised that the migrant population was likely to have a greater impact on the electoral process, ethics and righteousness were sacrificed to garner the migrant vote bank. This process started on the eve of Independence and has been gaining momentum over the years. These factors pushed the tribal population deeper into the interiors where cultivation was difficult, land productivity was less and jungles had to be cleared before cultivation could commence.

Tripura's royalty also faced a number of revolts. One of the important insurgency movements was fuelled by Reang discontentment. This was started against the 'exorbitant house tax' levied by the king in 1939-42. This was followed by attempts by Reangs to collect 'food for common masses'. This movement, led and organised by Ratan Mani Reang, became one of the first organised movements in the state.<sup>13</sup> The growing sense of insecurity and economic deprivation was aggravated by another incident in the early 1940s when the last king, Maharaja Bir Bikram Manikya, decided to help the British in their war against the Japanese during the Second World War. This decision entailed large-scale supply of food material and resources to British troops. This decision had a dual impact on the poor people of the state. The first was a drastic reduction in the already scarce supply of food in the area. The second was a more direct impact brought about by the Maharaja's decision to increase levels of taxation on people as a result of the war effort.

As the discontentment rose, the already demoralised people were probably pushed into rebellion against this injustice. This movement was provided a rallying point in the form of Ratanmoli Noatia, a tribal hermit. The hermit was reputed to have a 'religious mystique' and his standing was further enhanced in the eyes of the people as he stood up against the royal order, encouraging the people to refuse to pay revenue. The movement did gain considerable momentum; however it could not withstand the onslaught of royal troops and Ratanmoli was imprisoned and later died in prison. This movement may not have succeeded but it certainly was able to concentrate the collective ire of the tribal people, an act which later became a legend. The movement was subsequently hijacked by the communists, who claimed it to be the first people's movement and they used it as an example worth emulating during subsequent tribal uprisings against the government. It is also necessary to understand that Ratanmoli's movement was also aimed at reviving tribal identity and independence. This revivalism, which commenced in 1940, sowed the seeds

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.: 370-71. The Reangs are the second most numerous tribal group in the state and as events proved, they faced selective discrimination at the hands of the monarchy, leading to dissatisfaction and revolts. Some of the present movements too owe their origin to this group.

of tribal unity and resurgence. The movement was temporarily blunted after the death of Ratanmoli, but gained momentum later as deprivations and exploitation of the tribal population increased.

The year before Independence saw fervent activity, with both pro-Indian and pro-Pakistani forces exerting pulls and pressures to take advantage of the situation. This situation arose with the death of Maharaja Bir Bikram on 17 May 1947, a few months before Independence. Though the Maharaja had already decided to join the Indian Union, elements within his clan and some others having nefarious designs on the future of Tripura attempted to encourage its merger with East Pakistan. The Maharaja's death left a void which a member of the royal family, Durjoy Kishore, wanted to fill, as the Maharaja's son was a minor. However, his efforts were frustrated with timely action taken by the late Maharaja's wife Kanchanprabha. Declaring herself the regent, she flew to Delhi and secured help from India to forestall attempts by forces acting against the state. Pakistan also claimed the region because of a percentage of Muslim population. Claims by East Pakistan were largely based on the predominantly Muslim population of Chakla Roshanabad—the zamindari of the Maharaja.<sup>14</sup> Taking advantage of limited support, they organised a series of rallies near Comilla to press for inclusion of Tripura into East Pakistan. However the final integration of Tripura with India on 15 October 1949 defeated all Pakistani attempts to secure control over the state.

Before transcending the timeline to discuss the post-Independence period, it will be appropriate to emphasise that the 1940s were a period of large-scale discontentment amongst the people against the monarchy. This was largely because of economic and social reasons. It will also be seen that the period subsequent to Tripura's merger provided an opportunity to the political establishment to remove these differences and bridge the gap between the diverse ethnic groups of the state. However, the events of subsequent years continued to relate a history of violence and dissatisfaction.

## Independence

Independence did not bring any respite or added benefits to the people of Tripura, as one would have envisaged. In fact, much like other states of Mizoram and Manipur, Independence severed existing trade links connecting Tripura to the outside world with the creation of East Pakistan. Communications had still not developed with the rest of the country to enable free flow of goods for the people. The pressures of amalgamating India and fighting against divisive forces in Kashmir took up a lot of time and energy of India's governing elite and they seemed to have little time for far flung regions in the North-east.

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<sup>14</sup> The region of Chakla Roshanabad was a bone of contention even in the pre-Independence period as it was a lucrative plains area which yielded sizeable revenue resources. This was especially important for the Maharaja of Tripura who was virtually left with only the hilly regions for sustaining his kingdom.

This sudden isolation was felt the most by the poor amongst the population, who were already facing the onslaught of deprivation from their land as a result of large scale migration of Bengalis in the period immediately before and after Partition.

The first strains of revolution were witnessed in context with the Ratanmoli revolt in Tripura. At this stage it will be pertinent to note that the rise of tribal self assertion and communism moved almost simultaneously on parallel lines, till the time these lines met and became one in the early 1950s. Communism in Tripura is linked to the freedom struggle emanating from Bengal, with Netaji Subhash Bose as its beacon of guiding philosophy. One of the earliest proponents of this movement in Tripura was Biren Dutta. Dutta and his compatriots were responsible for a number of people's movements in the state. One of the earliest organisations formed to harness the strength of mass agitation was the *Janmangal Samiti* or People's Welfare Organisation. This furthered the tradition of mass agitation with demand for a government by popular vote rather than a monarchy, and abolition of excessive taxes. The communists found the educated tribal middle class ideal material for conversion to the principles of communism, as the ideals of communism seemed to bring the goals of tribal salvation closer. This brought Biren Dutta in contact with tribal leaders like Aghore Debbarma, who was one of the pioneers of a mass literacy movement through an organisation *Janshiksha Samiti*.

Another organisation called the *Praja Mandal* was formed in 1946 and was an amalgam of communists and moderate tribal leaders. After Independence, the communists in India mistakenly overstretched their reach and capability when they decided at their party Congress at Calcutta in 1948 to capture power through armed struggle.<sup>15</sup> The effect of this call in Tripura was not as prominent as it was in Bengal. Keeping in view local sentiments and the severe crackdown by security forces, demands remained more local in nature.

Finally, in late April 1948, the *Tripura Rajya Mukti Parishad* was formed with Dasarath Debbarma as its President and Aghore Debbarma as its Secretary. The formation of this organisation formally commenced a guerrilla struggle demanding political, social and economic reforms. The fledgling organisation resorted to violent means, which finally ebbed after its amalgamation with the Communist Party in 1950. The organisation demanded:

- Government by popular vote
- End to Dewani rule

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<sup>15</sup> The relation to the near simultaneous Maoist movement in China and its resounding success could not be just a mere coincidence. The communists in India too probably wanted to emulate the movement without either the ability or organisational structure to undertake it. They also lacked a viable cause for any movement of this kind and were destined for failure. The movement led to approximate 2,800 deaths and 50,000 arrests. It is interesting to note that the communist movement, which was initially spearheaded by the Communist Party of India (CPI) later split to form the CPI(M). While the former supported the erstwhile Soviet model, the latter modelled itself on the Chinese principles enunciated by Mao.

- Unconditional release of political prisoners
- End to arrest warrants
- End to police atrocities

The nature of demands clearly brings out the form of uprising. Its communist angle is perceptibly evident, through demands like self-governance. However, the most significant aspect of the entire struggle is the fact that yet again it arose from within the tribal people. Though the struggle was limited to the areas of Khowai, Sadar and Kamalpur, it embedded another set of seeds of a dissatisfied struggle which were to emerge yet again after tribal unrest and disgruntlement. It was both a shocking and unexpected revelation for the government, to find a nascent organisation vitalise itself in so short a time and launch an armed struggle. It not only became well organised with a clear manifesto and code of conduct for its members and the people, it also undertook a number of actions to improve the lot of the tribal people. The only shortcoming it faced was the limited area of its operations and lack of support from the entire region. However, it is interesting to note that throughout the struggle there was an underlying effort to keep the nature of struggle broad based to include both the tribal people and migrant Bengalis. There were no signs of a divide, despite large-scale migration of ethnic Bengalis into Tripura.<sup>16</sup>

The amalgamation of *Mukti Parishad* with the CPI in 1950 and its subsequent relinquishing of the path of violence brought both to the electoral platform during elections held in 1952. The combine gained a significant victory, sidelining the Congress in the region. The Congress realised that it could not fight the united strength of tribal vote and decided to play upon the sentiment of the migrant Bengali population. The Congress, in what might be one of the first attempts at divide and rule by an Indian party, played up the *Mukti Parishad's* struggle as 'Bangla Kheda'.<sup>17</sup> The party realised that it had to increase its electoral base of Bengalis to remain a significant electoral force in the region. This led to encouragement of Bengalis to migrate and settle in Tripura.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand the communists did not want to look anti-Bengali, especially given its strong roots in West Bengal. They continued with their policy of appeasement of both sections, despite clear signs of deprivation of tribal land and resources. In this entire power game, the tribal people turned out to be the only sufferers.

Yet another chapter in the history of Tripura was the constitution of the State Reorganisation Committee in 1953. The committee submitted a proposal for unification of Tripura with Assam, a proposal which can be analysed in the context

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<sup>16</sup> The struggle emanated from communist ideology, which had its roots in Bengal. Even in Tripura communist leaders like Biren Dutta were instrumental in giving root to the struggle in the region. This is in stark contrast to subsequent years of the struggle, which saw a deep ethnic divide between the tribal and Bengali leaders.

<sup>17</sup> 'Bangla Kheda' literally translates into 'drive away Bengalis'.

<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to draw a parallel between the encouragement of Bengali migration and similar actions in Assam, probably with similar aims in mind.

of problems already being faced by Assam in controlling its vast frontiers.<sup>19</sup> However, this proposal was not promulgated and led to widespread demonstrations ultimately resulting in Tripura becoming a Union Territory on 1 November 1956.

In a significant political development, the *Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti* (TUJS) or Tripura Tribal Youth League was formed in May 1967. It was started as a non-political organisation by students and the tribal elite to fight for the tribal cause. Subsequently the TUJS became a party, and did a neat tightrope walk taking the political arena and simultaneously supporting the tribal militant cause, though it remained a 'hidden agenda' of the movement. Subir Bhaumik writes, 'The TUJS leaders wanted to manipulate the tribal insurgency to achieve their declared political objective of having the provisions of the Fifth Schedule of the Constitution promulgated in Tripura. They also wanted to harness the groundswell of ethnic feelings to help them emerge as a political challenge to the Mukti Parishad and the CPI(M).'<sup>20</sup>

At this stage in the state's history of LICs, another movement was brewing within Tripura, in the northern hills of the region bordering Mizoram. Reangs and Mizos populated this relatively inaccessible area. The Reangs unlike the Mizos were poor peasants who were finding it difficult to make their living and found Bengali traders and moneylenders exploiting them. The growing feeling of frustration was further augmented by the relatively successful militant struggles of a similar nature in Mizoram and Nagaland. The Reangs given their distinct ethnic lineage and individuality decided to fight for their own cause, rather than leave it to the Tripuri struggle and the communist movement. This led to the formation of the '*Tripura Tribal Sengkrak Union*' in October 1967. Leaflets were found along the border with Mizoram immediately after formation of the organisation. These included demands like notice to non-tribal people to leave the state.

The Reangs found a more than willing partner in the MNF, which was prepared to assist them in training for the uprising. This symbiotic relationship gave the Mizos support of the Reangs in relatively inaccessible areas of Tripura, well away and deep in the jungles of Tripura. It also served the MNF's purpose of cultivating the area, with a sizeable Mizo population, in accordance with their ideals of greater Mizoram. The Sengkrak was introduced to Pakistan's ISI in Pakistan through the MNF. Bismoni Reang, the 'Supply Officer' of Sengkrak as quoted in *Insurgent Crossfire* commenting about their inter linkage with Pakistan, says, 'When we first went to Rangmati [Headquarter of Chittagong Hill Tracts] in April 1968, the MNF took us to the Pakistani officers. The Pakistanis welcomed us and promised all kinds of support—weapons, money and training. But they wanted us to work closely with the MNF.'<sup>21</sup>

The Sengkrak movement ultimately fizzled out after 1969 for a variety of reasons. First, the movement was not broad based and rather than joining their

<sup>19</sup> For a detailed understanding of the preceding events refer to Chakravarti (1996).

<sup>20</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 136–37.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*: 132.

hands with other dissatisfied tribal people of the state they decided to fight alone. Second, the movement was driven by passion alone rather than an ideological thrust and well planned strategy. The very fact that the organisation came up as a brainchild of three disgruntled people who were harassed by moneylenders, rather than with clear aims and perceptions, shows its chances of success were limited. Third, the support that it gained from the MNF was purely because of the selfish interests of the MNF, rather than any sympathy for the Reangs or their cause. Fourth, this was made worse by lack of quality in terms of ability to take on hardships and deprivations, which led to a short life span of the movement. However, the movement did achieve the distinction of being the first low intensity conflict in the state to take assistance from across the border and base its actions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, another chapter opened and quickly closed in the history of low intensity conflicts in Tripura, many of which were on a low key and remained unknown due to their limited aims and short life cycle.

## TUJS and the Rise of Hrangkhawl

The formation of TUJS in May 1967 also saw the simultaneous rise of a Christian tribal leader Bijoy Hrangkhawl on the scene of Tripura's political and militant affairs. As was seen earlier, political compulsions of communists and the Congress led both parties to turn a blind eye to the ever-continuing infiltration of Bengali refugees. The rise of TUJS took place in these very circumstances, wherein a platform was needed by the tribal people to fight against all forces against their interest, without the pressures of power politics. It is again this reason, which led the TUJS to go in for a broad-based set-up comprising all tribal groups in Tripura, rather than the majority Tripuri community. This led to initial success of the organisation, as numbers swelled and people like Hrangkhawl managed to reach top levels of the organisation. Despite the TUJS never proclaiming its hardline and militant posture, it, however, did have links with militant organisations and supported their cause, even if it remained a covert gesture. The first indication came in the form of the *Tripura Sena* (Tribal Army), under the leadership of Hrangkhawl, which was the strong arm of TUJS. Slowly, beginning from 1968, militant activities of this armed wing of TUJS started increasing simultaneously, with improved organisational set-up and training. However, it still did not venture into any attempts at taking on the security forces. Meanwhile, the mass base of TUJS kept increasing, as did its hold on tribal communities across the state.

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<sup>22</sup> This period had already seen the emergence of insurgency movements in Nagaland through the NNC, MNF in Mizoram and UNLF in Manipur. This is likely to have encouraged similar movements in areas like Tripura. It was probably felt that the gun could get what peaceful voicing of demands had failed to achieve.

The militant activities of all groups in the north-east received a setback in 1971, with outbreak of the 1971 Indo-Pak War and establishment of a favourable government in Bangladesh. Tripura and *Tripura Sena* were no different. Its attempts at establishing a militant base and enlarging its activity received a severe setback. This forced the TUJS to continue with its social and political agenda. In so doing, the organisation received an impetus, when the government gave it the very opportunity it was looking for. The first act was de-regulation of 1950 sq. km of land reserved for tribal people. The second salvo was building of a dam on Gumtir river, which submerged 43.64 sq. km of tribal land. This led to protest by TUJS, which accused the government of failing to look after the interest of tribals in the area.

The next few years saw a see-saw battle between the CPI(M) and the TUJS, in projecting the real representative of tribal interest. While the TUJS did develop a mass base during this period, this did not translate into any major electoral victory for it. This was more than proved during the 1977 elections, which were swept by the CPI(M) who took a huge majority, wiping out the Congress from the state and leaving very few electoral benefits for TUJS. The only consolation for TUJS was its victory in the four reserved seats.

The electoral debacle also saw Hrangkhawl lose elections and probably his confidence to come to power and force his agenda through politics. His alternative plan did seem to be falling in place as he saw another opportunity with the death of Sheikh Mujib in Bangladesh, which caused relations to deteriorate between India and Bangladesh. This led to a spurt in insurgent activities in the entire area, with MNF taking the lead. Hrangkhawl saw his future tied to the MNF, after his emissaries sent to Bangladesh in 1977 were re-directed to the MNF for training and related activities. He saw this as the ideal opportunity to finally strike.<sup>23</sup>

Another factor, which forced Hrangkhawl onto the path of violence, was the persistence of the TUJS top brass to keep itself limited to principles of agitational politics without treading on the path of overt violence as a weapon of politics. This suited neither the temperament of Hrangkhawl, nor his brand of power politics, through which he hoped to achieve his aim.

## The Rise of TNV

The *Tripura Sena* formed the base of Hrangkhawl's latest attempt at fighting for Tripura's tribals. However, this time Hrangkhawl aimed to fight for liberation of Tripura and he finally took the plunge into armed militancy with the formation of Tripura National Volunteers (TNV) on 10 November 1978. This organisation

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<sup>23</sup> It is pertinent to note that both the Pakistani and subsequently Bangladeshi intelligence agencies saw the MNF as the nodal agency to run their cross-border terrorism game. While this speaks volumes about the organisational skills and clout of the MNF, it also indicates the lack of standing of other organisations, which were not trusted with directly dealing with Bangladeshi authorities.

started with 24 volunteers, with Hrangkhawl as its President and Chuni Koloï as its Commander-in-Chief at Kachima. Immediately after the official formation of the TNV, its nascent and yet inexperienced cadres were sent to the Chittagong hill tracts for training by the MNF in the beginning of 1979. This was followed by successful ambushes against security forces by combined groups of MNF and TNV in the areas bordering Mizoram. These operations were supposed to be aimed at both bleeding in for the cadres, as well as being part of their training. Neither security forces, nor the government, were aware of formation of TNV at this stage. They attributed these operations to the MNF, which was a formidable group at this juncture and was still active despite ongoing negotiations with the government.

Yet again, it was an example of poor intelligence and forethought, on part of the intelligence agencies and the government, which failed to foresee and forestall formation and cross-border training of another nascent militant organisation. It is pertinent to bring forth a similar case in Mizoram, a struggle which albeit being conducted on a much bigger scale, nevertheless followed the identical path taken by Laldenga and Hrangkhawl. Both leaders failed to achieve their political aims through the ballot, and immediately after that turned to the bullet to force their political aims. Obviously, lessons had not been learnt from failure in Mizoram. Though the TNV was a fledgeling organisation at this stage, it subsequently did achieve dangerous proportions in terms of threat to internal security.

The relative inexperience of TNV came to the fore when one of its top leaders, Kamalsingh Jamatia, was arrested in October 1979. A number of militancy-related documents were recovered from him, which lifted the veil of secrecy from existence of the organisation. This led to a series of crackdowns and arrests, putting pressure on the cadres to surrender. Hrangkhawl, who was seen as a top member of TUJS, suddenly came under the spotlight. His irrefutable involvement in TNV embarrassed TUJS, which immediately disowned TNV, attributing its formation and existence to Hrangkhawl. Soon, realising the futility of continuing against the prevalent mood in the state, Hrangkhawl grasped the olive branch offered by the Chief Minister, Nripen Chakrabarty. The ensuing peace deal helped release all his aides, with the promise that all seditious activities would be stopped.

With TNV activities coming to an end, peace got a fillip with chance to succeed in the state. Hrangkhawl was forced to resign from TUJS, which did not want to carry the burden of his actions. However, yet again, power and politics proved to be the stumbling block, which brought another chapter of bloodshed and disturbance to the area.

Elections in 1980 brought the CPI(M) to power in the state. This was a setback for the TUJS, which still saw itself as the real representative of tribal people in the State. The CPI(M) Government legislated and passed the Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council Bill, further stealing the thunder of TUJS rhetoric. CPI(M) was still intent on playing a balancing game, knowing very well that it could not succeed in electoral politics, without support of the majority Bengali population. This led the TUJS to step up its pitch and stakes, with a renewed demand for expulsion of all foreigners from Tripura, who had migrated after 15 October 1949.



This and some other demands were aimed at appealing to tribal sentiments. These were:

- Extension of provisions of Sixth Schedule of Constitution to Autonomous District Council.
- Restoration of tribal land alienated after 1960.
- Introduction of Kok Borok dialect as medium of instruction.
- Recognition of Manipuris as 'scheduled tribe' in Tripura.
- Introduction of 'inner line' permit for Tripura.
- Reservation of 50 per cent broadcast time for tribal programmes in Agartala.

TUJS also probably knew the impracticality of some of their demands. However, they had good publicity value and were easy to profess, while sitting in the opposition. These demands were specifically made on the eve of elections for Autonomous District Council, which TUJS wanted to win at any cost, after its electoral debacle at the state level. Politics and the game of one-upmanship led the state to widespread violence, with ethnic riots breaking out all over the state.<sup>24</sup>

The stage had again been set up for a sharp divide in state politics and subsequently untold atrocities, which drove the already frustrated common tribal people to gun culture. A number of these people were already on the run from police and other law enforcement agencies.

TNV was revived by two leaders, without support from Bijoy Hrangkhawl, who had been imprisoned during the riots. Dulal Hrangkhawl and Binanda Jamatia took over the reigns of the organisation, as arrangements were made and volunteers were sent into Bangladesh for training. Subir Bhaumik writes, 'The riots gave a fresh boost to tribal insurgency in Tripura. Kartick Kolo estimates that over 130 tribals from Tripura received varying degrees of training from MNF and TNV instructors between September and November 1980.'<sup>25</sup> Bijoy Hrangkhawl in another surprise move announced the disbanding of TNV on 12 December 1980, leaving the cadres who had returned after training and the new leadership in a lurch. Immediately after the announcement, the same leadership and cadre strength of approximately 130 cadres launched a new organisation called the All Tripura People's Liberation Organisation (ATPLO).

Renewed attempts at gaining support from Bangladesh did not succeed and soon the organisation split with differences arising between two factions on tribal lines. The Jamatias and the Kolois became the two power centres, with differences arising over accounting of funds collected. The expected split occurred in the beginning of 1982. This power struggle gained a new face, when both groups realised that progress could only be made through the support of MNF and Bangladesh. They

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<sup>24</sup> The state saw the killings of 20 tribals in Amarpur on 6 June 1980, followed by the slaughter of 200 Bengalis at Mandai on 7 June. There were allegations of a predominantly Bengali police being an accomplice to subsequent incidents in the state, flinging it in a condition of lawlessness. The army was subsequently called in, after promulgation of Disturbed Areas Act in the State.

<sup>25</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 214.

also realised that this could only be achieved through existing contacts of Bijoy Hrangkhawl.

Chuni Koloï made the first move and tried to convince Hrangkhawl to take over leadership of his faction. Meanwhile, Jamatia's group, realising the 'value' of Hrangkhawl at this stage, abducted him on 13 August 1982 and took him away to their camp. For Hrangkhawl, it must have been quite an experience to be a captive of the men he had trained some years back!

It did not take long for the Koloï faction to trace Hrangkhawl and after a bloodless duel, they were not only able to get the release of Hrangkhawl, they also broke up the rival group, amalgamating some of its members, thereby strengthening themselves. The stage had been set for the re-raising of TNV.

On 10 November 1982, TNV was again raised with Hrangkhawl as its President. The militants had learnt their lessons during the nascent stage of TNV and later during their unsteady years with ATPLO. The ATPLO, or whatever remnants of it remained, finally surrendered in 1983, but left behind the most formidable organisation till that period in its wake. By the standard of Tripura militancy, the organisation was fairly well armed. It had 27 rifles, eight single barrel guns, one double barrel gun, four revolvers, one 9-mm pistol and six grenades.<sup>26</sup>

The following period of one year saw TNV organise itself, with emphasis on training, on the one hand, and simultaneous actions aimed at collecting money through extortion and weapons through raids on security forces, on the other. This period was also used by Hrangkhawl to move to Bangladesh to procure weapons and ammunition for the cadres. While he was partially successful in his endeavour, militancy started gaining strength, with TNV achieving improved co-ordination and strength. Right through the rise and fall of militancy in the state, TNV leaned onto the MNF for support, training and availability of secure bases in Bangladesh.

There were a number of factors, which went in favour of TNV, despite its limited numbers and weaponry. First, TNV was never considered a major threat to the territorial integrity of Tripura. Its envisaged strength and weaponry at best forced the government to employ the security forces in punitive actions on selective occasions. Second, the region was already facing problems of militancy in Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram. Assam too had started to flicker on the radar screen of low intensity conflict watchers. Under these circumstances, a lower priority was accorded to Tripura. This indirectly helped TNV, which found that relatively less force was employed against it. Third, it also found large tracts totally devoid of the presence of security forces. Even if there were attempts by security forces to evenly distribute into these areas (which is against all principles of employment), they became easy prey to lurking militants looking for publicity, means to establish their influence in tribal areas, and above all, for weapons and ammunition, which were still in short supply. Fourth, militants further augmented this advantage by creating

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*: 221.

a favourable mass support base by targeting Bengali population, thereby further increasing the divide between the two communities. Tribals felt sympathetic to TNV guerrillas, seeing them as saviours of their cause.

At this stage, it will be interesting to analyse reasons for Hrangkhawl's commencement of armed struggle and TNV's motives behind the orgy of senseless violence perpetuated against innocent people.<sup>27</sup> It is difficult to imagine that Hrangkhawl could have hoped to achieve his stated aim of secession from India. He must have studied similar struggles that were more potent and better organised, which had failed to achieve such aims. It is also difficult to imagine that he took up arms after re-raising TNV, despite his bitter experience in the first instance and his arrest during the riots in 1980. It is likely that Hrangkhawl was sympathetic to the tribal cause and also had a hardline approach to affairs in the state. However, it seems that he was no more than an opportunist who, having failed to win a popular vote, aimed at securing power through devious means at heavy costs, at the expense of innocent people of the region. Hrangkhawl's varying stands at various stages of his career clearly point towards opportunism. His initial stand for an autonomous council, while he was in TUJS, suddenly subsided when he saw the CPI(M) steal his agenda after it had successfully formulated the district council. He had no option but to up the ante and talk of secession. Similarly, after his first experience in TNV, and its virtual withering under pressure, he again took the typical political back alley exit policy, by confusing his connotation of 'total freedom'. He said, 'I fight for total freedom from poverty and expansionist oppression by majority refugees, but it does not mean that I declare Tripura independent.'<sup>28</sup> The comparison and similarity of Harangkhawl with Laldenga is too stark to be ignored and brushed aside.

If this premise is further analysed, it will flow from the argument that TNV and its top leadership was playing a game, to get the best possible deal from the government. This was both in terms of promulgation of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution for the autonomous district council and more importantly, to gain a greater role in the political arena of the state. If while doing so, it gave a benefit to the tribals, it was a bonus. This factor was proved when finally TNV teamed up with the Congress(I) in the state, just prior to elections in 1988 and the Congress(I) negotiated a deal, which brought the TUJS–Congress(I) to power at the expense of CPI(M).

Probably this was the reason that TNV-related violence against innocent Bengali population rose and fell, to hammer out a suitable negotiation with the government. Hrangkhawl sent the first feelers to the government in December 1984, when he wrote a letter to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Every time he or the government negotiated for peace, there was a perceptible upswing in violence in the state,

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<sup>27</sup> In every assault, it was evident that mainly the non-tribal traders like blacksmiths, artisans, washermen, barbers, shopkeepers, moneylenders, etc., were the targets of their attacks (Roy 1996: 373).

<sup>28</sup> *Tripura Star*, 13 December 1979.

probably to pressurise the government through public opinion and media. This happened in 1984–85. Contrary to expectations, Hrangkhawl received a setback in 1986, when MNF negotiated a peace settlement with the government. TNV, which had till then employed the MNF as a crutch, was further isolated after this settlement.

Another major step taken by the government was the extension of provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to the Autonomous District Council in 1985. This further upset the calculations of TNV, which found very little for which it could bargain. In 1986, it knew that the time had come for it to get an honourable escape route with a suitable settlement.

The old method and dictum was put in practice yet again in Tripura. TNV stepped up militancy, and more specifically violence, against innocent Bengalis, to pressurise the government in 1987–88. The mindless violence continued, while covert negotiations progressed in an endeavour to find a peaceful settlement to the problem. Finally, with elections round the corner in early 1988, the impending settlement was postponed. TNV saw bright chances of a favourable outcome if Congress(I) came to power. 'It was clear that if the guerrillas struck "soft targets" with sufficient ferocity, panic stricken Bengalis would vote against the ruling Marxist out of sheer desperation.... In January 1988, the month before state assembly elections, TNV hit squads, bolstered by their "local collaborators" went on an orgy of violence in Tripura, attacking Bengali villages and killing at random.... No less than 117 Bengalis were butchered in that month of violence....'<sup>29</sup>

The Congress–TUJS combine won the elections. A settlement was finally reached with TNV on 12 August 1988. A memorandum of understanding was signed with TNV (Appendix Q). A total of 437 TNV guerrillas surrendered with 106 weapons. Temporary peace had been achieved at a heavy cost.

## Militancy Yet Again

It has been proved repeatedly in Tripura that militancy has become an extension of problems of tribal dissatisfaction and exploitation. However, it has also been proved that projection of these problems has been as much for the benefit of tribals, as for individual leaders who resort to this form of protest to achieve their personal goals and objectives—which generally happen to be political.

Immediately after TNV negotiated a settlement with the government, a splinter group of TNV felt that provisions of the accord were not being implemented expeditiously. This led to the formation of All Tripura Tribal Force in 1990, though it subsequently surrendered in 1992. A splinter group renamed the organisation as All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF). By then, yet another militant organisation had come into existence, calling itself the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) in 1989.

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<sup>29</sup> Bhaumik 1996: 238–39.

Both the groups have had some cadres surrendering at intermittent intervals and have indulged in killings, looting and kidnapping. The groups have been accused of providing the requisite muscle power, as in the case of Manipur, to help political parties win elections. This tacit symbiotic support of politicians and militants to further each other's cause has only harmed the interests of the state. Lt Gen V.K. Nayar writes, 'The insurgency scenario has got politicised or the political scenario has got militant infected, as ATTF has links with CPI(M), and NLFT enjoys Congress patronage. With NLFT having forged links with NSCN(IM), and ATTF with ULFA and PLA, the scenario is emerging similar to one in Nagaland and Manipur.'<sup>30</sup>

The scenario has become more murky with Bengalis choosing to militarily combat killings through rival militant groups like United Bengali Liberation Force (UBLF) and the two main groups dividing and sub-dividing further, based on personal difference of opinions rather than on any ideological basis.

The run down to elections in 1998 saw heightened killings with both groups vying with each other to further their political and personal agendas. NLFT, which had been supporting the Congress, saw the writing on the wall and sided with the newly organised Indigenous People's Front (IPF), as the front came to power in the council. With the passage of time, NLFT has emerged as the more powerful of the two militant groups and has had a major impact on militancy in the state. Killings of non-tribals have continued unabated in 1999 and in the subsequent period without any decrease in violence (See Figure 15.1 for details of casualties).<sup>31</sup>

## Why Militancy

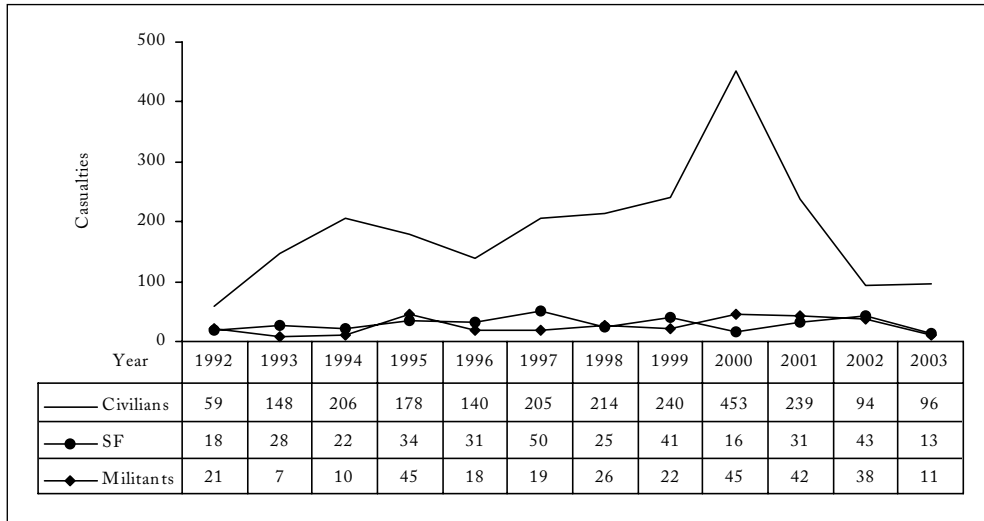
Tripura has a long history of low intensity conflicts starting from the pre-independence period. The analysis of its problems makes for revealing study and can be compared with a number of tribal movements. First, most of the struggles were initially a symbol of tribal discontentment, as a result of years of exploitation. Time and again, the power of the people manifested itself in some form or the other and emerged from its shroud to warn the powers that be. The poor and underprivileged fought for their rights, though every time their passionate and suppressed voices were not given the right direction and means of expression. Tripura, like other states in the north-east, suffers from similar problems, and is a case of lost opportunities. Though there is an indisputable cause to redress the grievance of the people, inadequacy and inefficiency has often failed the people. Hopes have been belied and opportunities lost.

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<sup>30</sup> Nayar 2000: 131. Roy (1996: 392) writes, 'It is open secret that the tribal faction of CPI(M) built up a strong underground organisation named ATTF (All Tripura Tiger Force) to break the TUJS bases and also succeed to weaken them.'

<sup>31</sup> The number of killings (203 in 1998, 209 in 1999) since 1998 remain unabated. Similarly, kidnappings for the same period (401 in 1998, 480 in 1999 and 340 in 2000) remain at the same level (Nayar 2000: 138).

Figure 15.1  
Casualty Details—Tripura



**Source:** www.satp.org.

**Note:** Figures for 2003 till 15 June.

Second, Tripura, as compared to progressive states is still more dependent on traditional occupations, which do not give its people the ability to exploit the fruits of modernisation. Agriculture, forestry and fishing remain the mainstay of the state. Given rampant land encroachment and land alienation, this occupation too gives little in terms of monetary compensation. This issue is very close to the heart of Tripuri tribal people, who see land as their only means of subsistence. Losing this natural insurance is unthinkable for them and has repeatedly led them to take up arms. While long-term solutions point to alternate means of livelihood through education-oriented avenues enriched by manufacturing, industry and trade as its growth engines, these are a long way in coming to the region.

Third, Tripura is also characterised by a distinct ethnic divide. This also marks a divide between the educated elite that has for decades cornered white collar jobs in the state and the deprived who have done labour-intensive blue collar jobs. These jobs were left to the 'aboriginal' inhabitants giving them a feeling of being a deprived class. The Tripuris see large-scale migrations as colonisation of their homeland and that too from within, rather than from outside the country, giving them very few opportunities of resistance. This Tripuri-Bengali divide runs through the society, in every sphere of activity, aggravating the crisis of lack of opportunity and inadequacy. It has already been pointed out that agricultural land had been provided in the plains to Bengalis by the king. This deprived the tribals living in the hills of an opportunity to shift to modern techniques of agriculture in the plains because of paucity of land, further giving rise to resentment.<sup>32</sup>

Fourth, geography has not been very kind to Tripura and its people. The state lies straddled and surrounded by Bangladesh, which gives it distinguished geo-political importance in the region. The state has been the target of foreign interference from the time of Independence. At the time of Independence, Muslim League leaders fought for its inclusion in East Pakistan. The state's proximity to the Chittagong hill tracts enabled divisive powers from across the border to exploit dissatisfaction and disgruntlement and abetted, assisted and guided militancy in a cross-fire of interests between the two countries. This gave the necessary fillip to an otherwise weak movement, with very little in terms of weapons and equipment to sustain it.

Fifth, vagaries of geographic injustice also deprived the state of trade routes and markets, which could enable economic symbiosis and livening up of traditional exports like jute and tea. This was further aggravated by lack of suitable transit facilities with the rest of the country and its markets. Kolkata, which could have served as an alternate trade centre after Chittagong, was no longer available, given the lack of understanding and availability of transit routes through Bangladesh and its port facilities. A narrow parochial mindset snatched from Tripura transit facilities that could have gone a long way in alleviating its economic problems. This may

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<sup>32</sup> Roy 1996: 392.

receive a boost after the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) comes into effect and after improvement of relations between India and Bangladesh.

Sixth, Tripura, like other states in the north-east has never really been amalgamated into the national mainstream. This is not a process, which can be achieved as part of a crash course over a short period of time. However, despite its significance being understood, neither has it been appreciated nor has a substantive action-plan been promulgated. India's problem of remaining preoccupied with its 'Central Hindi Heartland' has already done a lot of damage to its unification efforts. It is pertinent to note at this stage that all major movements have emanated from geographical extremities of the country, which go to prove this argument. For a vast multitude, India's everyday relevance is limited to this heartland, while significance and importance of the rest pales in contrast.

This attitude emanates from a number of reasons. The first is the false premise of a claimed superiority of Aryan lineage and its finally coming to terms with the Dravidian south. However, it is yet to fully integrate with the Mongoloid east. This three-pronged *trishul* can only become a weapon of power and effect when all three groups integrate fully—a process yet to be completed. The second is the relative aloofness of the north-east from India's freedom movement. This movement enabled all corners of India other than most of the north-eastern states to fully integrate and give a united fight to colonial power. The north-east's physical and psychological distance at this crucial juncture in history kept it away from the centre for decades. For once, this distance was reduced when India fought its first media-driven conflict with Pakistan in Kargil in 1999. This conflict saw honoured national flag draped bodies of soldiers travel in their Sankaracharya-like travails deep into all corners of the country, thereby binding the nation during the hour of pain, sorrow and pride.

Seventh, militancy in Tripura, much like other states, has become a business of the underprivileged and uneducated. Lack of job opportunities is compensated by this thriving trade, which not only gives the youth a feel of power, but also gives them a steady flow of income and backroom power in the politics of the state. New groups have risen after every successful attempt at negotiation and normalisation.

Eighth, while it will be unfair to directly attribute militancy to any ideology, misunderstanding of communism and its false interpretation has certainly aggravated the problem through false promises of utopia following its propagation. Communism and militancy first joined hands immediately after independence and its shadow has indelibly remained on most movements thereafter.

Ninth, the entire north-east suffers from opportunism in politics of the worst kind. This opportunism does not stop at ideological barbs at each other, but goes much further to exploit local sentiments. This is done through rag-tag militant groups, which see gun culture as a much more profitable business than being able to barely subsist in a weak economic scenario, which does not afford opportunities for jobs and business. In all the phases the ruling party succeeded to utilise the forces of those underground outfit to their advantages. During the Left rule,



the rightists, the then opposition, took advantage of those adventurist elements and vice-versa.<sup>33</sup>

Finally, Tripura's economic advancement has suffered over the years due to militancy, which has not allowed any capital to come to the state from private entrepreneurs as well as from the Central Government. The state's real per capita state domestic product at 1980–81 prices languishes behind all other states in the north-east at 1,664 rupees, compared to an overall average of 2,258 and a high of 2,452 of Arunachal Pradesh—one of the few peaceful states.<sup>34</sup> This figure had increased to 5,083 as per the 1995–96 survey and 9,768 as per the 1999–2000 survey available as per the current prices.<sup>35</sup>

The realities of low intensity conflict in the region are for all to see, analyse and understand. All the militancy-affected states are at the crossroads of their future. After more than five decades of independence they have to perceive and decide what centuries of isolation and separation gave them vis-à-vis independence in five decades, despite unrest. States like Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram have proved that peace is the key to economic, cultural, social and political advancement. This improvement in the economic health of the state is a positive indication of resolution of LICs.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.: 373–74.

<sup>34</sup> Atul Sarma, 'Economic Development of the Northeastern States in the Context of Globalisation', *Strategic Analysis*, May 2001, IDSA.

<sup>35</sup> Northeastern Development Finance Corporation.

PART IV

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MINOR CONFLICTS



## Chapter 16

# Gorkhaland Movement

### Background

The Gorkhaland movement, unlike other major struggles that have led to low intensity conflicts (LICs), did not have secession from the Indian Union as one of its primary aims. It did, of course, raise the issue of self-determination intermittently; however, these were more attempts at securing governmental consent on other issues and never serious bids at seceding, as this analysis of the movement will proceed to demonstrate.

The movement emanated in the area of Darjeeling, which subsequently became the political and ideological hub of the struggle. The origins of the struggle can be found in the history of Nepal as we know of it today, as well as in certain parts in India including Darjeeling. Present-day Nepal gets its name from the Nepal valley, which is the country's cradle. Though the early history of this region suffers from the non-availability of documentary evidence, from the eighteenth century onward it is comparatively clear. The present-day physical boundaries of the country are the result of conquests by the Gorkha kings in the second half of the eighteenth century. This series of conquests progressed in quick succession during the reign of Prithvinarayan Shah (A.D. 1743–75). Prithvinarayan Shah was very successful in amalgamating the various small principalities in the region and extended his kingdom to areas like Patan, Bhadgau, Kathmandu, Makhwanpur and Vijayapur. His final two conquests brought him the rich Terai regions of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. This led to a conflict of interests between the British East India Company and the king, who was keen to enhance his territorial limits southwards so as to get a share of the rich agricultural land of that region. His extension of his kingdom eastwards into the territory of Sikkim further aggravated the existing rivalry. This was followed by conquests to the west, until, in 1808, his kingdom extended till the river Sutlej. Thus the King controlled an extensive area extending from the river Teesta in the east to Sutlej in the west.

The British viewed this increasing power of the king in the north as an imminent threat. To them it was an ominous sign as they understood that this mountain kingdom was strategically situated and thus capable of forging alliances that could

threaten their interests and/or claim a share of the profits that they derived from vital trade routes into China. Thus, it was only a matter of time before the British turned their attention to curbing Prithivinarayan Shah. The result was a war between the East India Company and the Gorkhas in 1814 and by the end of 1815, the British had won a significant victory resulting in the signing of the Treaty of Segauli on 2 December 1815. In effect this treaty nullified all the gains that the Gorkha kings had made through conquests between 1760 and 1808, bringing the geographical boundaries of the kingdom down to its present-day expanse. Sikkim was returned its territories and a guarantee of non-aggression was enforced between Nepal and Sikkim.

The British, during the 200 years that they spent in India, were always on the look out for hill stations as cool retreats from the heat and dust of the Indian plains. One such attempt was their acquisition of the beautiful Darjeeling hill area. The King of Sikkim was 'convinced' to cede this territory to the British through a deed of grant dated 1 February 1835. The deed reads:

The Governor-General having expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate for the purpose of enabling the servants of his government suffering from sickness to avail themselves of its advantages, I, Sikkim-Patti Raja, out of friendship for the said Governor-General, hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Company, i.e., the land south of Great Rongit river, east of the Balasun, Kahali and Little Rongit river and west of the Rongo and Mahanadi rivers.<sup>1</sup>

The next major political development in the region was the ceding of the Kalimpong region to the British by the king of Bhutan under the Treaty of Sinchula in November 1865. Article 2 of the treaty said:

...it is hereby agreed that the whole of the tract known as the Eighteen Doars, bordering on the Districts of Rungpoor, Cooch Behar, and Assam, together with the Talook of Ambaree Fallacotah and the hill territory on the left bank of the Teesta upto such points as may be laid down by the British Commissioner appointed for the purpose is ceded by the Bhootan Government to the British Government for ever.<sup>2</sup>

This further led to a demarcation of boundaries between British India and Bhutan (after ceding Kalimpong), which was completed by 1873.

Once the British took over Darjeeling there was a change in the ethnic composition of the area. The roots of the Gorkhaland movement lie in this development. The Treaty of Segauli of 1815 set a wave of migration from north India into the Tarai region of Nepal with the concurrence of the Government of Nepal, as these areas were sparsely populated and the settlers reclaimed land with the aim

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<sup>1</sup> O'Mally 1907: 21.

<sup>2</sup> Extracts from the Treaty of Sinchula of 1865 (see Samanta 2000: 217–20). The area west of Teesta refers to the present day region of Kalimpong.

of boosting productivity. However, during the next century protests started over their presence and they began moving to the Darjeeling region. This was accompanied by a number of low-caste Nepalese migrating due to social oppression and pressures within Nepal—and they found a more liberal environment in India accompanied by enhanced job opportunities. The population which migrated to Darjeeling and its surrounding areas was from eastern Nepal. The migrants were principally Rais and Limbus. The census reports of that period clearly indicate that in 1835 there was no Nepalese speaking population in the area, whereas by 1935 the Nepalis numbered 223,888 of the total population of 376,369 in the district and of the 286,355 in the three hill divisions of the district.<sup>3</sup> Thus there was a near total change in the linguistic composition of the area. As Amiya K. Samanta notes, ‘Nepalese were the single largest foreign-born group in India till 1931.’<sup>4</sup>

Another factor that contributed to the influx of Nepalese immigrants into the Darjeeling area was the commercial growing of tea, which started in 1856. Large expanses of the area came under the tea gardens that sprang up and this led to the need for cheap labour to work in them.

Despite the fact that Nepal itself was made of a number of linguistic groups, the migrants, irrespective of their different backgrounds, were knit together into a cohesive group through the Nepali language, which became the *de facto* lingua franca of Darjeeling. With the passage of time and an increase in the population of Gorkhas in the region, Nepali gave rise to a sense of identity among them.

Initially Nepali had the status of a derivative of Hindustani however, due to a British initiative, the first school with Nepali as the medium of instruction was established in 1869. In the last few years of the nineteenth century a number of Nepali journals and other publications came into being. This growth in linguistic pride led to, ‘...an estimate by the All India Nepali Bhasa Samity [according to which] as many as 290 different periodicals were published from India, of which 80 were in circulation till 1981.’<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Nepali was recognised as a vernacular language by the Calcutta University in 1918 for the purposes of the matriculation, intermediate and graduate examinations. In 1949, the Government of West Bengal recognised Nepali as the medium of instruction in primary, middle and high schools in Darjeeling. This steady linguistic pride in the Nepali language among the people of Darjeeling also formed the basis for an agitation from 1960 onwards for its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This fact is important since the status of the Nepali language was one of the issues involved in the Gorkhaland movement.

The Gorkhaland movement can also be traced to the fact that Darjeeling was declared a non-regulated area by the British after it became a district in 1866. This vested substantial powers in the hands of the executive with the aim of saving the commoners from the exploitation of traders. This was similar to the ‘excluded’ areas

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<sup>3</sup> Government of India, Census Returns.

<sup>4</sup> Samanta 2000: 22.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*: 71.

discussed in the case of certain North-eastern states like Nagaland. However, this did not give the region any form of sovereignty or autonomy, which could be encashed at the time of independence or thereafter.

The first signs of demands for autonomy came to the fore when the people of Darjeeling submitted a memorandum to the British Government on the eve of the passage of the Indian Council Act of 1909, demanding that Darjeeling remain a 'scheduled' district. This was further augmented with the formation of the Hillmen's Union in 1907. This was a group of ex-servicemen, government servants and some more representatives. The organisation was one of the first representative bodies in the region and was able to influence both public opinion and that of the Government to a certain extent. One of their first demands, made in 1917, was for an independent administrative unit. There were suggestions for a North East Frontier Province, with an aim of maintaining the distinct identity of the people in the area.

All these activities aimed at giving Darjeeling a distinct character of its own. It is evident that this movement had the support of the British and European planters, as it was in their interests to keep Darjeeling outside the purview of impending reforms under the Reforms Act of 1919. While this encouragement emanated from vested interests, it did influence the mindset of the people as is evident in their proclamation of 'neglect' of their movement for self rule by the rest of the country. It was also seen in the isolation of the people of Darjeeling from the freedom struggle in the rest of the country at this stage, which continued during the period immediately preceding the constitutional reforms of 1935. The Hillmen's Union again asked the British Government to keep them isolated from the ongoing reforms by making reservations for them with a view to preserving their distinct culture. The region became a 'partially excluded area' after the 1935 reforms, but the dream of complete administrative autonomy did not materialise. In order to further consolidate their claim, the Hillmen's Union organised a council with the aim of proclaiming unity, similarity and oneness between the Nepalis, Bhutias and Lepchas. Thus emerged the acronym NEBULA to further demonstrate their unity and lend strength to their demands.

With Independence on the horizon, their demands for autonomy increased. However, unlike other regions in the North-east, there were no demands for self-determination and threats of secession. It must be mentioned here that there was no major effort on the part of the national leaders at co-opting the people into the national mainstream, primarily because the region presented a relatively negligible threat to the unity of the country, unlike the cases of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Nagaland.

## Post-Independence Period

The post-Independence period saw the first signs of the reorganisation of India along linguistic lines. There were two commissions appointed within a period of

two years, the States Reorganisation Commission and the Official Language Commission. The States Reorganisation Commission was formed in 1953, based on which the political map of India would have undergone a change. It considered factors such as size, economic viability, national security and state of development. The Official Language Commission of 1955 went about assessing the efficacy of the formation of states on a linguistic basis, and the designation of official languages. It is evident that at this stage language played an important role in galvanising people in the region and establishing a common identity. This not only gave them a sense of belonging but also provided them a platform to forge a common grievance, as they eventually did. It is important to note that within a decade this platform was recognised as *the* unifying factor. The Language Commission relied on the 1951 census, which projected Nepali as the language of just 20 per cent of the people of West Bengal. Efforts to get Nepali recognised as one of the official language thus failed, leading to widespread resentment in the Darjeeling area. However, after the 1961 census that showed Nepali as the language of 60 per cent of the people of Darjeeling, it was given the status of an official language in the three subdivisions of the Darjeeling district.

What followed was a demand for its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. The demand was made simultaneously with that for the inclusion of Sindhi. While Sindhi did receive its rightful place, Nepali did not, despite hectic lobbying for both languages with 'as many as 74 members of Parliament supported the inclusion in a signed letter'.<sup>6</sup> This failure to get Nepali incorporated into the Eighth Schedule led to a growing frustration amongst the people.

Demands for the recognition of Nepali were accompanied with those for autonomy for the region. These were similar to demands made in certain other districts and states of the North-east. This in effect required that the district be included in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution—a schedule aimed at preserving the identity of various tribal groups in the country. Darjeeling was not given this autonomy even after the passage of the Twenty-second Amendment to the Constitution, which envisaged the formation of autonomous states, leading to further resentment among and isolation of the people. Finally in 1974 a Hill Development Council and a Hill Secretariat were set up, but as they had no executive powers this ultimately led to its becoming defunct even before it could display its effectiveness.

The issue of autonomy for the region continued to surface intermittently amidst much political manoeuvring, the main parties to which were the Congress(I), the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI[M]) and the All India Gorkha League (AIGL). The communists proposed their idea of autonomy in 1970, followed by the Left Front Government, which came to power in 1977 in West Bengal, pitching for regional autonomy for Darjeeling. This government passed a resolution

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<sup>6</sup> Report of the Official Language Commission of India, Ministry of Home Affairs Library, New Delhi, pp. 310–12.



in September 1981 for granting regional autonomy to Darjeeling just prior to elections in 1982, but nothing came of it. Subsequently, a Constitutional Amendment Bill to the same end was tabled in Parliament in 1983, only to be defeated. This was again repeated in 1985 with similar results. In all of this political point-scoring the politicians involved seemed oblivious to the extent to which their alienation was serving to distance the people of the district from the mainstream, both within the state and in the country. The void created by the lack of sympathy and understanding allowed a more virulent and extremist movement to step in, in the form of the Gorkha National Liberation Front (GNLF) led by Subash Ghising. The GNLF fired the first salvo in 1983 when its leader, Subash Ghising, addressed a memorandum to the King of Nepal and a number of other important heads of state (such as those of the US, USSR, France, India and Pakistan). Ghising in his memorandum says 'more than six millions are living as degraded human beings in every parts of the country of India...', and goes on to detail the crimes committed against them down the course of history and their pitiable condition.

Under such cruel pressures of racial segregated atmosphere and directly denial of justice on liberty, equality, fraternity and opportunity, the Gorkha National Liberation Front had to be formed to meet the above cruel challenges of a series of apartheid and genocide crimes done by the states and central government of India since Bharat independence....<sup>7</sup>

Ghising further recommended the abrogation of the 1950 Indo-Nepal Treaty. Though the memorandum did not talk of secession, it prepared the ground for such demands in the years to follow. With each passing year these demands became shriller till finally by end-1985/beginning 1986 the agitation came out into the open.

## Causes of Agitation

The agitation in Darjeeling was fuelled by the game of political one-upmanship that the Congress(I) and CPI(M) were playing at the time. It had become clear to both parties that a hardening of stance was likely to win votes in the area, as the people had become increasingly resentful and were veering towards autonomy and secession. The game that both were playing gave Subash Ghising a much-needed fillip and helped fan the flames of secession. The political brinkmanship spoken of was visible in the charge and counter-charge each levelled at the other, '... the CPI-M made it a convenient stick to beat the Congress with for not calling the GNLF agitation in 1986-87 an anti-national agitation, though Congress Party was no less vocal in denouncing the agitation'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Memorandum by Subash Ghising to the King of Nepal dated 23 December 1983. For the text of this memorandum, see Samanta (2000).

<sup>8</sup> Samanta 2000: 107.

At this stage, it will be appropriate to discuss the reasons for the agitation. First, it has already been brought out that Nepali migrants had hoped for autonomy even during the British period. They had professed a distinct identity and a wish to preserve the same, even at the cost of not participating in the struggle for Independence which was still in its initial phases at the time, preferring to remain loyal to the British. After Independence they had perceived as unfair the Indian Government's refusal to give them the autonomy that they demanded. These factors alienated them and kept them out of the national mainstream.

Second, language played an important role in the people's discontent. It has been seen that the Nepali language played an important role in unifying the people, giving them a sense of a distinct identity and culture. They felt that the Nepali language of the Darjeeling district, especially in the three hill divisions, was distinct and deserved recognition. They wished it to be recognised as a medium of education till the degree level and also wanted its inclusion in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. Their feeling that it would only be possible to preserve their identity through their language was a contention that did not find favour with the Government. Consequently their demands were not acceded to immediately (though it must be mentioned that they were met gradually), which bred much resentment.

Third, the initial 'tea rush' in the area during British rule had brought the people of this area some amount of prosperity. However, with a subsequent stagnation in acreage and output, job opportunities began to dwindle. Coupled with improving educational standards, which led to ever-increasing expectations that could not be met given the limited job opportunities in the area, it led to frustration among the people. In addition, a view that some held, which was expressed by Subash Ghising in his memorandum, was that:

With the sole intention of causing harassment to the people of Darjeeling and Dooars areas and to further aggravate the already existing acute unemployment problem, and also for proving themselves masters of Gorkhas, the West Bengal Government has shifted all the head offices of the State Government in the District of Darjeeling to the plains of Siliguri over the years.<sup>9</sup>

Fourth, the people also felt that Darjeeling had been exploited, and its wealth, in terms of the large quantity of tea produced in the area, carried away.

After Bharat independence, the Bengal Government has done nothing in the hill areas of Darjeeling and the Dooars except eye wash of the Gorkhas by offering petty things and doing minor repair works in the name of hill development.... Hundreds of crores of rupees have been taken away from both the Central and State Government annually from Darjeeling and Dooars areas since 1947.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Memorandum by Subash Ghising to the King of Nepal dated 23 December 1983.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Thus, claims that the agitation lacked an economic flavour are incorrect. While the contribution of economic issues to the agitation was certainly less than that of the language issue and/or the issue of autonomy, perceived economic exploitation was certainly a factor.

Fifth, the people of the hills were of the opinion that most of the educational institutions were established in the plains, depriving them of equal opportunities for education. Another factor fuelling discontent was their perception that inadequate reservation was made for them in medical and engineering colleges.

Sixth, it was also their perception that the hill people were not receiving a fair share of higher administrative posts in the district. This has been attributed to the 'unconstitutional and undemocratic colonial domination' of the state government. Ghising further attributes it to the 'colonial domination of West Bengal' (Ghising in a Letter to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, dated 22 July 1987).

Seventh, there was also resentment over the inclusion of the plain regions like 'Islampur, Chopra and Phansedewa' in the Darjeeling Parliament seat rather than the contiguous areas of the Dooars which had a Gorkha population, thus forcing the people to 'vote to an unknown candidate of the plains, much against their will'.

Eighth, the widespread deforestation of the area in and around Darjeeling was resented and blamed on the Government of West Bengal. As Subash Ghising again alleges in his memorandum, '...the West Bengal Government have completely destroyed the wealth and sanatorium value of Darjeeling hills'.<sup>11</sup>

## The Rise of GNLf and Aggression

The GNLf was formed on 24 July 1980. It appears to have been born out of the frustration of the hardline elements who had become disenchanted with the moderate movements spearheaded by established political parties and the Prantiya Sangstha. This was a predecessor of the GNLf that was fighting for the rights of the people in the region. However, it did not succeed and was overshadowed by the GNLf, which stood for such demands as a Nepali homeland within India, the inclusion of the Nepali language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, the abrogation of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1950,<sup>12</sup> and better job opportunities.

If we compare Subash Ghising's profile and rise to fame with that of Laldenga in Mizoram, we find a striking similarity between the two. Moreover, it is a reasonably well known fact that Ghising, in planning his agitation, was influenced by the MNF and its leaders. He was born in 1925 and like Laldenga, spent some time in the army. Though his stint there lasted only six years, it is certain to have

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> GNLf's basic difference with the Treaty was with Article VII, which as per Ghising gave them the status of 'reciprocal citizens' rather than 'bona fide citizens' of the country. The clause 'failed to create a much-needed distinction between the bona fide aboriginal and the settled Gorkhas in India and the Nepalis of Nepal who came to India on a reciprocal basis'.

helped him imbibe the organisational abilities of the army, and also enabled him to interact closely with a large number of ex-servicemen in the area. Like Laldenga, Ghising also contested the elections held in the area in 1977, though with little success. This is one of the probable reasons for his disenchantment that led him to formulate an alternative plan to grab power and establish himself in the area.

After an initial period of aimless manoeuvring, Ghising went about the task of influencing public opinion and recruiting them to the idea that they had been discriminated against. He then came up with a set of concrete proposals which would enable the government to resolve the deadlock in the region. The release of this 11-Point Programme on 13 March 1986 can be regarded as the formal launch of the movement. It included many of the demands that had been made earlier, the only difference being that it was decided that from this time an offensive approach, including demonstrations and boycotting of political, executive and social responsibilities, would be adopted against the government. It also became apparent that the nascent uprising was not averse to the use of violence if the need arose, as was subsequently proved during the agitation. 'When in March 1986 Subash Ghising appealed to the ex-servicemen to train the young members of the GVC and the GNLF, the hint was clear: he would not shun violence if it was necessary.'<sup>13</sup> There were widespread demonstrations in the region despite orders to the contrary. Police firing on the demonstrators in Kurseong resulted in the deaths of five people. This only served to further ignite passions and the people took to the streets in greater numbers. On 29 June 1986, agitating mobs burnt copies of Article VII of the Indo-Nepal Treaty of 1970 and the State Reorganisation Committee's Report (the Committee was formed in 1953, with the Report being submitted in 1956). Violence continued, subsequently claiming the life of one policeman. In what seemed a retaliatory action by the police, 15 people lost their lives on 27 July. Statistics of deaths and injuries reveal the extent of violence during this period.<sup>14</sup>

The next six months were a see-saw battle of wits between the GNLF and the state's CPI(M) Government. The GNLF regarded the CPI(M) as the ones responsible for their plight and went about destroying CPI(M) and Government property in a frenzied expression of their anger. This was followed by the CPI(M) retaliating in a bid to retain their initiative and receding influence in the area. Ultimately the state government, realising that the agitation was getting out of hand, decided to deploy paramilitary forces in June 1987.

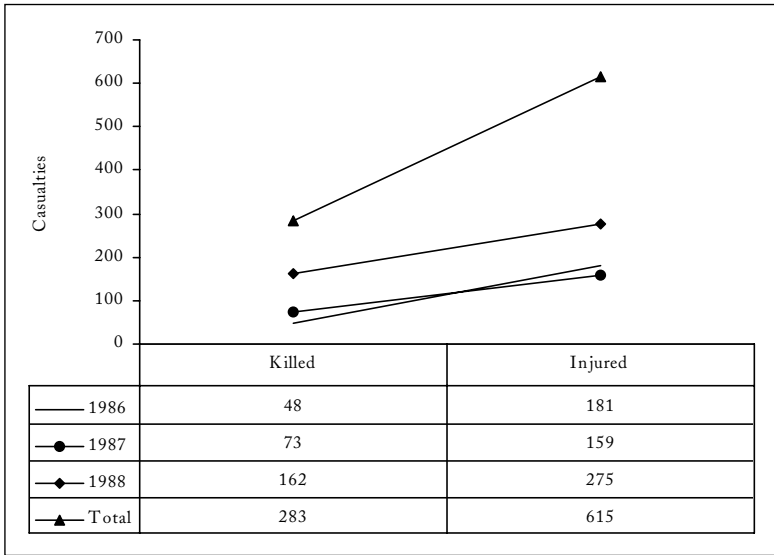
From June 1987 till the time an accord was signed between the GNLF and the Government of West Bengal, Darjeeling not only experienced avoidable violence, but also became a playing field for rival political parties. While the Central Government tacitly sympathised with Ghising, the state government led by the CPI(M) regarded the whole affair as a conspiracy between the GNLF and the

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<sup>13</sup> Samanta 2000: 138. GVC (Gorkha Volunteer Corps), GNSF (Gorkha National Students Front).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 149.

Figure 16.1  
Casualty Details—Gorkhaland Movement



Source: Samanta 2000.

Congress(I) at the Centre. ‘There is no doubt about a good deal of closeness between Ghising and the Union Home Minister, Buta Singh.... The CPI-M used this public perception and launched a campaign branding the Congress and the Central Government as conspirator and collaborator.’<sup>15</sup>

Political uncertainty resulted in an impasse. Frequent strikes and violence by the GNLF aggravated the situation. The stalemate was based on GNLF’s insistence on including the areas of Siliguri and the Dooars in the Hill Council. They also demanded the addition of the word ‘Gorkha’ to the name of the council, a demand not acceptable at the time to the state government. Ultimately a compromise was reached when certain Nepali majority villages were included in the council’s jurisdiction and the state government released certain GNLF agitators detained under the provisions of the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (TADA) Act, 1987. A further compromise was the withdrawal of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) from the area; those cases against agitators in which no charges had as yet been framed were also dropped. Finally the word ‘Gorkha’ was also added to the name of the council, renaming it the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council. All these actions resulted in the signing of a Memorandum of Settlement on 22 August 1988 (for the text of the memorandum, see Appendix R).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 167.

## Memorandum of Settlement

The new Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council had 42 members of which 28 were elected. The council, unlike the previous one, was given both executive and financial powers, which made it both effective and realistic, with the aim of resolving the grievances of the people of the area. This was immediately followed by an agreement with the central government on the issue of citizenship. This agreement clarified that every Gorkha as on 26 January 1950 was a citizen of India as already granted by the Constitution of India. After prolonged agitation, these settlements satisfied the people and provided them with some much needed respite.

The first elections to the council were an expression of the people's mood. Satisfied with the settlement that the GNLF had achieved for them, they showed their appreciation and recognition of its efforts by voting for its candidates in the elections. As a result the GNLF won 26 of the 28 elected seats on the council, with 84 per cent of the people voting for them as compared to the CPI(M)'s 8.64 per cent.

The struggle in Darjeeling was brought under control by a practical and timely solution which could act as a good example for the resolution of similar demands in other areas, without putting the people there through the agony of pointless violence. It also proves that in the presence of the requisite government will, such emerging insurgencies or nascent LICs can be solved before they spiral out of control. It also highlights the importance of nipping such problems in the bud through acceptable and practical solutions which encourage the reintegration of the people involved into the national mainstream, a more essential for the unity, peace and prosperity of the country.

## Chapter 17

# Naxalite Movements

### Introduction

The rise of the Naxalite movement in India largely reflects the rise of communism in the country, the cradle for which lay in China and the erstwhile USSR. For some, communism and Naxalism represent the complementary faces—political and extremist—of the same ideology. There is little doubt that Chairman Mao, who is also considered the ideologue of communism in the country, provided Naxalite movements with a philosophy on which to base their struggle. Also, it cannot be contested that most leadership for these movements came from the ranks of communists in the country. These communists were disillusioned with the relatively liberal and rightist attitude of the Communist Party in its quest to capture power in collaboration with other parties, which did not share the ideology of the hardline elements within the communist fold.

Naxalism followed the classical principles of Mao's theory of communist revolutionary warfare. The communists in India wanted to interpolate a similar movement in the Indian context. However, it produced contrasting results, much to the chagrin of the leaders of the movement in the country and across the border in China.

The Naxalite movement began primarily as a socio-economic struggle to fight for the rights of landless peasants against the rich landed classes and money-lenders—the class widely seen as exploiting the poor people. The movement also became popular amongst the lower working classes in factories and government and public sector undertakings, with an aim to fight for the rights of workers. The movement can be seen as an expression of dissatisfaction, frustration and rebellion of have-nots against the haves.

It is interesting to note that the movement was and has been restricted to a few states in the country, and despite its simmering continuation over decades, it has not been able to penetrate any other area. West Bengal, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Bihar, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh are some of the states which have been affected, with minor impact in Punjab and J&K.

Before discussing the rise of Naxalite movements in the country, it will be relevant to understand the rise of communism. The rise of Naxalism as an offshoot of communism comes as a clear and stark indication of the increasingly militant inclinations in communist thought. M.N. Roy formally introduced communism to India by guiding the formation of the Communist Party of India (CPI) in July 1924, in the wake of the Russian Revolution—which had influenced him a great deal. The CPI was part of Communist International, which was spreading its roots in USSR and China, from where it was destined to spread all over the world. It was accompanied by the establishment of ideological schools in USSR, to formally give educate students in this form of governance inspired by communist philosophy. Some of these were the Lenin Institute of Political Warfare, Academy of Red Professors and the Sunyat Sen University. Indian participation in these programmes began in 1920. ‘In October 1920, a group of thirty-six Indians reached Tashkent, where they were met by Roy and enrolled in a training course for revolutionaries.’<sup>1</sup>

The 1920s saw communist movement come out into the open. Two major incidents, the Kanpur Conspiracy Case and subsequently mass arrest of conspirators of CPI in Meerut, made plans of the communists in India clear to the British Government. This was further corroborated by arrests of USSR trained communists on the Indian border in 1921–22. This made the Government come down heavily on the spread of the movement. At the first instance, it seems more or less logical to conclude that the communists were freedom fighters, who were working in unison with the rising freedom movement in India. However, this is only partially correct, since the communists certainly were against British rule and presence in India. On the other hand, their aim was not to strengthen the ongoing movement led by the Congress. Their loyalty was more towards their ideology and its spread.

At this stage, it will be interesting to understand communist philosophy in general and communist aims in India in particular. The sweeping winds of communism, which emanated from USSR after the success of the Russian Revolution, started spreading with rapidity. When targets for these revolutions were drawn up, states ruled by colonial powers came up as the highest priority for the simple reason that the seed of revolution, dissatisfaction and upheaval was already sown with the native population, which was on the lookout for ways and means to overthrow the colonial powers. Amongst the countries ruled by colonial powers, India was again high on the priority list, given its strategic location and the obvious influence a communist country in the region was likely to have on smaller neighbouring countries. Lenin had said, ‘The road from Moscow to Paris lies through Peking, Shanghai and Calcutta’. This was the importance attached to the spread of communism in India.

The second aspect that needs to be highlighted is the attitude of communists towards the Congress, which at this time was spearheading the freedom struggle

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<sup>1</sup> Sinha 1968: 12–13.



in India. The communists were against Congress policies and their loyalty was to the wider cause of communism and its establishment in India. ‘The greatest threat to the victory of Indian revolution is the fact that great masses of our people still harbour illusions about the National Congress and have not realised that it represents a class organisation of the capitalists working against the fundamental interests of the toiling masses of our country.’<sup>2</sup> This misplaced sense of priority made the communists open up two fronts at the same time. On the one hand they were fighting British oppression and on the other, they were opposed to the Congress, which was undoubtedly the most prominent representative of the people in the country. This was further aggravated by the lack of mass support for communism and failure in the establishment of a strong base that could propel any kind of a movement in the country.

In 1934, the British Government in India banned the CPI and Communist International. The Communists were against Britain and its capitalist policies. However, with Hitler attacking USSR during the Second World War and Britain coming to their assistance, the communist high command in USSR was forced to change their policy. This in turn forced an embarrassing turnaround in CPI’s policy vis-à-vis the British and they changed their policy, aimed at support for British war effort. This served as a boon for the communists in India. The ban on the party was removed and the CPI was legalised on 26 July 1942. There was a sudden spurt in membership of the party and its literature became easily available. This was coupled with vilification of the Indian struggle for independence. The party and its satellite groups embarked on a campaign to subvert the people and turn them against the freedom fighters. ‘The sort of “struggle” Gandhiji is visualising and in which the rest of you have acquiesced is not a plan of struggle but a gamble; it is not fighting for freedom but escape into jails; it is not leading the people but forsaking them. Such a “struggle” will not get us freedom but Fascism.’<sup>3</sup>

After the war, as freedom became a reality, the communists were shocked to note that the Congress would preside over the affairs of the country, shattering their dream of a major role for communists in the formation of the government. This commenced a new phase in rivalry in the post-independence period.

## Beginning of Armed Struggle

The first signs of armed struggle by the communists commenced in the Telengana region in 1946.<sup>4</sup> This phase of armed violence continued till 1952 and saw numerous

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Sinha (1968) from *Pravda* and *Comintern Weekly* titled ‘Platform of Action on CPI, 1930.

<sup>3</sup> *The People’s War*, 26 July 1942, quoted by Sinha (1968).

<sup>4</sup> The struggle cannot strictly be termed as a Naxalite struggle in the classical sense as will be seen later. Naxalite movement was formally launched in 1967 from a little known and heard area called Naxalbari. However, the struggle gains significance in helping trace the roots of communist supported violence in the country, of which Naxalite violence is widely considered an offshoot.

lives of innocents and militant communist cadres being lost. The struggle was ill-timed, as this was the period when nationalist sentiment was at its peak and success of any movement against the Congress which was expected to lead the country to miracles after independence was improbable if not impossible.

Telengana as a region was named such as a reference to the nine erstwhile districts of Hyderabad, which at that time were under the rule of the Nizam. The movement commenced in this region because of the autocratic anti-peasant rule of the Nizam. The people were oppressed and were reeling under policies like grain tax, forced labour<sup>5</sup> and land eviction. The extent of feudal society can be assessed from the distribution and utilisation of land revenues in the area. 'Of the 53 lakh acres of land of the state about 60 per cent was the *dirwani* or government land revenue system, about 30 per cent under the *jagirdari* system and about 10 per cent under the *sark khas* or the Nizam's own direct estate. In the *jagir* areas, land taxes on irrigated land were ten times those of the *dirwani* area.'<sup>6</sup> This resulted in formation of an ideal and fertile region for the rise of communism. With the passage of time, the Nizam's forces had become weak and were finding it difficult to combat the rise of communism as effectively as was done by the powerful, well organised and equipped British forces. Thus, there were conditions favouring an open resistance struggle against the feudal rule in the State. 'Within two years the movement gained control of about 3,000 villages, and its control spread to many more, although it had to pay the heavy price of 2,000 deaths. At the time the Indian Government intervened in Hyderabad in 1948, the Telengana movement was growing at an astronomical rate and the defeat of the Nizam in that region was merely a question of time.'<sup>7</sup> Resistance from the communists came in the form of fighting squads in a number of villages. These squads organised themselves and decided to take on the might of the *Razakars* (raiders). Organisations were created at village level so as to give the movement some semblance of a systematic struggle.<sup>8</sup>

A very creditable and praiseworthy aspect of the struggle was the active participation of women. They led, participated and stood up to the torture tactics of the Nizam's forces to display a rare sense of commitment and resolve, which has been quite uncommon in struggles in the country. There was also a strong movement aimed at equal rights for women, which resulted in a number of them taking their rightful place on village committees.

The Indian decision to take over Hyderabad was influenced by the Nizam's anti-India stance. However, it is likely that it may also have been influenced by a rise

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<sup>5</sup> Forced labour was called *vatti* in the area. According to the feudal laws of the area, one male member of each family was forced to do labour despite orders issued by the Nizam's Government to the contrary.

<sup>6</sup> Louis 2002: 47.

<sup>7</sup> Biplab Dasgupta 1974: 16.

<sup>8</sup> The fighting squads were called *dalams* and village committees were called the *gram rajyams*. These two organisations formed the militant and organisational wings of the movement in the area.

in communist influence in the area, which was likely to create problems for the country in case it progressed and took over the region. After the Indian government's takeover of the region, the complexion of the struggle suddenly changed. It turned from an anti-feudal to an anti 'bourgeois democratic government' struggle. The communists had sown the seeds for a protracted struggle against the Government in spurts, in various regions of the country, which started in Telengana. The struggle was destined to fail and that too at a heavy cost to the revolutionaries. After Indian independence, the communist revolutionaries lost another 2,000 people in encounters with the much more superior, well-equipped and powerful force. The pressure applied by the Indian government and forces pushed the militants further into the interiors and they were forced to take refuge in the forest area of four districts they were active in. These were Khammam, Warangal, Nalgonda and Karimnagar. The struggle finally petered out with the communists suing for peace. This came about in the form of elections in which, they performed creditably capturing 41 seats in the united Madras state in 1952 and 37 seats in Telangana region in the Hyderabad state in 1952. Thus, the struggle was a case of failure despite support from the people.

## Interim Period

The interim period was marked by reorganisation within ranks of communists and introspection. This was a result of the failure of their armed struggle. Different sections amongst the group started following varying schools of thought. There was a group, which was no longer in agreement with policies of CPI and instead wanted to follow the Chinese model of revolution. This resulted in a split in communist ranks and formation of a new party called CPI(M) in 1964. The contrasts had become all the more sharp with basic disagreements of the two groups on foreign policy and internal policies. While the CPI started supporting the Government on a number of foreign policies and internal issues, the CPI(M) was in sharp disagreement. This was most pronounced after the 1962 war, which saw the rightists (CPI) supporting the Government, while the leftists (CPI[M]) did not. Though the parties had still not officially divided at this stage, the division between the two groups had become apparent. This resulted in government crackdowns on the leftists. However, this did not deter CPI(M) or their supporters, as became evident from election results in Kerala (1965) and West Bengal (1967) subsequently.

Political compulsions forced both parties to adopt a soft line, as they were forced into collaborative politics through a coalition government in West Bengal defeating the Congress for the first time in the race for power in the State in 1967. This brought out differences amongst the communists yet again. The CPI(M) despite its hardline credentials was forced to take a softer line. This aggravated the situation and led the hardline elements to emerge from the shadow of the two big parties to declare their intention: 'If there is to be a revolution, there must be a revolutionary party'. This resulted in the formation of the All India Communist Committee of

Communist Revolutionaries (AICCCR) in May 1968. Based on the resolutions adopted, recommending a party on the principles of Lenin and Marx, the third major communist party CPI(ML) was formed on 22 April 1969 under the leadership of Charu Mazumdar. Yet another party, the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) was formed immediately after this, under the leadership of Asit Sen.

Most of these rumblings in the communist camp commenced in the post-Naxalbari phase, which brought out sharp differences between the communists in terms of their philosophy of and outlook on struggle against oppression. Naxalbari is widely considered to be the landmark which hailed the commencement of Naxalism in the country in the form it is known and recognised today. It also became the focal point for amalgamating localised struggles in different states in the country, which were primarily tribal movements into a more focused fight for the rights of the peasantry.

Before discussing the happenings in Naxalbari and its impact on the movement, it will be relevant to discuss another agrarian struggle in Andhra Pradesh, which though a totally localised struggle in a minuscule area of the State, represented yet another expression of frustrated outburst of the poor peasants.

## Srikakulam

Srikakulam is a small district comprising merely 6 per cent of the total population of the state, as per the 1961 census. The area, which was affected by the agitation, was further restricted to the hilly areas in the district, which approximately comprised 90 per cent of agitating people. These hill people were referred to as the 'girijan' (hill tribal), because of which the movement is also called the girijan struggle. The total area covered by the struggling masses was about 300 villages in six *taluks*.<sup>9</sup>

The struggle commenced in 1959, with the tribal population in the hilly region finally taking up their cause in a combative mood. This struggle emerged for familiar reasons in tribal areas. The poor peasants were given a meagre wage of 'less than half a rupee and only 59 kilograms of grain a year'. Their land once mortgaged was not released as expected by 'plainsmen', who were the landlords and money-lenders. They were not allowed to use traditional methods for farming, thus making them totally subservient to their 'masters'. The struggle was decidedly successful to the extent that it was able to get an appreciable improvement in conditions imposed by the landlords. 'It secured a five-fold increase in wage rate for farm servants, forced two-thirds of the produce to the tiller, about 1,500–2,000 acres of mortgaged land were wrested from the landlords, about 5,000 acres of waste land were made available to the girijans free from the restrictions imposed by forest

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<sup>9</sup> The struggle covered the *taluks* of Parvathipuram, Pathapatnam, Palkonda, Sompeta, Ichapuram and Tekkali.

officials, and loans amounting to about 3 lakhs were annulled by 1967.<sup>10</sup> The struggle also achieved a class-consciousness, which further led to strengthening of the armed communist struggle when CPI(ML) was formed. These areas provided rich experience of leading a struggle against the landlords. It also became one of the chapters of successful struggle.

However, this struggle too hit a rough patch, much like other movements of similar nature, when it attempted to go beyond its capabilities, without the requisite support or means to take on the government machinery. The year 1969 saw a number of 'class killings' aimed at policemen and landlords, in the most brutal fashion to instil fear amongst opponents of the struggle. It is estimated that a total of 150 people were killed, including more than 20 policemen and over 50 'class killings'. These gruesome killings soon invited large-scale police action and repression, aimed at countering the strategy of the communists. By the middle of 1970 the government had successfully eliminated most of the top leadership in a number of successful actions, after the cadres had almost achieved success in liberating vast tracts in areas dominated by them. The success in Srikakulam after initial gains turned out to be short-lived.

## Naxalbari

The Naxalite movement has got its name from a little known area called Naxalbari. It was this area which became known for the rousing chorus of violent symphony in an organised fashion, despite failure of the movement. Naxalbari and 1967 became the landmark location and landmark year, which still forms a sacred, though a humble beginning for agrarian armed struggles based on a socio-economic upheaval.

Like most other struggles during this period, Naxalbari too is an area populated by tribals. Santhals, Oraos, Mundas and Rajbanshis formed the meagre population of a total of 42,000 people.<sup>11</sup> The area was primarily forested or covered by tea plantations and agricultural land. It forms a part of the Siliguri Sub-Division and is in the close vicinity of both Nepal and China. Sikkim bounds it to the north and Nepal to the west, locating it strategically close to its area of ideological influence.

It was mentioned earlier that 1967 was a year of political upheaval in the country, with the Congress losing power in West Bengal, besides a number of other states. West Bengal saw a rag tag coalition government coming to power, with a number of parties of conflicting ideologies and policies. Even within the Communist Party, members differed on a number of important and critical policies and issues.

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<sup>10</sup> Biplab Dasgupta 1974: 47-48.

<sup>11</sup> Another author, Samanta (1985), has assessed the strength of the area to be 50,799. Of this 11,278 is supposed to be Scheduled Castes and 13,286 were Scheduled Tribes, which make it a total of 22.20 and 26.15 per cent respectively.

However, the aspect relevant to the study is contradiction in policies relating to the movement. The matter of land disputes was gaining momentum in the area and there were a number of cases of atrocities by landlords on the poor peasantry. While the CPI(M) was against police intervention in such matters, Bangla Congress, another of the constituents was for it. In the initial phase, the CPI(M) had its way and was able to block police interference in all land disputes. The result of this decision was almost immediately visible.

On 22 May 1967, the first incident came to light when there was a clash between poor peasants and a landlord over land which probably belonged to the peasants. This happened despite a court order in favour of a peasant. The next incident, after two days, was a clash between guards of a tea estate and peasants. The same day a police party was ambushed and an officer was killed, as a result of this incident. This was followed by an even more reprehensible incident, when a police party, not being able to locate the culprits, opened fire on innocent people, killing nine women and children.

These incidents may have come as a surprise to many observers of national security, as part of the national media and administration. However, these incidents were representative of a larger picture, which had been developing in the area over a long period of time. Landlords, through intricate law procedures, exploited the peasants, refused to return land once mortgaged and clashed because of methods of farming and rates of wages. These peasants became the perfect base for communist functionaries, who found the situation ideal to cultivate their ideology. There is no doubt that leaders did fight for the cause of the poor peasants. However, the methodology did not always evoke agreement and support of the government and the common observer.

One of the first leaders of the movement was Kanu Sanyal of the CPI(M), who was himself a Brahmin. He was supported by Jagan Santhal, a tribal communist leader. Another important leader in the hierarchy was Charu Mazumdar who subsequently rose in the chain to become the founding General Secretary of the CPI(ML). Charu Mazumdar fought the elections and after a humiliating and a disastrous defeat, probably decided to take a more militant stance, shunning the process of democracy. After his loss in the 1963 elections, he hardened his approach and deviated from the CPI(M) line, especially after their collaboration in the post-1967 election period, with the 'bourgeois parties'. Though, he was a member of the CPI(M) at this stage, he continued to distance himself from them and planned a more militant struggle, on the lines of Mao's teachings.

At this stage, it will be relevant to analyse the circumstances that prevailed in the country. First, there was a political upheaval churning the power structure, shaking the very edifice on which politics was established in 1947. With cracks appearing in the Congress, political opposition was most visible and its effects were being translated to every state and region in the country. This was accompanied by the realisation that the dreams of independent India certainly were not round the corner, with rising unemployment, and drop in per capita income. The shackles of feudalism were refusing to loosen their grip on the poor people and there was a rise

in dissatisfaction and frustration in a number of states. This was coupled with the spread of communism and the two formed a volatile mix, preparing to burst on the national scene with violent proclamations of revolution.

The incidents in May 1967 prematurely led the Naxalites to proclaim the area as liberated, much to the interest of national press, which flashed it on the national scene. While this succeeded in giving the movement more than its share of publicity, it also prematurely brought it into the eye of the storm, leading to stringent action once the protective ring woven by the CPI(M) was removed by the state government, coming under greater pressure by the day.

While the CPI(M) did try and shield the movement, the differences were too wide to arrive at any kind of compromise or solution. On the other hand, it was the Chinese who came out openly as staunch supporters of the revolution, despite its premature and nascent stage. They criticised the CPI(M) for not lending it the requisite support. 'A peal of spring thunder has crashed over the land of India. Revolutionary peasants in the Darjeeling area have risen in rebellion under the leadership of a revolutionary group of Indian Communist Party, a red area of rural revolutionary armed struggle has been established in India. This is a development of tremendous significance for the Indian party's revolutionary struggle.'<sup>12</sup> The Chinese interest and support to communist struggles have significant implications at this stage. First, the Chinese wanted a weak and fragmented neighbour, especially after the 1962 Sino-Indian War. Second, they probably felt that after the humiliating defeat in 1962 and the war in 1965 against Pakistan, India was not strong enough to resist forces of fragmentation. They probably saw it as an ideal opportunity to convert the country, or at least a part of it, which was relatively in closer vicinity to communism, thereby keeping a favourable flank on its borders. Third, China may have tried to prove to India that it was capable of destabilising the country—an act, which could be avoided by taking a favourable posture on the issue of Tibet.

The struggle lasted for merely 52 days, after which a strong police force supported by the BSF moved into the area and nullified the movement on 13 July 1967 arresting 250 peasants. This was followed by the arrests of Kanu Sanyal, Charu Mazumdar and Jangal Santal in the next few months, crippling the movement effectively.

In an introspection by Naxalite leaders and specifically by Kanu Sanyal the achievements and failures of the struggle have been brought out aptly. The achievements flow out from reasons for the revolt and the reasons for the dissatisfaction of the peasants. The achievements have been as cited as, (a) taking over of land belonging to non-cultivating owners, (b) destruction of all legal documents, (c) declaring mortgage and loan documents void, (d) confiscation of hoarded rice, (e) trial and execution of some rich peasants, (f) similar trial and execution of the 'lackeys' of rich peasants, (g) organisation of groups armed with bows and arrows, (h) takeover of village and operation of schools, (i) formation of revolutionary

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<sup>12</sup> *The People's Daily*, 5 July 1967, a newspaper in China, as quoted by Biplab Dasgupta (1974).

committees, and (j) declaring the existing bourgeois laws and courts void.<sup>13</sup> Though the achievements have been listed in detail and seem to be an impressive tally, their efficacy in making a revolution successful seems questionable. The achievements listed are more of reactionary and revenge impulses rather than a well co-ordinated and thought out operation. The weaknesses listed by Kanu Sanyal are:

- (a) Absence of a strong party organisation, and leadership in the hands of petty bourgeois elements who failed to resist the police attack.
- (b) The party failed to rely wholly on the people and sometimes discouraged popular initiative to minimise losses.
- (c) Party workers were ignorant about military affairs. The movement relied on the spontaneous action of a large number of people (for example, to raid the houses of rich peasants), but failed to form armed guerrilla squads to protect the 'liberated areas'.
- (d) The party failed to carry out land reforms because of obstruction by the middle and rich peasantry.<sup>14</sup>

The assessment is accurate. However, Kanu Sanyal fails to bring out some more aspects, which led to failure of the movement. First, the movement was a totally amateur attempt with aims that were not in consonance with the planning and preparation for it. It is unthinkable to foresee the Naxalbari movement snowballing in a popular uprising without the ground having been prepared for the same in other areas. Second, Naxal leaders seem to be a group of dreamers who were safely isolated from the reality of a country or a state's powers to deal with such situations. They did read the history of movements in USSR, China, Vietnam, but they probably did not understand or care to understand the requirements of such a revolution. Third, a movement which relies on crude weapons and mobs, cannot think of a revolution. The philosophy of leaders to encourage their cadres to employ such weapons to give them close contact with their victims is acceptable to prepare cadres psychologically, but it cannot substitute for modern weaponry. Fourth, the party did not seem to be organised to carry out its various functions—military, psychological, financial, propaganda and recruitment. There seems to have been too much of philosophising in the entire operation, with little to back up such lofty ideals and principles. Fifth, there was and subsequently has been a lot of in-fighting in communist organisations with any number of splits and blaming games amongst the parties involved. This has led to divisions in the party and their followers, finally resulting in loss of faith. The communist movement could never decide on their aims and the means to achieve them. This is not only restricted to the Naxalbari movement, since the 1960s, the communists have also failed to expand their influence beyond West Bengal and Kerala even in terms of electoral gains till date.

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<sup>13</sup> Kanu Sanyal, 'Report on peasant struggle on the Terai region', *Liberation*, November 1968. Quoted by Biplab Dasgupta 1974: 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*: 13–14.



## The Struggle Spreads

The significance of Naxalbari as brought out earlier, was not much in its tangible results achieved. Its importance was in terms of a landmark and an example, which could be imbibed and improved upon by agitating groups in other areas. One of the areas which was influenced by Naxalbari, though it may not be much of an improvement in terms of quality, was a small region in Bihar called Mushahari. This was an area where the population was not predominantly tribal. It had a population of 242,726 with a high urban percentage of 52.07 per cent. Located in close proximity Muzaffarpur, its people were better exposed to facilities of modern lifestyle. However, a substantial 25.2 per cent of the population was from the Scheduled Caste.

The area had similar symptoms, as were prevalent in other areas infected with Naxalite movements. 'The *Bhumibars* who constituted 15–20 per cent of the population, owned most of the land of the area.... The daily wage was 1.5 kg of paddy or coarse grain.'<sup>15</sup> It will be evident that the movement was yet again an expression of frustration against social and economic injustice.

The movement was led by a Bhumihar youth Raj Kishore Singh. He helped to organise the struggle with formation of Kisan Sangram Samitis. The first incident was reported in April 1968, when peasants snatched crops in the village of Gangapur. This symbolic commencement slowly spread to neighbouring areas with 'class killings' and looting taking place. However, in a similar fashion as other struggles, the movement was not able to take the brunt of police action and with the killing of Raj Kishore Singh in firing the struggle too ended prematurely with little gain.

Analysis of the struggle points towards similar shortcomings as were seen in previous struggles. There was little planning, organisation and systematic approach to a synergised movement, which ultimately resulted in failure yet again.

## Future of Naxal Movements

Naxal movements, as they are popularly known, have not ended with the end of these struggles cited. The reasons cited for most of these struggles continue to force landless peasants to pick up weapons and fight for their rights. This is further exploited by petty power centres, to gain at the expense of frustrated people. There are a number of *senas*, which have sprung up in states like Bihar to prop up such power centres. Large-scale killings often hit the headlines to remind the administration about the unfinished agenda and stark economic disparities in the region. It is apparent that these agrarian and socio-economic struggles are likely to continue, till the basic problems of the people are not addressed and political interests refrain from exploiting these differences for the politics of vote banks.

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<sup>15</sup> Prakash Louis 2002: 148.

Though the chances of any of these movements snowballing into a full-fledged insurgency are remote, these struggles, emanating from disgruntled elements, can certainly play host to anti-national elements in their quest to destabilise the country. The areas can become fertile support bases for terrorists. Thus, it is not essential for an area to be termed dangerous merely because it is capable of supporting an LIC on its own. It is as dangerous if it can covertly give tacit support, thereby further deepening the roots of a struggle. This complementary nature of a struggle is likely to emanate from regions of the kind affected by Naxalism.

## Chapter 18

# Conclusion

### Jargon Wars

This section deals with the seemingly academic issue of terminology used to describe various conflicts under the purview of LICs. There is a tendency to use terms like terrorism and insurgency without understanding the subtle difference between them. While it may not make a material difference to the conflict in question, it certainly does make a difference to informed people, the intelligentsia, the world polity at large, and to the psyche of soldiers who fight such conflicts.

The probable reason for attempting to redefine a struggle is not difficult to find. Some such attempts are inadvertent in that they arise from an obvious lack of understanding of the subtle difference between these definitions. However, it is the concerted attempts at redefinition that one must be wary of, as they often lead into a terminological quagmire. First, attempts of this nature may arise when the representatives of disgruntled groups that are a part of the struggle or the Government may try to 'tag' the conflict in accordance with their perceived interests. An example is the problem in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), which Pakistan sees as an indigenous struggle for independence and the Indians as a proxy war waged by promoting cross-border terrorism. It is often said that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. Thus definitions become misleading and instruments of national interest.

Second, it is also the academic community which displays a tendency to redefine such conflicts through the prism of their area of specialisation. An expert on terrorism would tend to view every conflict as such. Yet another expert on counter-insurgency would probably interpret all conflicts as insurgencies. There are a number of books available that tend to classify all LICs fought in India either under the head of terrorism or insurgency.<sup>1</sup> The former is obviously more common,

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<sup>1</sup> *Roots of Terrorism* (New Delhi, Penguin, 2002) written by a very respected authority on international affairs, Kanti Bajpai, is one such example. Though the book is an excellent study of the struggles in India and the understanding of the author is clear, crisp and incisive on the subject, yet titling the book *Roots of Terrorism* tends to be misleading, especially when the author

primarily because it appeals more to the common man and reinforces his fear of violence, which threatens his sensibilities. It has also gained acceptance after the USA-led war against terror, which has been defined as such for obvious reasons of political expediency. However, for students of military history and the more informed among society, there is a necessity to view a conflict in the right perspective—at least from the academic point of view.

Besides owing a writer's debt to the people at large, it is important that the men in uniform understand the subtle yet vital differences between various forms of LICs. This is for a simple reason—that tactics and attitudes are governed by what may at first seem an aspect of little consequence to the actual conflict. For example, terrorism, which enjoys little popular support, will employ sensational and visible violence to terrorise and break the will of the people and in turn make a government accede to its demands. For this reason it needs to be put down ruthlessly. An insurgency, however, will enjoy considerable popular support and will therefore need to be handled with far more caution and understanding lest it progress to the stage of a revolution or civil war. Thus popular support differentiates the two struggles, and it is this factor that defines a struggle as either of the two forms of LIC. To cite the case of Punjab, at one stage Bhindranwale had rendered the administration and police virtually ineffective through a series of terrorist acts, blatantly visible and skilfully employed to have maximum impact. Here it was fear and not large-scale popular support that paralysed the administration. On the other hand the initial uprising in J&K in 1989 was an expression of popular discontent and could therefore be categorised as an insurgency. However, with waning popular support for the insurgents, over time it morphed into cross-border terrorism. Having made an attempt at demystifying the two major forms of conflict, it is left to the reader to define the various conflicts, both past and present, in the country.

There is yet another aspect that requires clarification, that of a 'proxy war'; an oft-employed term, especially in the context of Pakistan-sponsored activities in India. The term proxy war implies a country's endeavour against another to fuel discontent, violence and unrest in the latter in pursuance of its ultimate political, ideological, economic or religious aims. Proxy wars can employ various means of conflict to achieve these aims. These can vary from subversion and limited reliance on terror to large-scale use of violence. They may also differ in terms of the people involved, who may be locals or even foreign mercenaries from sympathetic countries—for example the kind of people Pakistan pushes into Kashmir to subvert, train and induct the Kashmiri youth into outfits that fight the security forces. However, in both cases the sponsoring country uses tools of terrorism, insurgency or subversion to implement their proxy war. Thus proxy wars by themselves are hostile but low cost acts which involve the employment of one form of LIC for their implementation. They are thus a cheap and viable alternative to a conventional

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has himself stressed on related aspects in his book. Yet another example is *Uncivil Wars: The Pathology of Terrorism in India* by Ved Marwah.

war and keep the action below the threshold level beyond which the other country would declare war.

It is not necessary that a proxy war be an armed struggle. Another means of waging such a war is through the economic strangulation of the adversary, which may be effected by influencing other countries to impose economic sanctions. It can further be fought in cyberspace through hackers and the like. Proxy wars, therefore, rely on indirect means with the ultimate aim of either assisting the final direct effort or achieving the results in isolation. An example of the former was the 1965 Indo-Pak War where Pakistan initially employed tribesmen, led and controlled by Pakistan army regulars, to capture the Kashmir valley, which was to be followed by a thrust to isolate it from the rest of India.

Proxy wars can be successfully fought in an atmosphere where suitable conditions exist in the victim country, which the aggressor can subvert to its own ends. It also requires that the aggressor have favourable diplomatic equations with other opinion-shaping countries on the world stage, which matters if international repercussions and sanctions are to be avoided. A just cause will further assist in avoiding a negative fallout internationally.

Another term often employed is 'guerrilla warfare'. Guerrilla warfare does not signify any particular form of conflict. It is merely the employment of certain techniques, tactics and principles in a conflict to achieve designated aims. Thus guerrilla tactics may be employed in various conflicts, be they terrorism or insurgencies or even as a subsidiary to conventional war; such tactics were successfully used by the British and French against the Germans during the Second World War. Such tactics generally exploit the terrain on which the conflict is being fought, and rely on speed, surprise and sometimes even the weather amongst other factors, as was done by Shivaji against the Mughals.

There are a number of other terms like revolutionary warfare and partisan warfare, insurrection, asymmetric warfare, little war, small wars, etc., which all correlate to specifics as understood and defined by certain sections to suit local situations, and probably also as an urge to coin new terms for an age old method of warfare. However, all these conflicts are covered under the ambit of LICs and have been discussed as such.

## Factors Leading to an LIC

### General Factors

The study of every LIC reveals obvious and perceptible factors that have led to the struggle. However, the factors involved change with each specific struggle. Factors relevant to a particular insurgency, terrorism or a revolutionary war will almost always differ from those relevant to another.

However, the various conflicts that come under the ambit of LICs can be made to fall under two major subdivisions. Conflicts that comprise the dissatisfied

elements within the country would include within their ambit insurgencies, terrorism, revolutionary warfare, secessionist warfare, subversion and civil war. The second comprises conflicts involving other countries, including limited wars and ‘ugly stability’ scenarios along the international boundaries in which the regular armies of the parties involved are deployed, as is the case in the conflict between India and Pakistan on the north-western border between the two, i.e., the LoC. Factors that have led to the conflicts under each of the two subdivisions would obviously differ. However, the two subdivisions are not watertight compartments. Conflicts under one may evolve so as to get classified under the other depending on the pressures applied by the two opposing sides or by the countries supporting them in the conflict. Moreover, changes in the level of intensity of a conflict may make it take a quantum jump from an LIC to an MIC and from there to an HIC. Initially the Bangladeshi struggle (which had India’s support) against the erstwhile East Pakistani authorities was an LIC. However, as it gathered momentum with the passage of time and Pakistan realised it was about to lose its sovereign control over the region, it finally declared war against India. Thereafter, in order to pressurise India, subtle threats came from China and the USA that never did materialise, but nevertheless left a lasting impression on the minds of the Indian planners and policy makers.<sup>2</sup>

Internal LICs, on the other hand, arise due to the dissatisfaction of and discontent among certain sections of the population. It has been seen that the threat of such LICs increases in countries that are ethnically diverse, or where there are a multiplicity of religions. Factors such as the economic deprivation of certain sections of society and demographic disparity can also lead to discontent and cause the concerned groups to rebel against the government. Sometimes the ideology of certain groups may also bring them into conflict with the government, leading to revolutionary struggles, as was the case in a number of communist sponsored revolutions—often termed ‘Communist Revolutionary Warfare’. However, in these cases too the primary cause was economic disparity, sometimes along ethnic lines, which the communist cadres exploited to incite the population and motivate them to participate in revolutionary movements.<sup>3</sup>

In order to better understand the factors leading to LICs, their causative factors have been grouped under four heads: political, social, economic and external. Other than the external factors, each group has been further subdivided into various sub-factors. Where these sub-factors have initiated conflicts they are classed as primary causes, and where they have played a subsidiary role they are classed as secondary

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<sup>2</sup> Threats from the USA came in the form of the US Seventh Fleet sailing into the region in order to pressurise India, which ultimately did not affect the outcome of the conflict.

<sup>3</sup> India has been relatively untouched by communist revolutionary movements in the country. While Kerala, governed by a communist government, does not have any history of major communist revolutionary activity, Marxist ideology-based activities in Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and some parts of West Bengal have had limited impact and influence. However, some of these areas are potential regions for conflict in the future, as will be discussed subsequently in the chapter.

causes. It is interesting to note, as the subsequent analysis will suggest, that there are certain common factors like corruption which may play a role in exacerbating a conflict, but are rarely its primary cause. On the other hand, though this is also rare, factors such as linguistic dissatisfaction may become the primary causes of conflicts.

## Political Factors

One of the primary causes of LICs in India are the demands for independence or autonomy of certain dissatisfied sections of the population. This factor stems from India's loosely federated polity prior to Independence, where a number of states were given autonomy and others were made to accept British suzerainty. The latter included 565 princely states in the country, which governed their kingdoms but continued to remain under British guardianship. When Independence became a viable possibility, certain autonomous regions like Nagaland, kingdoms like Kashmir, Junagarh and Hyderabad, and distinct religious identities like the Sikhs raised demands for separate states. While the demands made by the Nagas and the three kingdoms mentioned above were cohesive and they were formally represented by their leaders, there was a perceptible divide amongst the Sikhs with a large number wanting to join India even as certain hardliners talked of 'Sikhistan'.<sup>4</sup> This factor caused LICs to erupt in states like J&K that wanted independence and settled for autonomy. This was apparent from the letter accompanying the Instrument of Accession that Maharaja Hari Singh had signed when the state acceded to India. It states:

I wanted to take time to decide to which Dominion I should accede or whether it is not in the best interests of both the Dominions and of my State to stand independent, of course with friendly and cordial relations with both.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, even a prominent leader in the state like Sheikh Abdullah, continued to toy with the idea of independence after having decided in favour of acceding to India. His speech on 11 April 1952 at Ranbirsinghpura openly questioned the future of Kashmir. The deteriorating relations between him and the Centre eventually led his arrest in 1953. Even though the state government has over the years watered down the demand for independence, a resolution by the assembly demanding maximum autonomy during the rule of Farooq Abdullah remains a plank for the moderates in the state.

In Punjab, hardline elements looked for independence prior to Partition; however, realising the futility of their demand they initially settled for a Sikh majority state. However, when this did not give them the political clout they had imagined,

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<sup>4</sup> Covered under the sub-head of Sikh Factionalism.

<sup>5</sup> See letter accompanying Maharaja Hari Singh's acceptance of the Instrument of Accession at Appendix A.

they revived their demand for independence. The moderates, realising the likelihood of a dent in their vote bank, came up with a demand for autonomy. Thus, the hardline elements led by Bhindranwale raised slogans for the establishment of Khalistan and the Akali sponsored Anandpur Sahib Resolution speaks of autonomy.<sup>6</sup> The basis of both these demands was not any dissatisfaction of the common people; rather, it was a quest for political power by putting the fear of religious persecution into people's minds.

Nagaland, the scene of another LIC, had a history of relative autonomy even under British rule. Naga leaders misconstrued this as a guarantee of their right to self-determination after Independence. There were frantic negotiations regarding the future of Nagaland even prior to Independence. The Naga leaders met with Mahatma Gandhi and his assurance that 'If you do not want to join the Union of India then nobody will force you', remains a bargaining plank to this day. Though the stalemate was partially broken with the signing of the Akbar Hydari Agreement in 1947, 10 years later the future of Nagaland was still ambiguous. Hardline elements continued to demand independence and this became a primary cause for an insurgency in the region. At various stages in the history of the LIC in Nagaland the moderates did succeed, albeit partially, in brokering peace, but eventually the hardline stance has denied a solution and peace to the region.

The Gorkhaland movement in Darjeeling, though a minor LIC which was eventually resolved, also had its roots in demands for autonomy made in the pre-Independence period. Thus at the time of Independence the seeds of resentment that had been sown had already sprouted and many regions had commenced their flirtations with independence, which subsequently became a major cause for LICs in the respective regions.

Another aspect which became an important reason for LICs in the country was political opportunism. At varying stages in India's history post-Independence, political opportunism led to the polarisation of ethnic and religious groups, which in turn led to the emergence of struggles. While this book has covered the details of each case, a short summary that enables the readers to understand the impact of political opportunism on these conflicts will be pertinent here. For example, in J&K, Sheikh Abdullah probably wanted the maximum possible autonomy for himself along with independence for the state. Dissatisfied with the level of autonomy offered by India and realising that he would have a major role to play in an independent state, he tried to achieve this by raising the bogey of an overwhelming Hindu India to incite the people. Thus political brinkmanship overtook his secular image. The Centre, forever unsure of their standing in the state, resorted to political jugglery to retain control over the region. However, their attempts only succeeded in further alienating the people of the state. J&K witnessed a see saw battle between Sheikh Abdullah and the Congress in their attempt to

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<sup>6</sup> Acceptance of this demand would have placed Punjab in a state of similar political autonomy as pre-1953 Jammu and Kashmir.



retain their hold on the state, which hurt the standing of the Centre more than it did Sheikh Abdullah's. The perception of the people regarding the Centre was affected to a large extent by elections held in the state, the results of which were regarded as doubtful and an attempt by the Centre to bring particular parties to power.

The Punjab problem was largely the result of the Akalis and the Congress following their policy of encouraging hardline and secessionist elements like Bhindranwale for political gain.<sup>7</sup> From the time that the demand for a Punjabi Suba was made, it was apparent that the interests of the people were being held hostage to politico-religious rhetoric. Vote bank politics led to flirtations with extremist elements, which foresaw gains from effecting violent churning in the state. Whenever one party appeared to be gaining ground, the other would raise the pitch of fundamentalist political propaganda to neutralise these gains. This led to a dangerous spiral, which ultimately consumed thousands of innocent people in its flames.

As mentioned earlier, a quest for self-determination existed in Nagaland prior to Independence. The aspirations of the common people were adequately met when Nagaland was granted statehood under the 1975 Accord. However, hardline elements in the region realised the political power that resulted from resorting to arms. There was thus a perceptible entwining of politics and the muscle power provided by militant groups.

A similar situation prevails in Manipur where an ethnic divide further muddies political waters. It was not only the gun which was available for hire to political parties, it was also a loyal ethnic following. Political parties have employed militant groups to assist them in capturing power even as the latter extract an unrestrained turf in a neat quid pro quo arrangement.

The method and means of political opportunism in Assam and Tripura followed similar lines. On the one hand illegal migration was allowed to cement a sizeable vote bank despite blatant signs of internal colonisation. On the other, the ethnic divide between non-tribals and tribals was exploited for political gain. The CPI(M) and the Congress employed this policy in Tripura, and in Assam it was the Congress versus the AGP and the AASU versus the ABSU.

In Mizoram, Laldenga exploited the people's anger after the state and central government's inept handling of a rat famine to gain political power. It became apparent that but for political game playing, the final settlement reached by the MNF could have been worked out much earlier, thereby saving countless lives. However, it was the ultimate aim of political power that influenced militant actions. Unfortunately this has remained a problem since Independence and has been the cause of many conflicts.

Yet another factor that has led to conflicts is political neglect. India has a varied, diverse and distinct demographic pattern, which requires that it be governed with

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<sup>7</sup> An appraisal of the problem is dealt with by Hewitt (2003: 65).

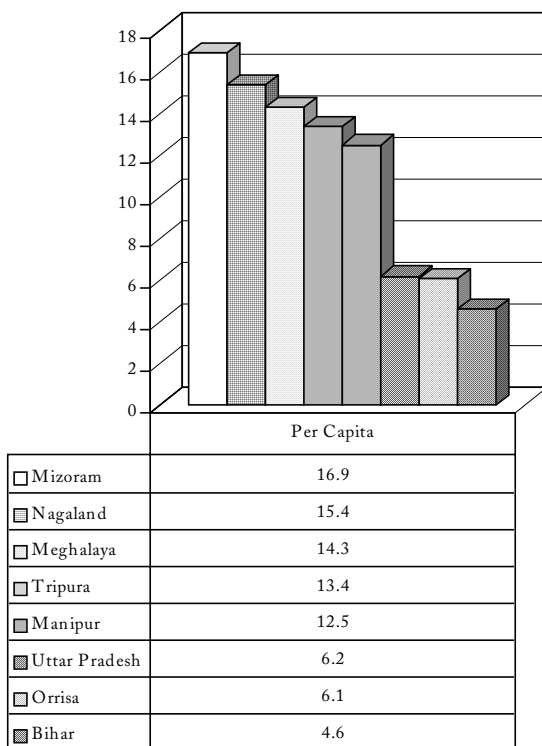
a degree of political maturity, sympathetic understanding and decentralised control. Unfortunately this was not kept in mind after Independence, when large unmanageable states came into existence. Examples of states like Assam are appropriate to understand the intensity of political difficulty faced by the state government to govern the area. In these states the government found it difficult to administer the large area included within its boundaries, and the people suffered due to this inability with their problems remaining unresolved. Moreover, the demands of various discontented groups for autonomy and statehood were initially ignored and only met after an armed rebellion. The folly of this short-sighted insistence on large states can be gauged from the fact that even today, it is the smaller states which are better managed and governed.<sup>8</sup> Granting certain states in the North-east statehood has improved the conditions in the same dramatically. Mizoram now has a literacy rate of 88.5 per cent, second only to that of Kerala, and it also has an impressive 80.5 per cent of its population above the poverty line. The per capita income of certain states in the North-east, i.e., Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Tripura, makes an interesting and revealing study when compared with that of certain large states such as Uttar Pradesh and Orissa (see Figure 18.1). The tendency to keep an iron grip over states became visible in the case of states like J&K, where, despite an obvious popular sentiment in favour of autonomy, a gradual chipping away of the state's special status gave opportunists the leverage necessary to incite the people by playing on their fears of dominance by the Hindu majority of India. The inability and lack of political will to establish political faith even after four decades of Independence (at the time the insurgency broke out in 1989) speaks volumes of the failure of the existing political machinery. Similarly, the insensitive attitude to certain innocuous demands in Punjab, which worsened the situation there, only makes one wonder at the inexplicable delay in reaching the Rajiv-Longowal Accord.

Ideological differences have also resulted in LICs (as is apparent in certain struggles), the underlying ideology of which has been leftist. As mentioned earlier, though the leftist ideology might form the basis of the struggle, the roots go still deeper and lie in a lack of opportunity, economic deprivation and exploitation. A good example of this is the Naxalite movement, the primary centres of which are West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh. Though the movement has largely been quelled, it continues to simmer in the background, threatening a violent redressal of grievances as the causes that fuelled it still subsist. The communist ideology also influenced the states of Tripura and Manipur, creating an ideological divide in these areas as well. This ideological divide has mellowed over the years, with the initial ambitions of overthrowing the democratic government in the country by revolutionary means having been transformed to ideological differences that find

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<sup>8</sup> A survey in *India Today* (19 May 2003) listed the best governed states as Goa, Delhi, Punjab, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh. Interestingly, some of the largest states find their place at the bottom of the list. In descending order these are, Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal.

Figure 18.1  
Per Capita Income Analysis



**Source:** *India Today*, 19 May 2003.

**Note:** Rs '000 at 2003 prices.

expression in the political arena. However, this has also resulted in violence and has influenced the growth of certain militant outfits like the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) [CPI(ML)], the ATTF in Tripura, the UNLF in Manipur, besides other smaller groups. This has given an impetus to LICs in these regions.

Yet another factor, which has had an almost universal influence on the start of LICs, is the history of regions. In the Indian context the legacy of British rule and thereafter Independence and Partition sowed the seeds of protracted LICs in various corners of the country. Partition was undoubtedly ill-planned and hurried, British short-sightedness, self-interest and worse, apathy to the cause of regions on the periphery of the country, resulting in the overlooking of the aspirations of certain sections and regions. In the case of J&K, indecision about its accession was allowed to linger on till after Partition. Some of the states of the North-east were encouraged to remain politically, psychologically, socially and economically cut off

from the mainland. Besides this, proposals like the 'Coupland Plan' and the 'Crown Colony' encouraged centrifugal tendencies. In addition to these aspects, an analysis of political activities prior to Independence indicates a perceptible rise in movements for political authority, autonomy and even independence. This is apparent from the organisations which rose to prominence in various regions. The National Conference (NC) in Kashmir openly advocated complete independence of the state, and only watered down their demand when they understood its futility. The Akali Dal in Punjab also fought for reservation in the provincial elections of 1919 and even went to the extent of asking for a separate country. The Naga Club looked for autonomy after its formation in 1918, and subsequently the NNC asked for independence. In Mizoram the Mizo Union, after its formation in 1933, wanted to overthrow the power and control of the chiefs and did flirt with the idea of a merger with Burma and independence. Tripura saw Durjoy Kishore, a member of the royal dynasty, seeking a merger of the state with East Pakistan. In Assam, the Bodos looked for autonomy within Assam after the formation of the Tribal League in 1933. Darjeeling saw the Hillman's Union, after its formation in 1907, looking for autonomy, and was conspicuous by its absence in the struggle for Independence in the hope of getting more regional autonomy if it remained loyal to the British. Thus, it is adequately revealed that in the period during and in the immediate aftermath of the World Wars, sub-regional nationalisms emerged, which the prevailing spirit of nationalism in the country only served to further inflame.

## Social Factors

India is populated by a number of tribal groups which have migrated into the present areas that they occupy in the country at different stages in its history. Most of these tribal belts are found in the states of the North-east. These regions have for centuries remained relatively isolated, away from the attempts of kings to bring the majority of India under their control. It was not until the advent of the British and their endeavour to exploit the economic potential of this region that these areas were integrated with the rest of the country. The British also aimed at maintaining this region as a buffer against the growing influence of China and Russia by keeping it as a directly but loosely controlled region in a tiered system of governance. This relative isolation of the tribal areas of the North-east from the rest of India, often viewed as centred around the Hindi speaking Gangetic Plain and the areas immediately surrounding it, led to their amalgamation into India becoming a contentious issue at the time of Partition.<sup>9</sup> It is an issue which over the years has become watered down to a significant extent, yet remains one of the major reasons for a number

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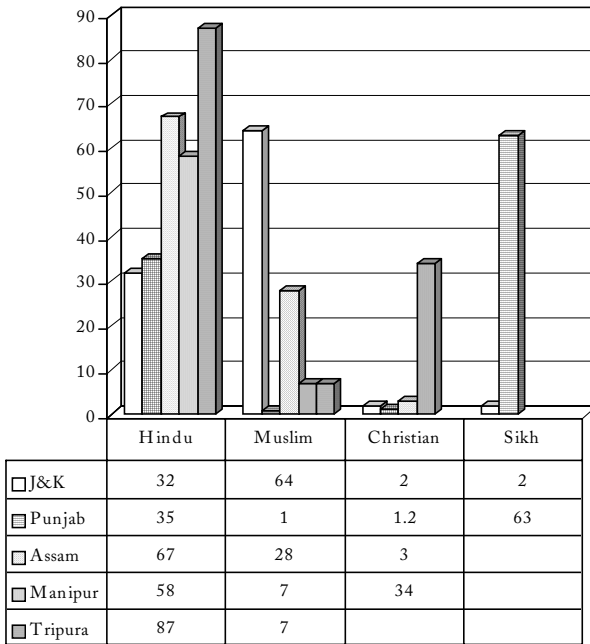
<sup>9</sup> The issue was particularly sensitive for the Nagas who refused to accept British and subsequently Indian attempts at amalgamating the region into the Indian Union. The Naga Nationalist Council (NNC) led by Phizo declared independence on 14 August 1947.

of conflicts emanating from the region. The impact of tribalism is clearly visible in Assam where the Bodos have made an endeavour to maintain a distinct identity. Similarly the tribes of Nagaland have made an even greater effort to remain isolated from the mainland, the results of which are clearly visible in their efforts over time to gain independence. In Manipur tribalism has had a major impact on the diverse cultural and social differences between the Meiteis and the Nagas in the state, which has led to further clashes of interest and a schism in that region. Mizoram has remained relatively peaceful after the insurgency problem in that state was resolved. However, its roots can again be traced to the distinct tribal culture of the people and their resistance to any integration into the national mainstream because of the fear of a loss of their cultural identity and way of life. In Tripura, tribalism created a clear divide between the progressive Bengali immigrants who prospered at the expense of the tribals. Tribalism was and remains a major impediment to progress and social transformation, and has impaired the ability of the tribals to compete with other groups. This in turn led to growing resentment, which, amongst other reasons, led to the growth of insurgency. Lastly, tribalism has been a major cause for Naxalism in the country. Rich moneylenders exploited the tribals' isolation and lack of awareness, forcing them into labour and alienating their lands. The anger that this caused once again translated into insurgencies, as has been discussed earlier.

Yet another social factor that has bred LICs is intra- and inter-country migration. Mass movements of population within India, and from neighbouring countries into India, was primarily because of two factors. The first and more common one was the lure of improved living conditions through better job opportunities. This factor has operated in the case of a migrant influx from Bangladesh and to some extent even from Nepal. The country saw a constant flow of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, and this has caused deep-rooted resentment in states like Assam, Tripura and to some extent in Manipur and in Naxal-hit states. The second factor was religious persecution. India had to bear the brunt of a huge influx of refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan in the immediate aftermath of the Noakhali riots during Partition, and subsequently prior to the 1971 Indo-Pak War. Immigration also led to demands for autonomy because of the change in the demographic pattern of Darjeeling over a period of time with the arrival of many Nepali immigrants. While immigration in Assam is largely a problem of infiltration from the erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) leading to a religious and ethnic divide, in Tripura it was more a case of migration from Bengal, with religion not playing as important a role in the dispute. While there have been a number of feeble attempts at resolving this growing imbalance, these have fallen by the wayside against the onslaught of political opportunism. In certain cases such as Mizoram and Darjeeling, autonomy has successfully fulfilled the aspirations of the people to resolve what was becoming an increasingly volatile and violent dispute. Similar attempts are now being made at resolving the Bodo insurgency in Assam. It has been realised over a period of time that for a multi-ethnic country like India, a decentralised federal system in the spirit of self-governance is likely to serve the country better.

Another peculiarity of India is the religious diversity in the states (see Figure 18.2). This has resulted in struggles based on demands ranging from statehood to autonomy and finally to independence. The division of states along religious lines commenced in the pre-Independence period. After Partition, religion has not been an overt plank for further division except for a small percentage of fundamentalist elements in the case of J&K and in a very subtle way in the case of Punjab. Certain elements amongst the Muslims in J&K have feared being overwhelmed by the majority population, a fear that was exploited for purposes of political expediency, leading to divisions on a religious basis.<sup>10</sup> The history of J&K has witnessed a religious bias of the Dogra rulers against the Muslims and subsequently of Sheikh Abdullah against Hindus due to his unfortunate experiences in Dogra-ruled Kashmir, his rightist propaganda, demands for a special status for Kashmir and the wish to achieve short-term political benefits. The Kashmiri Pandits were forced to

Figure 18.2  
Religious Diversity in States



Source: 1991 Census. J&K only armyinkashmir.org

Notes: Figures in percentage. Figures for J&K provisional.

<sup>10</sup> This problem has not been as much a problem of the masses as it is of the political elite, who have exploited religious sentiments to fuel a rift between the people for political gains.

migrate out of Kashmir, and at present a divide exists between the Muslim majority and the Hindus in the state. In Punjab, the feeling of loss because of Partition and, more importantly, of having lost a chance to gain a separate homeland, led to the demand for a Punjabi Suba. This was cloaked in the garb of linguistic differences, which was not really an issue either for the Hindus or Sikhs, both of which were Punjabi speaking. Once Punjab was created in 1966, the increased frustration of extremist elements came to the fore when they were unable to exploit the arithmetic of caste and religious politics to emerge as a dominant force on Punjab's political scene. Thus they angled for greater autonomy and in certain cases for a separate nation, galvanising the people by creating a false sense of insecurity among them by playing on their fears of amalgamation with the Hindu religion with the consequent loss of religious identity. It led to a polarisation in Punjab's society and polity, resulting in the unfortunate years of terrorism. In states like Assam, religion coupled with illegal immigration caused a social divide, which resulted in perceived economic deprivation. This remains a major cause of resentment and allowed an insurgency to take root. In Manipur and Tripura, while religion does play a role in aggravating LIC conditions, it is not a major cause of the same.

It must be understood that the founding fathers of the Indian nation and its Constitution understood the country's religious diversity. It is with the ultimate aim of forging unity in diversity that they forged a secular state. The traditional Hindu understanding of religion, which saw it as a way of life, further assisted in the achievement of this cherished aim. However, these aims were often negated, blunted and worse, twisted by self-serving, communal, rightist elements amongst all the major religions. For a secular country like India, which is inherited a rich civilisation and which takes pride in its culture and traditions, to witness a Godhra and the events that succeeded it in Gujarat is a step towards self-destruction in much the same way as the terrorist incidents in J&K. The nation's focus tends to be riveted on the aspect of Muslim fundamentalism probably because it is seen as one of the causes of the secessionist movement in J&K. However, the factor of Hindu fundamentalism is probably more dangerous because the majority of its population, the foundation on which the country's progress and stability depends, follows this religion. While it will be relatively easier to arrest the spread of Muslim fundamentalism, the increasingly fundamentalist tilt in the Hindu psyche has the potential of causing irreparable damage, threatening to destroy the very fabric of Indian society. When Hindu fundamentalism comes up against its counterpart in any one or more of the other major religions followed in the country, there is the imminent danger of a conflagration that threatens the very secular edifice on which the nation was formed.<sup>11</sup>

It becomes evident in this analysis that religion is an emotive issue that can start conflicts. Unfortunately, it is often employed by political leaders and opportunists as an emotive focal point to win over the common people. Although India is a secular country and has in the past nurtured a number of social and religious

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<sup>11</sup> An appraisal of the problem is dealt with by Hewitt (2003: 65).

movements aimed at cleansing society of its ills, religion has often been exploited by certain elements to obtain power and achieve narrow, parochial aims.

If it is argued that there are terrorist acts perpetuated in the name of religion, a close examination would reveal that political aims of these acts and the truth that religion has only been taken on as a cover to attract some innocent people to the 'cause', and in an attempt to gain false legitimacy.<sup>12</sup>

In India the use of religion to incite the people was especially potent in regions bordered by hostile countries like Pakistan, who were willing to incite religious passions to achieve its aim of destabilising India. Therefore, one finds that even though Punjab and Kashmir suffered from a similar contagion, it was Kashmir that proved more difficult to resolve given the emotional and psychological leverage enjoyed by Pakistan, which played the Muslim card to the fullest extent and further contributed to the conflict it had incited by pumping terrorists across the border. It has been necessary to elaborate on this point because a clear understanding of the issue is imperative. Unless its nuances are understood in the correct perspective, the chances of it being misunderstood or worse, wished away in an attempt to refuse to see the obvious, are ever present.

Language has also resulted in a few cases of LICs in India. Language plays a role in amalgamating people and gives them a platform from which to voice dissent. Language was the primary cause of conflict in Darjeeling. Here the Nepali language became symbolic of the unity of the otherwise separate ethnic entities in the region. Since it gave the people a symbol of regionalism, it also became a major plank for agitation. In states like Assam, Manipur and Tripura, language symbolised their unique and distinct cultural identity. For Assam, it was a major factor in the assertion of difference between the ethnic Assamese and the Bengali migrants who were dominant players in the affairs of the state in the pre-Independence period. In Manipur, language became a symbol of the state's rich heritage and history. In Tripura Kok Borak is symbolic of the distinct identity of the tribals who fear being overwhelmed by Bengali. Punjab is yet another state whose very formation in 1966 was supposedly along linguistic lines. Language has thus fuelled a number of agitations as has been brought out to give sub-regional nationalism an acceptable mask in accordance with past norms for the creation of states.

Lack of education is often cited as one of the reasons for the emergence of LICs. In the Indian context, however, this is a fallacy in most cases of conflicts, as it is only the state of J&K and the Naxal-affected districts which are below the national average in terms of literacy. In fact, states like Mizoram lead where literacy is concerned. Similarly, most of the other LIC-affected states of the North-east boast of fairly good literacy rates. However, what does cause problems is when high literacy rates are coupled with high rates of unemployment because job opportunities have not kept pace with the growing numbers of the educated youth

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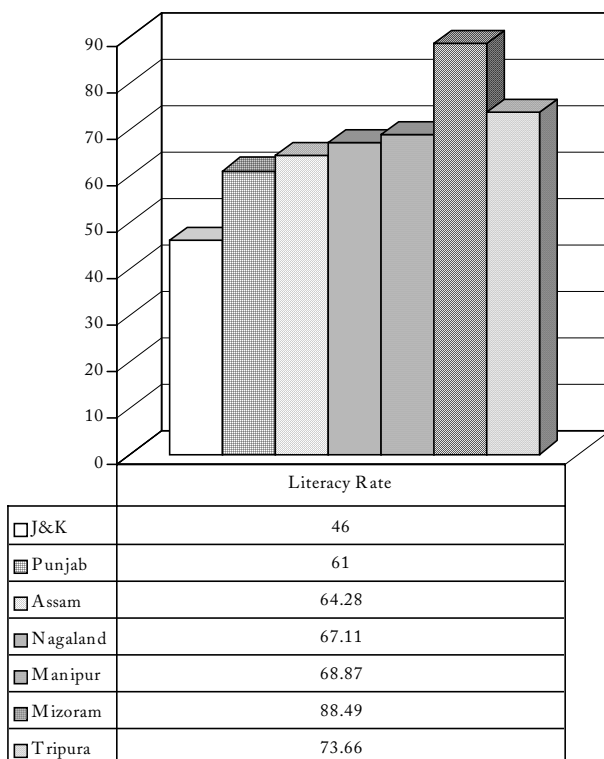
<sup>12</sup> Mourad 2002: 161.



(see Figure 18.3). In any event education, or the lack of it, is never a primary cause of LICs; however, it may contribute to the resentment at its root, acting as a secondary cause that is a catalyst to other major factors.

The aspect of an ethnic divide has also been a major factor in giving birth to LICs in states. This is evident in states like Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram and in the region of Darjeeling. The aspect of an ethnic divide has two facets. The first is the case of ethnic divisions within a particular state and the second occurs when the divide is perceptible between a particular group and the majority of the nation. The former was visible in Assam, where ethnic divisions between the Bodos and Ahoms have caused a rift leading to the Bodo movement.<sup>13</sup> Similarly,

Figure 18.3  
Comparative Literacy Rates



**Source:** North-east India Regional Databank, Census of India, 2001.

**Note:** Figures in percentage.

<sup>13</sup> Movements launched by the Bodos, Hmars, Karbis, Rabhas, Mishings and Tiwis represent the various ethnic uprisings in the region resulting in LICs at various levels of violence and effectiveness. These will be discussed later under the LICs in Assam.

divisions between Ahoms and immigrants from Bangladesh have caused a rift driven by external factors. In the case of Nagaland, the problem arose from the Naga perception of being ethnically distinct from the remainder of the Indian mainland. In Manipur, divisions are again both intra- and inter-regional. While a number of ethnic groups vie for power, prestige and political clout in the state, others see themselves as different from the Indian majority. This aspect, though it exists in Mizoram, is relatively subdued and has remained a secondary cause contributing to the conflict that is the result of other major factors. However, its relevance is very much related to the emergence of an insurgency in the state. The factor also came into play in Darjeeling, and contributed to the other aspects such as the quest for autonomy and linguistic identity.

The last social factor is corruption. This is common to all regions and unfortunately plagues the country as a whole. It has, therefore, acted as a contributing factor, though not as a primary factor, in all regions plagued by LICs.

## Economic Factors

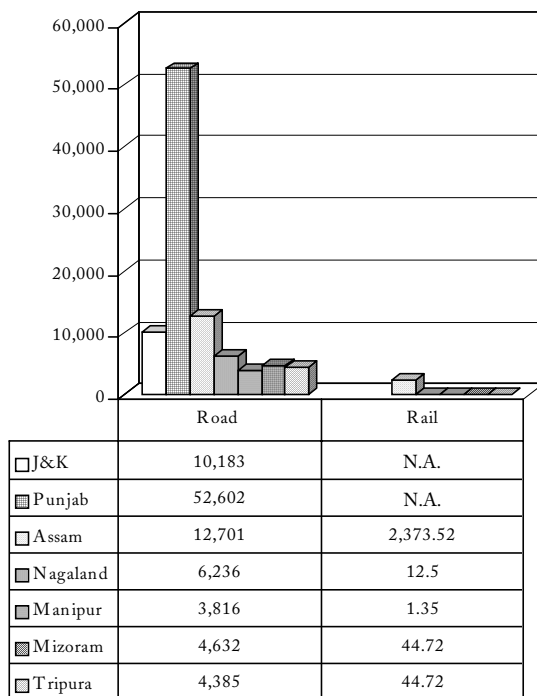
Economic exploitation is a factor that has caused the emergence of various LICs in the country. It manifests itself in the perceived exploitation of the resources of a state by the central government. This was observed in the case of Assam, where certain sections felt that the state's tea and oil resources were doing more for the economy of the country than they were for the state. Activists in Darjeeling had similar feelings, which led to growing resentment. Exploitation was seen as the centre enjoying the advantages that accrued from the export of tea in the state without undertaking sufficient development work in the region. Though this feeling of economic exploitation did play a role in aggravating the LIC situation in both regions, it cannot be regarded as the primary factor in the emergence of these LICs.

Another factor that must be considered is unemployment. While this factor is common to the entire country, yet in LIC-affected areas it tends to contribute to other major factors increasing popular dissatisfaction, which is then exploited by militants who play on it to win the frustrated and unemployed youth over to militancy. Unemployment was a relevant cause not only in states like J&K, where an opportunist neighbour exploited the situation, it also gained importance in a state like Punjab where the difference in per capita income between the rich and the poor was wide. Another factor that contributed to the discontent in Punjab was perceived poverty in comparison to the vast Sikh diaspora who were obviously able to maintain better standards of living.

The last factor is economic neglect. Examples of how this can contribute to the dissatisfaction that fuels LICs was found in the states of Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. The economies of these states were reliant on their links to the markets and ports of Burma and the area which became East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). With Independence and Partition these vital links were severed. What made the situation worse was that communication links between the regions in these states and the rest of the country were not as yet well developed. This led to their virtual

isolation economically, socially, psychologically and politically. The psychological and economic isolation had a devastating impact on the people of the region. A look at the road and rail links in some of the major states hit by LICs, with the exception of Punjab, is revealing (see Figure 18.4). Presently there is an attempt to improve communications in the region because of the new awareness of the importance of the area and its likely potential to emerge as an economic hub in the light of new efforts that are being made towards economic cooperation between India and other ASEAN countries.

Figure 18.4  
Economic Figures—Road and Rail



**Source:** North East India Regional Databank, Ministry for Surface Transport, 1999.

**Note:** Road length includes all surfaced roads in km.

## Foreign Support

South Asia and China have found themselves embroiled in an asymmetric conflict in an attempt to keep clear of conventional wars, having seen the failure of the same to resolve disputes. Pakistan was the illegitimate offspring of an affair of convenience between the British and certain pro-Pakistan leaders. The country faced an identity crisis from its very inception and could not accept the subsequent failure

of its 'two-nation theory' based on religious differentiation. Kashmir became the bone of contention in the attempt to justify this theory and was thus caught in the crossfire between two nations in their quest for nationhood and attempts at justification of their respective ideologies. Pakistan well aware of its weakness on the conventional military front exerted a number of bilateral and extraneous pressures through alliances and pacts. Thus started a policy of war by other than conventional means—a proxy war employing terrorism, insurgency and subversion.

However, it needs to be borne in mind that the presence of hostile neighbours often gets over-emphasised as a cause for the emergence of internal LICs. Whereas it is inarguably an important factor for the continuation or sustenance of these conflicts, it can never be the primary reason for a conflict to take root or for that matter come into being. The Pakistan factor is certainly an undeniable and important factor in the emergence of LICs in India but it is not and cannot be the basic factor for their emergence. It does, however, act as a catalyst to these conflicts and subsequently, once they have taken root, it ferments vicious divisive trends thereby moving from the periphery to the core. This was seen in J&K where Pakistan, from being a facilitator in the struggle, has gradually become the perpetrator of terrorism, given the fast-declining local support for the conflict.

As compared with internal struggles, LICs, in which external forces that perpetuate these conflicts either as proxy wars or limited conflicts, are more the result of rivals trying to establish their own strategic and national interests. These interests may then be furthered by instigating dissatisfied elements within the target country through insurgency, terrorism and revolutionary movements in cases of proxy wars or by limited struggles below the threshold of major conflicts. Pakistan has used these methods to wage a successful proxy war in J&K and also in Punjab and, to a lesser degree, in the North-east. Conflicts can also be fought independent of any instigation through a prolonged series of skirmishes along international boundaries or disputed lines of control between the troops of two countries.<sup>14</sup> These conflicts have a greater chance of spiralling into MICs as was the case in the 1971 Indo-Pak War, which commenced as an LIC in the erstwhile East Pakistan. This was also the case in 1965 when a conflict commenced with Pakistan sponsored incursions into J&K, which subsequently led to a war after the aims of the incursion could not be achieved.

The role and significance of the conflicts falling under both categories has had a very lasting impact on the history of the country and of the subcontinent. The conflict in 1947–48 led to the Kashmir issue remaining in the forefront of politics in the subcontinent. A part of the state is still under the illegal occupation of Pakistan, which it refuses to vacate in accordance with the UN Resolution of 13 August 1948. The conflict in the erstwhile East Pakistan, which started because of the exploitation by West Pakistan of the Bengali population whom India supported,

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<sup>14</sup> The most appropriate example of this conflict is the Indo-Pak conflict along the LoC, which has continued with no end in sight. This was further aggravated by flare up of the Siachen conflict from 1984. (A fragile ceasefire holds peace along the LoC at present.)

finally resulted in an all out war and the division of Pakistan with the creation of Bangladesh. This was a strategic victory for India because it halved the strength of its adversary. It also secured one of its borders, greatly reducing its security concerns in the area. However, this did not end the region's misfortunes as political short-sightedness and diplomatic naivety yet again brought India and Bangladesh to the crossroads of a low intensity duel. While Indian intelligence agencies supported the Shanti Bahini in their quest for autonomy in Chittagong Hill Tracts after 1975, the Bangladeshis replied in the same coin by supporting various insurgent groups in the North-east.<sup>15</sup>

China has also become an equal partner in South Asia's regional rumblings. China's forays at supporting insurgencies in the North-east have been replied to by India's support for the Tibetan movement. This commenced in the 1950s and continued till the late 1970s and then became negligible with the passage of time. China's support for insurgent groups has been covered in detail in each section of the study. However, an aspect which needs to be noted is the change of attitude of the Chinese after the 1962 Sino-Indian War. Support for insurgent groups after the war became more overt and sustained till it finally subsided.

Bhutan and Nepal have been helpless sanctuaries with limited ability to thwart militants using their territory for anti-India activities. This has been exploited by Pakistan to spread its intelligence and subversive network through Nepal, taking advantage of its porous border with India. The hijacking of the Indian Airlines Flight IC 814 was an example of Pakistan's success.<sup>16</sup>

Burma is yet another country which has been extensively employed by insurgent groups as a safe haven. While certain groups like the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) (NSCN[K]) have their traditional areas in Burma, others have taken advantage of support from anti-Burma groups operating on its borders.

LICs have also received the indifferent acceptance of major world powers like the USA for their own short-term gains. It is a recognised fact that pressure from a country like the USA can stem the tide of cross-border terrorism but that this was often not exerted because such a course was deemed detrimental to the 'national interest' of the country. It has been appropriately put by a distinguished and eminent jurist and lawyer who says, 'The United States had sown the wind; they have reaped the whirlwind.' In the context of the creation of the Taliban, he adds, 'The Taliban is the child of two parents, the United States and Pakistan.'<sup>17</sup> He may have liked to add the word illegitimate to make the description more apt!

The threat of global terrorism is now a reality, which threatens its former supporters in equal measure. Widespread condemnation of violent acts irrespective of the justification is now the order of the day. Yet another indicator of this intolerance for violence as an expression of discontent is the tendency to label all

<sup>15</sup> See Bhaumik (1996, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Both Bhutan and Myanmar have taken concrete steps of late to control anti-Indian terrorist activities emanating from their countries.

<sup>17</sup> Singhvi 2002: 34.

violent acts as terrorism in order to bring them under the ambit of anti-terrorism resolutions of the UN and turn world opinion against those responsible. Though it is in the interests of nations plagued by this contagion, it is hoped that this book will enhance the reader's ability to make a more discerning classification.

## Analysis of Conflicts


A detailed analysis of the conflicts in the previous section leads to various conclusions regarding the nature of conflicts in the country. It is apparent that conflicts can be divided into two main categories. These are 'inherited or historical conflicts' and 'graduated or aggravated conflicts'. Inherited conflicts have roots in the pre-Independence period and these historical roots are very apparent. On the other hand, graduated conflicts are aggravated over the years by a variety of factors that have been analysed in detail. Of the wide variety of factors analysed, it is evident that some of these were primary factors, while others played more of a supporting role in aggravating the conflict from dissatisfaction to a full-fledged LIC. Figure 18.5 analyses the various factors that have been operative in each conflict and simultaneously highlights the primary factors that have been circled in the figure in each case.


The study is revealing as it brings out certain common factors that have influenced LICs in the country. These are autonomy/independence, political opportunism, political neglect, corruption and social neglect. However, only autonomy/independence, political opportunism, political and social neglect can be regarded as primary factors that have caused LICs in one or more regions. The aspects of political opportunism and neglect deserve special mention, as these are as much the responsibility of the common man as of their representatives. In a number of cases, political opportunism has used existing weaknesses in society to enflame passions for political gain. This becomes apparent in the course of this book, as time and again opportunism has seized on highly emotive issues like religion, language, ethnic exploitation and immigration. Unfortunately, political opportunism has the tacit approval of many because of perceived gains to certain communities, sections, regions and religious groups. Over the period of time it has become apparent that certain political parties are not averse to using such methods to serve their own selfish, short-term interests. Unless the people and their representatives learn to give importance to real issues of development rather than to non-issues such as religion, caste and regionalism, political exploitation and opportunism will continue to thrive. The book reveals that sub-regional nationalism using LICs to achieve its ends negates the overall goals of nation-building, which in turn leads to the pursuance of short-sighted parochial goals. It also reveals that such feelings have been exploited time and again by political opportunists. Thus one finds that political opportunism is a primary factor in the emergence and continuation of LICs, not just because it is universal but also because of its ability to employ other factors as catalysts in such struggles.


Figure 18.5  
Analysis of Causes

Reason	J&K	Punjab	Assam	Nagaland	Manipur	Mizoram	Tripura	Gorkhaland	Naxalism
<b>POLITICAL</b>									
Autonomy/Independence	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Political Opportunism	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Neglect	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ideological					✓		✓		✓
Historical	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
<b>SOCIAL</b>									
Religion	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		
Linguistic		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Educational	✓							✓	✓
Tribalism			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Ethnic Divide			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Corruption	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Immigration			⬡		✓		⬡	✓	✓
<b>ECONOMIC</b>									
Exploitation			✓					✓	
Jobs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Neglect	✓	✓	✓	✓	⬡	⬡	⬡	✓	⬡
<b>FOREIGN SUPPORT</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓

**Notes:**  Primary cause in a region.

 ULFA (in case of Assam)

 Bodos (in case of Assam)



Yet another important and interesting factor is religion. As mentioned earlier, it has been exploited to the hilt in J&K and Punjab. In both cases fear of domination by the followers of the majority religion, that is, Hinduism were played upon to incite the people to violence. The reason for not stating this factor in LICs in certain Christian dominated states of the North-east is primarily because the basis of conflicts in the region have not taken a communal angle vis-à-vis some of the other regions. While Christianity has played an important role in influencing the people and the region, its impact cannot be seen as a cause for LICs. It will be incorrect to conclude that only regions with a Christian majority demographic pattern have been hit by the problem, the examples of Tripura and Assam will prove this point. On the contrary it was probably the positive influence of Christianity that led to the re-establishment of peace in Mizoram. In Nagaland the church has successfully played a major role in all major peace initiatives. This was unfortunately not the case with religious leaders in Punjab and J&K in the course of the struggles there. The study indicates that in a multi-religious country like India, if opportunists use religion as basis for either discrediting the government or as a means of packaging their resentment, it is likely to lead to disastrous results. It can only be negated and neutralised by the maturity of the majority community and political elite.

A positive deduction is that ideology has not been a major cause of LICs in most of the regions. Even though ideology, particularly the communist ideology, did have a role to play in the Naxalite movement in Manipur and Tripura, with the overall decline of communist influence the world over, there is a likelihood of a similar pattern being followed in these regions as well. What does need to be highlighted is that an ideological divide can to a large extent be accentuated by social neglect, which if addressed can eradicate it to an equally large extent.

It can also be safely deduced that all factors rooted in history are likely to stabilise with the passage of time and their impact likely to slowly and steadily reduce. This is likely to be through negotiated settlements as in the case of the Gorkhaland movement or better assimilation and understanding of the advantages of constructive cooperation as in the case of Mizoram and Punjab. These factors are also likely to recede in the face of economic development and improvement in education, communication and employment levels.

Ethnicity and tribalism were also major reasons for LICs. A growing sense of awareness, openness and influence of democratic norms made it imperative for the governments to be more accommodating and understanding of the problems of the people who had been exploited by the privileged classes. Some areas have found a suitable solution to the problem by giving adequate protection to the landholdings, culture and distinct identity of the people. However, the complexity of the situation in some states like Manipur has made finding a solution an uphill task. In some other states the grant of autonomy has been able to resolve contentious issues and promises to be a viable solution.

Attempts at intellectual colonisation have also had an impact on some regions. Language has formed the basis of most such conflicts. In Assam under British rule, the imposition of Bengali on the Ahoms and Bodos, followed by imposition of

Assamese on the Bodos and Mizos post-Independence, became explosive reasons for discontent. Nepali as a language became a very important factor that united a number of communities in the struggle in Darjeeling. Punjabi was used as a ruse to divide Punjab in 1966. In Manipur, agitations for inclusion of this well developed language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution became a plank for agitation and resentment. Thus, one finds that language was and remains an emotive issue for uniting the agitating masses.

Linked to intellectual colonisation is actual physical colonisation. This was resorted to and continues in the states of Assam, Tripura and to some extent in Manipur. There has been a concerted attempt to take advantage of a comparatively favourable economic environment in these states, which led to immigration into these states from Bangladesh and also from within the country. Inadequate administrative safeguards and political connivance led to this factor becoming a major cause for resentment in states like Assam and Tripura. Unless the problem is addressed with sincerity and conviction, it will remain a contentious issue capable of aggravating the existing situation.

There is a need to understand the difference between corruption and economic exploitation. While corruption is a social factor and remains common to all regions and includes economic exploitation within a state, economic exploitation as a factor focuses on perceived exploitation of a region by the centre. In the case of Assam it relates to the exploitation of its oil and tea resources, while in Darjeeling it is the income from tea exports from its gardens which is the issue.

It will be appropriate to consider a few examples to illustrate some conflicts with the help of Figure 18.5. In the case of J&K, the demand for independence/autonomy is a primary factor, which was inherited at the time of Independence. This was the seed from which the 1947–48 conflict germinated. Thereafter, it further escalated into a conventional war between India and Pakistan. In the period following this, peace could have been achieved were it not for the presence of secondary causes that have been indicated in the column under J&K in the figure. While all the causes have had a complementary influence, their degree varies. Similarly, factors for each region may have influenced the conflict but their importance remains relative and varied.

Another example is Assam. Here there are two major struggles that have been documented in this book. In the case of the ULFA uprising, the aspect of illegal immigration remains the primary cause, whereas in the Bodo struggle it is political neglect and a distinct ethnic divide. Other factors remain secondary influences. It is apparent from a study of Assam's history that the ULFA uprising would not have gained the degree of support that it finally did had the problem of illegal immigration not taken place. Similarly, had the political demands for autonomy of the Bodos been met at an appropriate stage, insurgency may not have emerged.

The analysis has taken into account the historical timelines of all regions, both in the pre-Independence and post-Independence period and various external factors as well. It is also evident that secondary factors could have arrested the primary causes had adequate attention been paid to them. The analysis has been done with

an aim to assist the understanding of the relative importance of various factors which have influenced a particular region. It has also been done with the additional aim of identifying primary causes, a focus on which would have resolved the problems peculiar to each area.

## Discordant Accords

The history of accords and memorandums of understanding between the government and various dissatisfied groups has documented their inability to provide a satisfactory solution to most LICs. A brief analysis reveals a disturbing trend.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the 1952 and 1975 Accords have failed to arrest the problem of growing secessionism. Through these accords the only party which was addressed and courted was the NC, while other elements in the political environment were neglected. Even in the present scenario, while groundwork is being carried out for talks with Pakistan, the resolution passed by the J&K Assembly during NC rule for greater autonomy was rejected with little national debate on the issue.

In Punjab, the Akalis were seen as representatives of the Sikhs yet the Longowal Accord signed in 1985 failed to arrest growing terrorism. The accord failed to foresee the influence and impact of fundamentalism as a factor, which was likely to take its independent course at that belated stage of signing an agreement with the Akalis.

Assam has seen accords with the AASU and ABSU and more recently in 2003 with BLTF. However, the memorandum of understanding with the AASU failed to satisfy the hardline elements and ULFA became active by 1988. In the case of the Bodos, the first accord was probably a hurried affair and it failed almost immediately after it was signed on account of disagreement over demarcation of villages. From its ashes emerged the BLTF and NDFB. The present accord too has taken only the BLTF into confidence, with the NDFB still insisting on a separate country.

In Nagaland, the first understanding through the Akbar Hydari Agreement left ample scope for doubt and misunderstanding leading to a declaration of independence by Phizo on 14 August 1947. The 16 Point understanding leading to statehood in 1963 also failed to reign in the NNC, which continued with its secessionist agenda. However, this was solved with the signing of the 1975 Accord. After the accord, even as the NNC gave up arms, the NSCN was born in 1980. Its influence continued till 1997 when a ceasefire agreement was signed with one of its splinter groups the NSCN(IM). Talks have been initiated with this group but this does not include the other major group, the NSCN(K).

In Tripura, the accord with the TNV in 1988 has held but its dissatisfied splinter groups, the ATTF and NLFT, came up by 1990 and continue to cause havoc in the state.

This analysis points towards two major deductions. The first is the lack of spadework and endeavours to bring all parties to the dispute onto a common

platform before reaching any understanding. The second, a more subtle policy, points towards the continuation of the policy of 'Divide and Rule', which was inherited from the British. There is a distinct tendency to address a section of the uprising in a probable attempt at breaking the movement. If this has been the aim, suffice to say that such short-sighted attempts are unlikely to bring succour to the people and resolve issues of national importance.

### Bindings of Boundary

The various LICs facing the country are often looked at within the confines of the states they are central to. However, at times this precludes the ability to look for a holistic solution, especially where the influence and effects of the struggle overflows political boundaries of states. This is especially the case in the states of the North-east. It needs to be understood that state boundaries were an expression of physical control of areas under certain kings in the period prior to British intervention. For example, Manipur has traditionally controlled areas of the Naga Hills. It is also seen that Tripura controlled areas in present-day Bangladesh and Kuki-Chin territory. The Assamese, Nagas and people of Arunachal Pradesh face similar disputes. Going further back into history, it is revealed that the British while following the watershed principle to demarcate areas made the cardinal mistake of dividing areas on either sides of watersheds. This was primarily because of the fact that settlements were centred on the peaks on both sides. This affected the Chin and Naga areas, which fall both in India and Myanmar. Yet another division, which defies logic, is of the Chittagong Hill Tracts area, which was primarily populated by the Hindus and Buddhists.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, one finds that the political problems of some states in the North-east are not confined within the state boundaries. However, law and order being a state subject is employed by governments within their political boundaries thereby resulting in disjointed efforts by states mired in political one-upmanship. The results are not difficult to imagine in such a scenario. One of the obvious examples is that of the NSCN(IM), which draws its senior leadership, including Muivah, from the hill areas of Manipuri dominated by Tankhuls. Similarly, Khaplang heading the other major group is from Burma. Unless there is cohesive effort of governments across political boundaries, insurgent groups will continue to take advantage of blind spots on the radars of states and of parochial and selfish interests of states.

## The Future of LICs in India

The future of LICs in India is clear to all those willing to read the signs present in the history of such conflicts. *The history of LICs in India is a reflection of the future.*

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<sup>18</sup> See Chaube (1997: 32–34).

The near future promises the continuance of LICs in a variety of forms. These are likely to vary from limited conflicts on the LoC to insurgencies which will emerge as the underprivileged classes are fast learning the art of using this cheap means of waging war against the state machinery. A number of defence analysts have given their opinion on this aspect. Lieutenant General Mathew Thomas says:

The chances of a LIC between China and us in the foreseeable future does not seem likely. There is a possibility however, because of the Maoist movement in Nepal, that the spillover of that, if we are not careful would come into the Tarai Region and we would possibly have a problem with regard to that at a future date. As far as Pakistan is concerned the Low Intensity Conflict situation will certainly be there for the next ten years at least.<sup>19</sup>

J.N. Dixit commenting on the likelihood of LICs in the Indian scenario says:

Given the nuclear weaponisation of both the countries (India and Pakistan), they have improved their balance of power with us, and given the implications, as it was shown during the Kargil War and in the aftermath of attack on our Parliament, that it (Pakistan) is safe as far as it doesn't formally declare a war or undertake a large scale formal operation against us. Tactical preference will be low intensity conflict.<sup>20</sup>

Taking a slightly different view K.P.S. Gill says:

Their [Pakistan's] subversion would probably get less and less Kashmir centric because people are totally tired and fed up of this issue, and become more and more India centric, which would be continuing subversion in Naxalite areas, helping them, helping North East insurgency. Ultimately assistance to even some Islamic militancy, first to brew up and then to give assistance to Islamic militancy.... I think there are four or five regions, which are Kashmir-like in their population distribution.... The attempt will be to destabilise those regions. That will be a difficult proposition, a very difficult proposition.<sup>21</sup>

The country is presently grappling with a war like situation on the north-western border against Pakistan both on the LoC and in the Siachen Glacier. This is further aggravated by a Pakistan-sponsored proxy war in J&K. However, these conflicts are likely to be arrested slowly, with growing awareness of global ramifications of terrorism and limited conflicts. The impact of 9/11 is more than perceptible and the stranglehold of world opinion will further tighten the noose around the necks of the terrorists and those who support them. The leverage that was enjoyed by state sponsored LICs both by developing countries and the super powers is unlikely to continue for long. This is likely to have a major impact on the proliferation of

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<sup>19</sup> Lieutenant General Mathew Thomas (Retd) PVSM, AVSM, VSM, in an interview with the author.

<sup>20</sup> J.N. Dixit in an interview with the author.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

LICs. It has also been realised that violence and terrorism will not be accepted, irrespective of the justification. These factors will also play a major role in the Indian context as those who perpetuate LICs will prefer to resolve conflicts through negotiations and extract the best possible solution lest world opinion further makes their position untenable. The example of ongoing negotiations with the NSCN(IM) is an indicator in the direction. It is also likely that the ULFA and other militant organisations in the North-east will follow the example of the NSCN(IM).

LICs in the North-east are further likely to be arrested with growing economic importance of the region in relation to the ASEAN countries and opening up of trade with Bangladesh and Burma. Better opportunities and increasing assimilation of the region with the rest of the country will become important to the resolution of conflicts.

The most difficult problem to resolve is likely to be J&K, primarily because of the influence of Pakistan and the stakes it has placed on the region in relation to the very concept of its nationhood. Despite complications, the changing geo-political scenario globally and India's growing importance in political and economic affairs is likely to resolve the conflict in India's favour, even though the solution is unlikely to be achieved in the near future. Pakistan will have to bow down to growing world pressure in India's favour not as much because of the correctness of India's position as because of its undeniable and irrefutable influence on the world stage. India is likely to be one of the six major world powers along with the USA, China, the European Union, Russia and Japan. If India is able to give credence to these projections, resolutions of problems like J&K will become relatively easier. However, it is for the country to first resolve its internal weakness within J&K, which are impediments to the complete integration of the hearts and minds of the people of the state with the rest of the country. It is also likely that there will be growing impact of the USA on the affairs of the state, however subtle and however restrained the manner of the same. If this is perceived to be in consonance with the interests of the country, these attempts at felicitation are likely to continue and may play a major role towards resolution of the conflict through track two diplomacy. It is also likely that resolution of the Siachen Glacier issue will precede the solution to the perpetual state of 'ugly stability' on the LoC. This will be followed by resolution of the Kashmir conflict.

This projection in the middle or long term will depend to a large extent on India's ability to handle its multi-ethnicity and multi-religious diversity. Even as we talk of a unique experiment in unity in diversity, we will have to manage our diversity to the satisfaction of all sections of the country. With ideological conflicts taking a backseat as is seen from analysis of conflicts in the country, ethnicity will remain a challenge for governments. Autonomy has proved to be a sound solution to the aspirations of people. Similar experiments at decentralisation of power may have to be resorted to.

It is important that an analysis of the increasing threat of terrorism is carried out even as insurgency is likely to take a back seat with receding popular support for conflicts. It is apparent that a small group of disgruntled people with negligible

popular support will be capable of creating havoc across the country through modern methods of terrorism. They have already surfaced across the world in the form of attacks on web-centric networks, biological terrorism using anthrax spores and the innovative use of techniques like hijacking and bombings. It is only a matter of time before similar attempts are made in India as well. Even though these attempts do not threaten nations with revolutions, they will nevertheless spread the contagion of terror and cause a breakdown of the administrative machinery that will serve to embarrass governments and possibly lead to their fall. This threat is more from groups with a global reach and resources to match like the Al Qaida and sponsored terrorists rather than relatively less resourceful groups within the country.

It needs to be appreciated that the Indian Union is in a state of democratic evolution. Most countries in their evolutionary stage are bound to face uprisings, which tend to get resolved with the passage of time and the process of amalgamation and homogenisation of the social and political set-up. Despite the likelihood of the next decade bringing much conflict fuelled by discontent, the future decades will probably see a downward trend in these secessionist and revolutionary tendencies. The country has just started reaping the fruits of economic liberalisation the effects of which are likely to reach the masses in the years to come. The role and importance of public health and education as a bedrock of advancement are slowly reaching the people and is leading to a quiet revolution. The process of self-governance at the village, block and district levels is slowly encouraging the people to take the initiative and improvise along with government projects to improve their condition. The example of water harvesting is one that immediately comes to mind. Use of solar energy as a potential source of power is another. Corruption and mismanagement are slowly being recognised by the people who understand the power of their vote in a democratic process—power that does not play a role in an autocratic communist rule. 'People Power' is voting out inefficient governments to give an opportunity to efficient governance. This realisation has further been augmented by the failure of communism the world over. People have realised that the most efficient and effective route to self-reliance and prosperity is through an open economy led by vibrant private enterprise.

The analysis of the causes of LICs in the previous section provides an objective basis for policy makers and decision to draw a road map for their resolution. It becomes apparent that there is a requirement for a comprehensive policy, which focuses attention on all aspects, be it political, economic, social or external. It is also apparent that growing awareness and understanding of functioning in a democracy is likely to slowly give way to decentralised administration, which in itself is likely to arrest the contagion of LICs.

The armed forces, state governments, paramilitary forces, police and the central government have found themselves amidst ongoing conflicts, which show no signs of abating in the near future. The kaleidoscope of LICs is ever effervescent and volatile, presenting new challenges with each passing year. The history of LICs in India, however, provides valuable insights and lessons—lessons that must be learnt if the future is to be different from the conflict-ridden past.

# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Letter of Maharaja Hari Singh to Lord Mountbatten with Instrument of Accession on 26 October 1947

My dear Lord Mountbatten,

I have to inform Your Excellency that a grave emergency has arisen in my State and request the immediate assistance of your Government. As Your Excellency is aware, the State of Jammu and Kashmir has not acceded to either the Dominion of India or Pakistan. Geographically my State is contiguous with both of them. Besides, my State has a common boundary with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and with China. In their external relations the Dominion of India and Pakistan cannot ignore this fact. I wanted to take time to decide to which Dominion I should accede or whether it is not in the best interests of both the Dominions and of my State to stand independent, of course with friendly and cordial relations with both. I accordingly approached the Dominions of India and Pakistan to enter into standstill agreement with my State. The Pakistan Government accepted this arrangement. The Dominion of India desired further discussion with representatives of my Government. I could not arrange this in view of the developments indicated below. In fact the Pakistan Government under the standstill agreement is operating the post and telegraph system inside the State. Though we have got a standstill agreement with the Pakistan Government, the Government permitted a steady and increasing strangulation of supplies like food, salt and petrol to my State.

Afridis, soldiers in plain clothes, and desperadoes with modern weapons have been allowed to infiltrate into the State, at first in the Poonch area, then from Sialkot and finally in a mass in the area adjoining Hazara district on the Ramkote side. The result has been that the limited number of troops at the disposal of the State had to be dispersed and thus had to face the enemy at several points simultaneously, so that it has become difficult to stop the wanton destruction of life and property and the looting of the Mahura power house, which supplies electric current to the whole of Srinagar and which has been burnt. The number of women who have been kidnapped and raped makes my heart bleed. The wild forces thus let loose on the State are marching on with



the aim of capturing Srinagar, the summer capital of my Government, as a first step to overrunning the whole State. The mass infiltration of tribesmen drawn from distant areas of the North-West Frontier Province, coming regularly in motor trucks, using the Manwehra-Mazaffarabad road and fully armed with up-to-date weapons, cannot possibly be done without the knowledge of the Provincial Government of the North-West Frontier Province and the Government of Pakistan. In spite of repeated appeals made by my Government no attempt has been made to check these raiders or to stop them from coming into my State. In fact, both radio and the Press of Pakistan have reported these occurrences. The Pakistan radio even put out the story that a provisional government has been set up in Kashmir. The people of my State, both Muslims and non-Muslims, generally have taken no part at all.

With the conditions obtaining at present in my State and the great emergency of the situation as it exists, I have no option but to ask for help from the Indian Dominion. Naturally they cannot send the help asked for by me without my State acceding to the Dominion of India. I have accordingly decided to do so, and I attach the instrument of accession for acceptance by your Government. The other alternative is to leave my State and people to freebooters. On this basis no civilised government can exist or be maintained.

This alternative I will never allow to happen so long as I am the ruler of the State and I have life to defend my country. I may also inform your Excellency's Government that it is my intention at once to set up an interim government and to ask Sheikh Abdullah to carry the responsibilities in this emergency with my Prime Minister.

If my State is to be saved, immediate assistance must be available at Srinagar. Mr V.P. Menon is fully aware of the gravity of the situation and will explain it to you, if further explanation is needed.

In haste and with kindest regards,

Yours sincerely,

**Hari Singh**

26 October, 1947

## Instrument of Accession

Whereas the Indian Independence Act, 1947, provides that as from the fifteenth day of August, 1947, there shall be set up an independent Dominion known as INDIA, and that the Government of India Act, 1935, shall, with such omission, additions, adaptations and modifications as the Governor-General may by order specify, be applicable to the Dominion of India,

And whereas the Government of India Act, 1935, as so adapted, by the Governor-General provides that an Indian State may accede to the Dominion of India by an Instrument of Accession executed by the Ruler thereof:

Now, therefore, I Shriman Inder Mahander Rajrajeshwar Maharajadhiraj Shri Hari Singhji Jammu and Kashmir Naresh Tatha Tibet adi Deshahhipati, Ruler of Jammu and Kashmir State, in the exercise of my Sovereignty in and over my said State do hereby execute this my Instrument of Accession; and

1. I hereby declare that I accede to the Dominion of India with the intent that the Governor-General of India, the Dominion Legislature, the Federal Court and any other Dominion authority established for the purposes of the Dominion shall, by virtue of this my Instrument of Accession but subject always to the terms thereof, and for the purposes only of the Dominion, exercise in relation only to the State of Jammu and Kashmir (hereinafter referred to as 'the State') such functions as may be vested in them by or under the Government of India Act, 1935, as in force in the Dominion of India, on the fifteenth day of August 1947, (which Act as so in force is hereafter referred to as 'the Act').
2. I hereby assume the obligation of ensuring that due effect is given to provisions of the Act within this State so far as they are applicable therein by virtue of this Instrument of Accession.
3. I accept the matters specified in the schedule hereto as the matter with respect to which the Dominion Legislature may make laws for this State.
4. I hereby declare that I accede to the Dominion of India on the assurance that if an agreement is made between the Governor-General and the Ruler of this State whereby any functions in relation to the administration in this State of any law of the Dominion Legislature shall be exercised by the Ruler of this State, then any such agreement shall be deemed to form part of this Instrument and shall be construed and have effect accordingly.
5. The terms of this my Instrument of Accession shall not be varied by any amendment of the Act or the Indian Independence Act, 1947, unless such amendment is accepted by me by Instrument supplementary to this Instrument.
6. Nothing in this Instrument shall empower the Dominion Legislature to make any law for this State authorising the compulsory acquisition of land for any purpose, but I hereby undertake that should the Dominion for the purpose of a Dominion law which applies in this State deem it necessary to acquire any land, I will at their request acquire the land at their expense, or, if the land belongs to me transfer it to them on such terms as may be agreed or, in default of agreement, determined by an arbitrator to be appointed by the Chief Justice of India.
7. Nothing in this Instrument shall be deemed to commit in any way to acceptance of any further Constitution of India or to fetter my discretion to enter into arrangement with the Government of India under any such further constitution.
8. Nothing in this Instrument affects the continuance of my Sovereignty in and over this State, or, save as provided by or under this Instrument, the exercise of any powers, authority and rights now enjoyed by me as Ruler of this State or the validity of any law at present in force in this State.
9. I hereby declare that I execute this Instrument on behalf of this State and that any reference in this Instrument to me or to the Ruler of the State is to be construed as including a reference to my heirs and successors.

Given under my hand this twenty-sixth day in October, nineteen hundred and forty-seven.

Hari Singh,  
Maharajadhiraj of Jammu and Kashmir State

### Acceptance of Accession by the Governor-General of India

I do hereby accept this Instrument of Accession.

Dated this twenty-seventh day of October, nineteen hundred and forty-seven.

Mountbatten of Burma,  
Governor-General of India

### Reply by Lord Mountbatten

My dear Maharaja Sahib,

Your Highness' letter dated 26 October 1947 has been delivered to me by Mr V.P. Menon. In the circumstances mentioned by Your Highness, my Government have decided to accept the accession of Kashmir State to the Dominion of India. In consistence with their policy that in the case of any State where the issue of accession has been the subject of dispute, the question of accession should be decided in accordance with the wishes of the people of the State, it is my Government's wish that, as soon as law and order have been restored in Kashmir and its soil cleared of the invader, the question of the State's accession should be settled by a reference to the people.

Meanwhile, in response to Your Highnesses appeal for military aid, action has been taken today to send troops of the Indian Army to Kashmir, to help your own forces to defend your territory and to protect the lives, property, and honour of your people. My Government and I note with satisfaction that Your Highness has decided to invite Sheikh Abdullah to form an interim Government to work with your Prime Minister.

Mountbatten of Burma  
27 October 1947

## Appendix B

### Joint Statement of Three Commanders in Chief of Indian Army, General L.M. Lockhart, Air Marshall Commanding the Royal Indian Air Force, T.W. Elmhirst and Rear Admiral of the Royal Indian Navy, J.T.S. Hall

It has been alleged that plans were made for sending Indian forces to Kashmir at some date before 22 October, on which day the raid on that State from the direction of Abbottabad began.

1. The following is the true time-table of events, as regards decision taken, plans made, orders given, and movement started in this matter:
2. On 24 October the Commander in Chief, Indian Army, received information that tribesmen had seized Muzzafarabad. This was the first indication of the raid.
3. Prior to this date, no plans of any sort for sending Indian forces into Kashmir had been formulated or even considered. On the morning of 25 October, we were directed to examine and prepare plans for sending troops to Kashmir by air and road, in case this should be necessary to stop the tribal incursions. This was the first direction which we received on the subject. No steps had been taken, prior to the meeting, to examine or prepare such plans.
4. On the afternoon of 25 October we sent one staff officer of the Indian Army and one of the Royal Indian Air Force by air to Srinagar. There they saw officers of the Kashmir State Forces. This was the first contact between officers of our Headquarters and officers of the Kashmir State Forces on the subject of sending Indian troops to Kashmir.
5. On the afternoon of 25 October we also issued orders to an infantry battalion to prepare itself to be flown at short notice, to Srinagar, in the event of the Government of India deciding to accept the accession of Kashmir and to send help.
6. On the morning of 26 October the staff officers mentioned in para 4 above, returned from Srinagar and reported on their meetings with officers of the Kashmir State Forces.
7. On the afternoon of 26 October we finalised our plans for the dispatch by air the troops to Kashmir.

8. At first light on the morning of 27 October, with Kashmir's Instrument of Accession signed, the movement by air of Indian forces to Kashmir began. No plans were made for sending these forces, nor were such plans even considered before 25 October, three days after the tribal incursions began.

## Appendix C

# The Resolution of the United Nations Security Council of August 13, 1948

### Resolution of the Commission of August 13, 1948

#### The United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan

Having given careful consideration to the points of view expressed by the representatives of India and Pakistan regarding the situation in the State of Jammu and Kashmir; and

Being of the opinion that the prompt cessation of hostilities and the correction of conditions the continuance of which is likely to endanger international peace and security are essential to implementation of its endeavours to assist the Governments of India and Pakistan in effecting a final settlement of the situation;

Resolves to submit simultaneously to the Governments of India and Pakistan the following proposal:

#### Part I: Cease-Fire Order

- A. The Governments of India and Pakistan agree that their respective High Commands will issue separately and simultaneously a cease-fire order to apply to all forces under their control in the State of Jammu and Kashmir as of the earliest practicable date or dates to be mutually agreed upon within four days after these proposals have been accepted by both Governments.
- B. The High Commands of the Indian and Pakistani forces agree to refrain from taking any measures that might augment the military potential of the forces under their control in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.  
(For the purpose of these proposals forces under their control shall be considered to include all forces, organised and unorganised, fighting or participating in hostilities on their respective sides.)
- C. The Commanders-in-Chief of the forces of India and Pakistan shall promptly confer regarding any necessary local changes in present dispositions which may facilitate the ceasefire.
- D. In its discretion and as the Commission may find practicable, the Commission will appoint military observers who, under the authority of the Commission and with the co-operation of both Commands, will supervise the observance of the cease-fire order.

- E. The Government of India and the Government of Pakistan agree to appeal to their respective peoples to assist in creating and maintaining an atmosphere favourable to the promotion of further negotiations.

## **Part II: Truce Agreement**

Simultaneously with the acceptance of the proposal for the immediate cessation of hostilities as outlined in Part I, both Governments accept the following principles as a basis for the formulation of a truce agreement, the details of which shall be worked out in discussion between their representatives and the Commission.

### **A**

1. As the presence of troops of Pakistan in the territory of the State of Jammu and Kashmir constitutes a material change in the situation since it was represented by the Government of Pakistan before the Security Council, the Government of Pakistan agrees to withdraw its troops from that State.
2. The Government of Pakistan will use its best endeavour to secure the withdrawal from the State of Jammu and Kashmir of tribesmen and Pakistani nationals not normally resident therein who have entered the State for the purpose of fighting.
3. Pending a final solution, the territory evacuated by the Pakistani troops will be administered by the local authorities under the surveillance of the Commission.

### **B**

1. When the Commission shall have notified the Government of India that the tribesmen and Pakistani nationals referred to in Part II, A, 2 hereof have withdrawn, thereby terminating the situation which was represented by the Government of India to the Security Council as having occasioned the presence of Indian forces in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, and further, that the Pakistani forces are being withdrawn from the State of Jammu and Kashmir, the Government of India agrees to begin to withdraw the bulk of its forces from that State in stages to be agreed upon with the Commission.
2. Pending the acceptance of the conditions for a final settlement of the situation in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, the Indian Government will maintain within the lines existing at the moment of the cease-fire the minimum strength of its forces which in agreement with the Commission are considered necessary to assist local authorities in the observance of law and order. The Commission will have observers stationed where it deems necessary.
3. The Government of India will undertake to ensure that the Government of the State of Jammu and Kashmir will take all measures within its powers to make it publicly known that peace, law and order will be safeguarded and that all human and political rights will be guaranteed.

4. Upon signature, the full text of the truce agreement or a communiqué containing the principles thereof as agreed upon between the two Governments and the Commission, will be made public.

### **Part III**

Government of India and the Government of Pakistan reaffirm their wish that the future status of the State of Jammu and Kashmir shall be determined in accordance with the will of the people and to that end, upon acceptance of the truce agreement, both Governments agree to enter into consultations with the Commission to determine fair and equitable conditions whereby such free expression will be assured.



## Appendix D

### Article 370 of the Constitution of India

#### Temporary provisions with respect to the State of Jammu and Kashmir

- (1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution,
- (a) the provisions of article 238 shall not apply in relation to the State of Jammu and Kashmir;
  - (b) the power of Parliament to make laws for the said State shall be limited to,
    - (i) those matters in the Union List and the Concurrent List which, in consultation with the Government of the State are declared by the President to correspond to matters specified in the Instrument of Accession governing the accession of the State to the Dominion of India as the matters with respect to which the Dominion Legislature may make laws for that State; and
    - (ii) such other matters in the said Lists as, with the concurrence of the Government of the State, the President may by order specify.
- Explanation.* For the purposes of this article, the Government of the State means the person for the time being recognised by the President as the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir acting on the advice of the Council of Ministers for the time being in office under the Maharaja's Proclamation dated the fifth day of March 1948;
- (c) the provisions of article 1 and of this article shall apply in relation to that State;
  - (d) such of the other provisions of this Constitution shall apply in relation to that State subject to such exceptions and modifications as the President may by order specify:
    - (i) Provided that no such order which relates to the matters specified in the Instrument of Accession of the State referred to in paragraph (i) of sub-clause (b) shall be issued except in consultation with the Government of the State:
    - (ii) Provided further that no such order which relates to matters other than those referred in the last preceding proviso shall be issued except with the concurrence of that Government.

(2) If the concurrence of the Government of the State referred to in paragraph (ii) of sub-clause (b) of clause (1) or in the second proviso to sub-clause (d) of that clause be given before the Constituent Assembly for the purpose of framing the Constitution of

the State is convened, it shall be placed before such Assembly for such decision as it may take thereon.

(3) Notwithstanding anything in the foregoing provisions of this article, the President may by public notification, declare that this article shall cease to be operative or shall be operative only with such exceptions and modifications and from such date as he may specify:

Provided that the recommendation of the Constituent Assembly of the State referred to in clause (2) shall be necessary before the President issues such a notification.\*

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\* In exercise of the powers conferred by Article 370 the President, on the recommendation of the Constituent Assembly of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, declared that as from the 17th Day of November, 1952, the said Article 370 shall be operative with the modification that for the Explanation in Cl. (1) thereof, the following explanation is substituted namely.

‘Explanation—For the purpose of this article, the Government of the State means the person for the time being recognised by the President on the recommendation of the Legislative Assembly of the State as the Sadr-i-Riyasat (now Governor) of Jammu and Kashmir, acting on the advice of the Council of Ministers of the State for the time being in office.’

## Appendix E

### Kashmir Accord—1975

Agreed conclusions which led to Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah's accord with Mrs Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister, and his subsequent assumption of office as Chief Minister in February 1975.

1. The state of Jammu and Kashmir, which is a constituent unit of the Union of India, shall, in its relation with the Union, continue to be governed by Article 370 of the Constitution of India.
2. The residuary powers of legislation shall remain with the State; however, Parliament will continue to have power to make laws relating to the prevention of activities directed towards disclaiming, questioning or disrupting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of India or bringing about cessation of a part of the territory of India or secession of a part of the territory of India from the Union or causing insult to the Indian National Flag, the Indian National Anthem and the Constitution.
3. Where any provision of the Constitution of India had been applied to the State of Jammu and Kashmir with adaptations and modifications, such adaptations and modifications can be altered or repealed by an order of the President under Article 370, each individual proposal in this behalf being considered on its merits; but provisions of the Constitution of India already applied to the State of Jammu and Kashmir without adaptation or modification are unalterable.
4. With a view to assuring freedom to the State of Jammu and Kashmir to have its own legislation on matters like welfare measures, cultural matters, social security, personal law and procedural laws, in a manner suited to the special conditions in the State, it is agreed that the State Government can review the laws made by Parliament or extended to the State after 1953 on any matter relatable to the Concurrent List and may decide which of them, in its opinion, needs amendment or repeal. Thereafter, appropriate steps may be taken under Article 254 of the Constitution of India. The grant of President's assent to such legislation would be sympathetically considered. The same approach would be adopted in regard to laws to be made by Parliament in future under the Proviso to clause 2 of the Article. The State Government shall be consulted regarding the application of any such law to the State and the views of the State Government shall receive the fullest consideration.
5. As an arrangement reciprocal to what has been provided under Article 368, a suitable modification of that Article as applied to the State should be made

by Presidential order to the effect that no law made by the Legislature of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, seeking to make any change in or in the effect of any provision of Constitution of the State of Jammu and Kashmir relating to any of the under mentioned matters, shall take effect unless the Bill, having been reserved for the consideration of the President, receives his assent; the matters are—

- (a) the appointment, powers, functions, duties, privileges and immunities of the Governor, and
  - (b) the following matters relating to Elections namely, the super intendency, direction and control of Elections by the Election Commission of India, eligibility for inclusion in the electoral rolls without discrimination, adult suffrage and composition of the Legislative Council, being matters specified in sections 138, 139, 140 and 50 of the Constitution of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.
6. No agreement was possible on the question of nomenclature of the Governor and the Chief Minister and the matter is therefore remitted to the Principals.

G. Parthasarathi

Mirza Mohammad Afzal Beg

New Delhi, 13 November 1974

## Appendix F

### Lahore Declaration

The Prime Ministers of the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan:

Sharing a vision of peace and stability between their countries, and of progress and prosperity for their peoples;

Convinced that durable peace and development of harmonious relations and friendly cooperation will serve the vital interests of the peoples of the two countries, enabling them to devote their energies for a better future;

Recognising that the nuclear dimension of the security environment of the two countries adds to their responsibility for avoidance of conflict between the two countries;

Committed to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations, and the universally accepted principles of peaceful co-existence;

Reiterating the determination of both countries to implementing the Shimla Agreement in letter and spirit;

Committed to the objective of universal nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation;

Convinced of the importance of mutually agreed confidence building measures for improving the security environment;

Recalling their agreement of 23rd September 1998, that an environment of peace and security is in the supreme national interest of both sides and that the resolution of all outstanding issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, is essential for this purpose;

Have agreed that their respective Governments:

- shall intensify their efforts to resolve all issues, including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir.
- shall refrain from intervention and interference in each other's internal affairs.
- shall intensify their composite and integrated dialogue process for an early and positive outcome of the agreed bilateral agenda.
- shall take immediate steps for reducing the risk of accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons and discuss concepts and doctrines with a view to elaborating measures for confidence building in the nuclear and conventional fields, aimed at prevention of conflict.
- reaffirm their commitment to the goals and objectives of SAARC and to concert their efforts towards the realisation of the SAARC vision for the year 2000 and beyond with a view to promoting the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and

to improve their quality of life through accelerated economic growth, social progress and cultural development.

- reaffirm their condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and their determination to combat this menace.
- shall promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Signed at Lahore on the 21st day of February 1999.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee  
Prime Minister of the  
Republic of India

Mohammad Nawaz Sharif  
Prime Minister of the  
Islamic Republic of Pakistan

## Appendix G

# Anandpur Sahib Resolution Authenticated by Sant Harchand Singh Longowal

### **The Resolution**

Adopted, in the light of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, at the open session of the 18th All India Akali Conference held at Ludhiana on 28–29 October 1978 under the Presidentship of Jathedar Jagdev Singh Talwandi are as under:

(It was after the passing of these Resolutions that Shiromani Akali Dal started the struggle therefore.)

### **Resolution No. 1**

Moved by S. Gurcharan Singh Tohra, President Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and endorsed by S. Prakash Singh Badal, Chief Minister, Punjab.

The Shiromani Akali Dal realises that India is a federal and republican geographical entity of different languages, religions and cultures. To safeguard the fundamental rights of the religious and linguistic minorities, to fulfil the demands of the democratic traditions and to pave the way for economic progress it has become imperative that the Indian constitutional infrastructure should be given a real federal shape by redefining the Central and State relations and rights on the line of aforesaid principles and objectives.

The concept of the total revolution given by Lok Naik Sh. Jaya Parkash Narain also based upon the progressive decentralisation of powers. The climax of the process of centralisation of powers of the states through repeated amendments of the Constitution during the Congress regime came before the countrymen in the form of the Emergency, when all fundamental rights of all citizens were usurped. It was then that the programme of decentralisation of powers ever advocated by Shiromani Akali Dal was openly accepted and adopted by other political parties including Janata Party, C.P.I. (M), A.D.M.K. etc.

Shiromani Akali Dal has ever stood firm on this principle and that is why after very careful considerations it unanimously adopted a resolution to this effect first at All India Akali Conference, Batala, then at Shri Anandpur Sahib which has endorsed the principle of State autonomy in keeping with the concept of Federalism.

As such, the Shiromani Akali Dal emphatically urges upon the Janata Government to take cognisance of the different linguistic and cultural sections, religious minorities

as also the voice of millions of people and recast the constitutional structure of the country on real and meaningful federal principles to obviate the possibility of any danger to National unity and the integrity of the Country and further, to enable the states to play a useful role for the progress and prosperity of the Indian people in their respective areas by the meaningful exercise of the powers.

## **Resolution No. 2**

The momentous meeting of the Shiromani Akali Dal calls upon the Government of India to examine the long tale of the excesses, wrongs illegal actions committed by the previous Congress government, more particularly during Emergency, and try to find an early solution to the following problems:

- a. Chandigarh originally raised as a Capital for Punjab should be handed over to Punjab.
- b. The long standing demand of the Shiromani Akali Dal for the merger in Punjab of the Punjabi speaking areas, to be identified by linguistic experts with village as an unit, should be conceded.
- c. The control of Head Works should continue to be vested in Punjab and, if need be, the Reorganisation Act should be amended.
- d. The arbitrary and unjust Award given by Mrs Indira Gandhi during the Emergency on the distribution of Ravi-Beas waters should be revised on the universally accepted norms and principles, thereby justice be done to Punjab.
- e. Keeping in view the special aptitude and martial qualities of the Sikhs the present ratio of their strength in Army should be maintained.
- f. The excess being committed on the settlers in the Terai region of UP in the name of Land Reforms should be vacated by making suitable amendments in the Ceiling Law on the Central guidelines.

## **Resolution No. 3**

(Economic Policy Resolution)

The chief sources of inspiration of the economic politics and programme of the Shiromani Akali Dal are the secular, democratic and socialistic concepts of Sri Guru Nanak Dev and Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. Our Economic programme is based on three basic principles.

- a. Dignity of Labour.
- b. An economic and social structure which provides for the uplift of the poor and depressed sections of society.
- c. Unabated opposition to concentration of economic and political power in the hands of the capitalists.

While drafting its economic policies and programme, the Shiromani Akali Dal in its historic Anandpur Sahib Resolution had laid particular on the need to break the monopolistic hold of the capitalists foisted on the Indian economy by 30 years of



Congress rule in India. This capitalistic hold enabled the Central Government to assume all powers in its hands after the manner of Mughal Imperialism. This was bound to thwart the economic progress of the states and injure the social and economic interests of the people. The Shiromani Akali Dal once again reiterates the Sikh way of life by resolving to fulfil the holy words of Guru Nank Dev:

‘He alone realises the True Path who labours honestly and shares the fruits of that Labour.’

This way of life is based upon three basic principles:

- i. Doing honest labour,
- ii. Sharing the fruits of this labour, and
- iii. Meditation on the Lord’s Name.

The Shiromani Akali Dal calls upon the Central and the State Government to eradicate unemployment during the next ten years. While pursuing this aim special emphasis should be laid on ameliorating the lot of the weaker sections, Scheduled and depressed classes, workers, landless and poor farmers and urban poor. Minimum wages should be fixed for them all.

The Shiromani Akali Dal urges upon the Punjab Government to draw up such an economic plan for the State as would turn it into the leading province during the next ten years, by raising per capita income to Rs 3,000 and by generating an economic growth rate of 7 per cent per annum as against 4 per cent at National level.

The Shiromani Akali Dal gives first priority to the redrafting of the taxation structure in such a way that the burden of taxation is shifted from the poor to the richer classes and an equitable distribution of National income is ensured.

The main plank of the economic programme of the Shiromani Akali Dal is enable the economically weaker sections of the Society to share the fruits of National income.

The Shiromani Akali Dal calls upon the Central Government to make an international air-field at Amritsar which should also enjoy the facilities of a dry port. Similarly a Stock Exchange should be opened at Ludhiana to accelerate the process of industrialisation and economic growth in the State. The Shiromani Akali Dal also desires that suitable amendments should be made in the Foreign Exchange rules for free exchange of foreign currencies and thereby removing the difficulties being faced by the Indian emigrants.

The Shiromani Akali Dal emphatically urges upon the Indian Government to bring a parity between the prices of the agricultural produce and that of the industrial raw materials so that the discrimination against such states which lack these materials may be removed.

The Shiromani Akali Dal demands that exploitation of the producers of the cash crops like cotton, sugarcane, oil seeds etc. at the hands of the traders should be stopped forthwith and for such a purpose arrangements for the purchase of these crops by the government, at remunerative prices should be made. Besides, effective steps should be taken by the government for the purchase of cotton through the Cotton Corporation.

The Shiromani Akali Dal strongly feels that most pressing National problem is the need to ameliorate the lot of millions of exploited persons belonging to the scheduled classes. For such a purpose the Shiromani Akali Dal calls upon the Central and State

Governments to earmark special funds. Besides the State Governments should allot sufficient funds in their respective budgets for giving free residential plots both in the urban and rural areas to the Scheduled Castes.

The Shiromani Akali Dal also calls for the rapid diversification of farming. The shortcomings in the Land Reforms Laws should be removed, rapid industrialisation of the State, ensured the credit facilities for the medium industries, expanded and unemployment allowance given to those who are unemployed. For remunerative farming perceptive reduction should be made in the prices of farm machinery like tractors, tubewells as also the inputs etc.

#### **Resolution No. 4**

This huge session of the Shiromani Akali Dal regards the discrimination to which the Punjabi language is being subjected in the adjoining States of Himachal, Haryana, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir etc. It is firm demand that in accordance with the Nehru Language Formula the neighbouring States of Punjab should give second language status to the Punjabi language because a fairly large sections of their respective population are Punjabi speaking.

#### **Resolution No. 5**

The meeting regrets the claims of the refugees who had migrated to Jammu and Kashmir as a result of the partition of the country, no compensation has been provided to them even after such a long time and these unfortunate refugees are rotting in the camps ever since then.

The Akali Dal Session therefore forcefully demands that their claims should be soon settled and immediate steps should be taken to rehabilitate them even if it involves an amendment in Section 370.

#### **Resolution No. 6**

The 18th session of the All India Conference notes with satisfaction that mechanisation of farming in the country handled to increase in the farm yield and as a result the country is heading towards self-sufficiency.

However, the session feels that poor farmers are unable to take to mechanisation because of the enormity of the cost involved.

As such, the Shiromani Akali Dal urges upon the Government of India to abolish the excise duty on tractors so that with the decrease in their prices the ordinary farmers may also be able to avail of farm machinery and contribute to the growth of gross agricultural produce of the country.

#### **Resolution No. 8**

The meeting of the Shiromani Akali Dal appeals to the Central and State Government to pay particular attention to the poor and labouring classes and demands that besides making suitable amendments in the Minimum Wages Act, suitable legal steps should

be taken to improve the economic lot of the labouring class to enable it to lead a respectable life and play a useful role in the rapid industrialisation of the country.

### **Resolution No. 9**

This session seeks permission from the Government of India to install a broadcasting station at Golden Temple, Amritsar, for the relay of 'Gurbani Kirtan' for the spiritual satisfaction of those Sikhs who are living in foreign lands.

The session wishes to make it clear that the entire cost of the proposed Broadcasting Project would be borne by the Khalsa Panth and its over-all control shall vest with the Indian Government. We have every hope that the government would have no hesitation in conceding this demand after the consideration.

### **Resolution No. 10**

The huge Session of the Shiromani Akali Dal strongly urges upon the Government of India to make necessary amendments in the following enactments for the benefit of the agricultural classes who have toiled hard for the larger national interests:

1. By suitable amendment in the relevant clause of the Hindu Succession Act, a woman should be given rights of inheritance in the properties of her father-in-law instead of the father's.
2. The agricultural land of the farmers should be completely exempted from the Wealth Tax and the Estate Duty.

### **Resolution No. 11**

The vast Session of the Shiromani Akali Dal strongly impresses upon the Government of India that keeping in view the economic backwardness of the Scheduled and Non-Scheduled Castes provisions proportionate to population should be made in the budget for utilisation for their welfare. A special ministry should be created at the Centre as a practical measure to render justice to them on the basis of the reservation.

The Session also calls upon the government that in keeping with the settlement already no discrimination should be made between the Sikh and Hindu Harijans in any part of the country.

### **Resolution No. 12**

The Congress government is called upon to vacate the gross injustice discrimination done to Punjab in the distribution of Ravi-Beas waters. The Central Government must also give approval for the immediate establishment of six sugar and four textile mills in Punjab so that the state may be able to implement its agro-industrial policy.

### **Basic Postulates of The Shiromani Akali Dal**

As adopted by the working committee of the Shiromani Akali Dal at its meeting held at Sri Anandpur Sahib on 16-17 October 1973.

## (A) Postulates

1. The Shiromani Akali Dal is the very embodiment of the hopes and aspirations of the Sikh Nation and as such is fully entitled to its representation. The basic postulates of this Organisation are Human progress and ultimate unity of all human beings with the Spiritual Soul.
2. These postulates are based upon the three great principles of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, namely, Meditation on God's Name, dignity of labour and sharing of fruits of this Labour. (Nam Japo, Kirat Karo, Wand Chhako)

## (B) Purposes

This Shiromani Akali Dal shall ever strive to achieve the following aims:

1. Reiteration of the unicity (Oneness) of God, meditation on His Name, recitation of Gurbani, renewal of faith on the ten Holy Sikh Gurus and the Holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib and other appropriate measures for such a purpose.
2. Grooming accomplished preachers, Ragis, Dhandis, and poets in the Sikhs Missionary College for a more effective propagation of Sikhism, Sikh Philosophy, belief in Sikh code of conduct and Kirtan etc. at home and abroad, in schools and colleges, in villages and in cities as indeed at every place.
3. Baptising the Sikhs (Amrit Prachar) on a vast scale, with particular emphasis on Schools and College of which the teachers and the taught shall be enthused through regular study circles.
4. Reinculcate the religious practice of 'DASWAND' among the Sikhs. (Given one tenth of one's earnings for the welfare of the Community.)
5. Generating feelings of respect for the Sikh intellectuals, writers, preachers, granthis, etc., who also in turn, would be enthused to improve upon their accomplishments while conforming to the basic Sikh tenets and traditions.
6. Streamlining the Gurdwara administration by giving better training to their workers. Appropriate steps would also be taken to maintain Gurdwara buildings in proper condition. For such a purpose, the party representatives in the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee and local Committees would be directed time to time to pull their weight.
7. Making appropriate arrangements for the error free publication of Gurbani; promoting research work in the ancient and modern Sikh history as also its publication; rendering Gurbani in other languages and producing first rate literature on Sikhism.
8. Taking appropriate steps for the enactment of an All India Gurdwara Act with a view to introduce improvements in the administration of the Gurdwaras throughout the country and to reintegrate the traditional preaching sects to Sikhism like Udasis and Nirmalas with the mainstream of Sikhism without in any way encroaching on the properties of the respective individuals 'maths'.

9. Taking such steps as may be necessary to bring the Sikh Gurdwaras all over the world under a single system of administration with a view to run them according to the basic Sikh norms and to pool their sources for the dissemination of Sikhism on a wider and more impressive scale.

Striving for free access to all those holy Sikh Shrines, including Nankana Sahib from which the Sikh Panth has been separated, for pilgrimage and proper upkeep.

### Political Goal

The political goal of the Panth without doubt, is enshrined in the commandments of the Tenth Lord, in the pages of Sikh history and in the very heart of the Khalsa Panth, the ultimate objective of which is the pre-eminence of the Khalsa.

The fundamental policy of the Shiromani Akali Dal is to seek the realisation of this birth right of the Khalsa through creation of congenial environment and a political set up.

For attainment of this aim

1. The Shiromani Akali Dal is determined to strive by all possible means to:
  - a. Have, all those Punjabi speaking areas deliberately kept out of Punjab, such as Dalhousie in Gurdaspur District; Chandigarh; Pinjore-Kalka and Ambala Saddar etc. in Ambala District; the entire Una tehsils of Hoshiarpur District; the 'Desh' area of Nalagarh; Shahabad and Gulha blocks of Karnal District; Tohana Sub-Tehsil, Ratia block and Sirsa tehsil of Hissar District and six tehsil of Ganganagar District in Rajasthan; merged with Punjab to constitute a single administrative unit where the interests of the Sikhs and Sikhism are specifically protected.
  - b. In this new Punjab and in other States the Centre's interference would be restricted to Defence, Foreign relations Currency and General Communication; all other departments would be in the jurisdiction of Punjab (and other States) which would be fully entitled to frame own laws on these subjects for administration. For the above departments of the Centre, Punjab and other States contribute in the proportion to representation in the Parliament.
  - c. The Sikhs and other religious minorities living out of Punjab should be adequately protected against any kind of discrimination.
2. The Shiromani Akali Dal would also endeavour to have the Indian Constitution recast on real federal principles, with equal representation at the Centre for all the States.
3. The Shiromani Akali Dal strongly denounces the foreign policy of India framed by the Congress party. It is worthless, hopeless and highly detrimental to the interests of the country, the Nation and the mankind at large. Shiromani Akali Dal shall extend its support only to that foreign policy of India which is based on the principles of peace and national interests. It strongly advocates a policy of peace with all neighbouring countries, especially those inhabited by the Sikhs

- and their sacred shrines. The Akali Dal is of the firm view that our foreign policy should in no case play second fiddle to that of any other country.
4. The Shiromani Akali Dal shall raise its firm voice against any discrimination against any Sikh (or even other) employees of the Central or State Governments. The Shiromani Akali Dal shall also endeavour to maintain the traditional position of the Sikhs in all the wings of the defence departments and the Panth would pay particular attention to the needs of the Sikh Armymen. The Shiromani Akali Dal would also see that 'kirpan' is accepted as an integral part of the Uniform of the Sikhs in Army.
  5. It shall be the primary duty of the Shiromani Akali Dal to help rehabilitate the ex-servicemen of the Defence Departments in the civil life and or such a purpose it would extend them every help to enable them to organise themselves so that they are able to raise their voice in an effective way of giving adequate concessions and proper safeguards for a life of self-respect and dignity.
  6. The Shiromani Akali Dal is of the firm opinion that all those persons males or females—who have not been convicted of any criminal offences by a court of law, should be at liberty to possess all types of small arms, like revolvers, guns, pistols, rifles, carbines etc., without any licence, the only obligation being their registration.
  7. The Shiromani Akali Dal seeks ban on the sale of liquor and other intoxicants and shall press for prohibition on the consumption of intoxicants and smoking on public places.

### **The Economic Policy and Programme of the Shiromani Akali Dal**

As adopted by its Working Committee on 17th October 1973 at its meeting held at Sri Anandpur Sahib:

Although the mainstay of the Indian economy is agriculture and all those political powers who claim to raise social structure on the basis of justice cannot afford to ignore this fact, yet this is a hard fact that the levers of economic powers, continue to be in the hands of big traders, capitalists and monopolists. Some marginal benefits might have accrued to other classes, but the benefits of economic growth have been reaped by these categories during the last 26 years after Independence. The political power has also been misappropriated by these classes which are wielding the same for their own benefits. As such, any peaceful attempt to usher in a new era of social justice would have to break the economic and political strongholds of these categories of the people.

The Shiromani Akali Dal strongly advocates that the growing gulf between the rich and the poor, in the urban and rural areas both, should be abridged but, it is of the firm opinion that, for such a purpose, the first assault would have to be made on the classes who have assumed all the reins of economic power in their hands. In rural areas, the Akali Dal determined to help the weaker classes, like the Scheduled Castes, backward classes, landless tenants, ordinary labourers, the poor and middle class farmers. For such a purpose, it stands for meaningful land reforms which envisage a ceiling of 30 standard acres and the distribution of excess land among the poor farmers.

The motto of the Shiromani Akali Dal is to provide employment for all, requisite food and clothing for all, a house to live in, suitable transport and to create means to fulfil all those necessities of a civilised life without which life appears incomplete.

As such, the economic policy of the Shiromani Akali Dal shall endeavour to achieve the following objectives:

### **Agriculture Sector**

During recent years the agriculture sector has witnessed land reforms and green revolution. The Shiromani Akali Dal undertakes to enrich the green revolution by an increase in yield per acre. It shall also ensure perceptible improvement in the standard of living of all rural classes, more particularly of the poor and the middle class farmers, as also the landless labourers. For such a purpose it plans to work on the following lines:

- a. Introducing land reforms and measures for increasing agricultural production with a view to remove the growing gap between the rich and the poor. For such a purpose the existing legislation on land ceiling would have to be revised and a firm ceiling of 30 standard acres per family would have to be enforced with proprietary rights to the actual tillers. The excess land would be distributed among the landless tenants and poor farmers, while the cultivable government land unused shall be distributed among the landless classes, especially the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. While distributing such lands the interests of Harijans and landless labourers would be particularly taken care of. The Akali Dal would also consider the possibilities of allowing the tenants to service loans by mortgaging the land under their plough, as also prohibiting the scheduled castes/tribes and backward classes from mortgaging the land distributed among them.
- b. The Shiromani Akali Dal shall work for the modernisation of farming and would also try to enable the middle class and poor farmers to seek loans and inputs made available by different agencies.
- c. The Shiromani Akali Dal shall try to fix the prices of the agricultural produce on the basis of the returns of the middle class farmers. Such prices would be notified well before the sowing seasons and only the State government would be empowered to fix such prices.
- d. The Shiromani Akali Dal stands for complete nationalisation of the wholesale trade in foodgrains through the establishment of State agencies.
- e. The Shiromani Akali Dal strongly opposes the demarcation of food zones and the attendant restrictions on the movements of foodgrains. The whole country should be the single food zone.

The party shall make special efforts to bring the Thein Dam and the Bhatinda Thermal plants to a speedy completion so that increased and cheaper power and irrigation facilities are made available. Definite efforts would be made for the establishment of an Atomic power station in the state.

Co-operative societies would be set up in the rural areas. In all those areas where canal water is not available small irrigation projects would be taken in hand.

## **Industrial Sector**

The Shiromani Akali Dal strongly advocates that all key industries should be under the public sector.

It is of the opinion that consumer industries should be immediately nationalised to stabilise the prices of the consumer goods and to save the poor consumer from exploitation at the hands of the industrialists and the middlemen.

The public sector industries should be established in such a way that the imbalance between different States is removed.

A planned effort to establish agro-industries in the rural areas should be made to relieve the growing population pressure in the urban areas. The industrial management should be democratised by enabling the workers to have a say in the management and by fair distribution of profits between the industrialists and the workers. The credit agencies, especially the nationalised banks, should be directed to invest a fixed ratio of their deposits in the rural areas. Every industrial unit beyond worth one crore assets should be brought under the public sector. The Akali Dal stands for progressive nationalisation of Transport.

The Public Sector units should be fully autonomous and manned by competent young executives drawn from a central pool of talent.

## **Economic Policy**

The Shiromani Akali Dal demands that the whole tax structure be revised in such a way that the evasion of taxes and the flow of black money is completely eradicated. It stands for a straightforward system of taxation. The present infrastructure of taxation weighs heavily against the poor and enables the rich to bypass it. The party stands for a more realistic policy in this respect so that the black money running a parallel economy may be usefully employed.

## **Workers, Middle Class Employees and Agricultural Labour**

For their benefits the Shiromani Akali Dal would try its best:

1. To fix need based wages for industrial workers.
2. To bring progressive improvement in the standard of living of government employees.
3. To re-assess the minimum wages of agricultural labour and to standard of living for them.
4. To take necessary steps to provide roofed accommodation for standard of living for them.
5. To take necessary steps to provide roofed accommodation for the rural and urban poor.

## **Unemployment**

The Shiromani Akali Dal stands for full employment in the country. For such a purpose it is of the firm opinion that the Government must provide immediate employment to



the educated and trained persons, otherwise reasonable unemployment allowance should be paid to them. This amount should be shared by the Centre and the State Governments. The minimum rates of such an allowance should be as under:

- |                                |                 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Matric and or trained hands | 50/- per month  |
| 2. B.A.                        | 70/- per month  |
| 3. M.A.                        | 100/- per month |
| 4. Engineers and Doctors       | 150/- per month |
| 5. Other trained Labour        | 50/- per month  |

All persons above the age of 65 should be given old-age pension.

### Weaker Section and Backward Classes

The Shiromani Akali Dal shall try to improve the economic conditions of the backward classes and weaker sections of Society by extending them facilities for education, employment and other concessions, to enable them to come at par with other sections of society. Foodgrains at cheaper rates would be made available to them.

### Educational and Cultural

The Shiromani Akali Dal aims at grooming the Sikhs into a strong and sturdy Nation highly educated, fully aware of its fundamental rights, very well versed in various arts and ever ready to honour the more outstanding of its sons. For such a purpose:

1. The Shiromani Akali Dal regards the educationalists, scientists, philosophers, poets, writers and artists of the Sikh Nation as its most prized asset.
2. The Shiromani Akali Dal stands for compulsory and free education upto matric standard.
3. To check the growing rate of unemployment, Shiromani Akali Dal would try to introduce such courses to study as would enable their students to get immediate employment on completion of a course.
4. The Shiromani Akali Dal shall make arrangements for the education of the rural and weaker classes and would also make provision for the higher education of the more promising students among them.
5. Punjabi would be a compulsory subject for all students up to the matric standard.
6. Special attention would be paid to the science and technical field of education, with particular emphasis on the study of Nuclear physics and space science in the University.
7. The Shiromani Akali Dal shall try to improve the standard of games and bring them on level with international standards.

Dated: 1.8.1977

Sd/-

Giani Ajmer Singh Secretary  
Shiromani Akali Dal

## Appendix H

# Memorandum of Settlement between Rajiv Gandhi and Sant Harchand Singh Longowal

### **1. Compensation to innocent persons killed**

- 1.1 Along with ex gratia payment to those innocent killed in agitation or any action after 1.8.82, compensation for property damaged will also be paid.

### **2. Army recruitment**

- 2.1 All citizens of the country have the right to enrol in the Army and merit will remain the criterion for selection.

### **3. Enquiry into November incidents**

- 3.1 The jurisdiction of Shri Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission enquiring into the November riots of Delhi would be extended to cover the disturbances at Bokaro and Kanpur also.

### **4. Rehabilitation of those discharged from the Army**

- 4.1 For all those discharged, efforts will be made to rehabilitate and provide gainful employment.

### **5. All India Gurudwara Act**

- 5.1 The Government of India agrees to consider the formulation of an All India Gurudwara Bill. Legislation will be brought forward for this purpose in consultation with Shiromani Akali Dal, others concerned and after fulfilling all relevant constitutional requirements.

### **6. Disposal of Pending Cases**

- 6.1 The notifications applying the Armed Forces Special Powers Act to Punjab will be withdrawn.  
Existing Special Courts will try only cases relating to the following type of offences:
  - a. Waging war
  - b. Hijacking
- 6.2 All other cases will be transferred to ordinary courts and enabling Legislation if needed will be brought forward in this session of Parliament.

## 7. Territorial Claims

- 7.1 The Capital Project Area of Chandigarh will go to Punjab. Some adjoining areas which were previously part of Hindi or the Punjabi regions were included in the Union Territory. With the capital region going to Punjab the areas which were added to the Union Territory from the Punjabi region of the erstwhile State of Punjab will be transferred to Punjab and those from Hindi region to Haryana. The entire Sukhna lake will be kept as part of Chandigarh and will thus go to Punjab.
- 7.2 It had always been maintained by Smt Indira Gandhi that when Chandigarh is to go to Punjab some Hindi-speaking territories in Punjab will go to Haryana. A Commission will be constituted to determine the specific Hindi-speaking areas of Punjab which should go to Haryana, in lieu of Chandigarh. The principle of contiguity and linguistic affinity with a village as a unit will be the basis of such determination. The Commission will be required to give its findings by 31st December 1986 and these will be binding on both sides. The work of the Commission will be limited to this aspect and will be distinct from the general boundary claims which the other Commission referred to in para 7.4 will handle.
- 7.3 The actual transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab and areas in lieu thereof to Haryana will take place simultaneously on 26th January 1986.
- 7.4 There are other claims and counter-claims for readjustment of the existing Punjab-Haryana boundaries. The Government will appoint another commission to consider these matters and give the findings. Such findings will be binding on the concerned States. The terms of reference will be based on a village as a unit, linguistic affinity and contiguity.

## 8. Centre-State Relations

- 8.1 Shiromani Akali Dal states that the Anandpur Sahib Resolution is entirely within the framework of the Indian Constitution; that it attempts to define the concept of Centre-State relations in a manner which may bring out the true federal characteristics of our Unitary Constitution; and that the purpose of the Resolution is to provide greater autonomy to the State with a view to strengthening the unity and integrity of the country, since unity in diversity forms the corner stone of our national entity.
- 8.2 In view of the above, the Anandpur Sahib Resolution, in so far as it deals with Centre-State relations, stands referred to the Sarkaria Commission.

## 9. Sharing of River Waters

- 9.1 The farmers of Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan will continue to get water not less than what they are using from the Ravi-Beas system as on 1.7.1985. Waters used for consumptive purposes will also remain unaffected. Quantum of usage claimed shall be verified by the Tribunal referred to in para 9.2 below.
- 9.2 The claims of Punjab and Haryana regarding the shares in their remaining waters will be referred for adjudication to a Tribunal to be presided over by a Supreme Court Judge. The decision of this Tribunal will be rendered within

six months and would be binding on both parties. All legal and constitutional steps required in this respect be taken expeditiously.

- 9.3 The construction of the SYL canal shall continue. The canal shall be completed by 15th August 1986.

#### **10. Representation of Minorities**

- 10.1 Existing instruction regarding protection of interests of minorities will be recirculated to the State Chief Ministers. (PM will write to all Chief Ministers)

#### **11. Promotion of Punjabi Language**

- 11.1 The Central Government may take some steps for the promotion of Punjabi language. This settlement brings to an end a period of confrontation and ushers in an era of amity, goodwill and cooperation, which will promote and strengthen the unity and integrity of India.

RAJIV GANDHI  
Prime Minister of India

SANT HARCHAND SINGH LONGOWAL  
President, Shiromani Akali Dal

Dated, the 24th July, 1985

Appendix I

**The Immigrants  
(Expulsion from Assam) Act 1950**

Be it enacted by Parliament as follows:

1. (1) This Act may be called the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950.  
(2) It extends to the whole of India.
2. If the Central Government is of opinion that any person or class of persons, having been ordinarily resident in any place outside India, has or have, whether before or after the commencement of this Act, come into Assam and that the stay of such person or class of persons in Assam is detrimental to the interests of the general public or any section thereof or of any Scheduled Tribe in Assam, the Central Government may by order—
  - (a) direct such persons or class of persons to remove himself or themselves from India or Assam within such time and by such route as may be specified in the order; and
  - (b) give such further directions in regard to his or their removal from India or Assam as it may consider necessary or expedient:  
Provided that nothing in this section shall apply to any person who on account of civil disturbances or the fear of such disturbances in any area now forming part of Pakistan has been displaced from or has left his place of residence in such area and who has been subsequently residing in Assam.
3. The Central Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, direct that the powers and duties conferred or imposed on it by section 2 shall, subject to such conditions, if any, as may be specified in the notification, be exercised or discharged also by—
  - (a) any officer subordinate to the Central Government;
  - (b) the Government of Assam, Meghalaya or any officer subordinate to that Government.
4. Any authority empowered by or in pursuance of the provisions of this Act to exercise any power may, in addition to any other action expressly provided for in this Act, take or cause to be taken such steps, and use or cause to be used such force, as may in its opinion be reasonably necessary for the effective exercise of such power.

5. Any person who—
  - (a) contravenes or attempts to contravene or abets the contravention of any order made under section 2, or
  - (b) fails to comply with any direction given by any such order, or
  - (c) harbours any person who has contravened any order made under section 2 or has failed to comply with any direction given by any such order shall be punishable with imprisonment which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.
6. No suit, prosecution or other legal proceedings shall lie against any person for anything which in good faith is done or intended to be done under this Act.
7. In this Act, except in section 3, references to Assam shall be construed as including also a reference to the State of Meghalaya and Nagaland and the Union territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram.

## Appendix J

# Nehru–Liaquat Ali Khan Agreement April 8, 1950

The following is the full text of the Agreement signed at New Delhi on April 8, 1950, by India's Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan's Prime Minister, Mr Liaquat Ali Khan on behalf of the Governments of India and Pakistan respectively on the minority question:

(A) The Governments of India and Pakistan solemnly agree that each shall ensure to the minorities throughout its territory complete equality of citizenship irrespective of religion, a full sense of security in respect of life, culture, property and personal honour, freedom of movement within each country and freedom of occupation, speech and worship subject to law and morality. Members of the minorities shall have equal opportunities as members of the majority community to participate in the public life of their country, to hold political or other office, and to serve in their country's civil and armed forces. Both Governments declare these rights to be fundamental and undertake to enforce them effectively. The Prime Minister of India has drawn attention to the fact that these rights are guaranteed to all minorities in India by its Constitution. The Prime Minister of Pakistan has pointed out that similar provision exists in the Objective Resolution adopted by the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan. It is the policy of both Governments that the enjoyment of these democratic rights shall be assured to all their nationals without distinction.

Both Governments wish to emphasise that the allegiance and loyalty of the minorities is to the State to which they are citizens, and that, it is to the Government of their own State that they should look for redress of their grievances.

(B) In respect of migrants from East Bengal, West Bengal, Assam and Tripura where communal disturbances have recently occurred, it is agreed between the two Governments:

- (i) There shall be freedom in movement and protection in transit.
- (ii) There shall be freedom to remove as much of his movable personal effects and household goods as a migrant may wish to take with him. Movable property shall include personal jewellery. The maximum cash allowed to each adult migrant shall be Rs 150 and to each migrant child Rs 75.

- (iii) That a migrant shall deposit such of his personal jewellery or cash as he does wish to take with him with a Bank. A proper receipt shall be furnished to him by the Bank for cash or jewellery thus deposited and facilities shall be provided, as and when required, for their transfer to him, subject as regards cash to the exchange regulations of the Government concerned.
- (iv) That there shall be no harassment by the Customs Authorities. At each customs post agreed upon by the Governments concerned liaison officers of the other Governments shall be posted to ensure this in practice.
- (v) Rights of ownership in or occupancy, of immovable property of a migrant shall not be disturbed. If during his absence such property is occupied by another person, it shall be returned to him, provided that he comes back by 31st December, 1950. In exceptional cases, if a Government considers that a migrant's immovable property cannot be returned to him the matter shall be referred to the appropriate Minority Commission for advice.  
Where restoration of immovable property to the migrant who returns within the specified period is found not possible, the Government concerned shall take steps to rehabilitate him.
- (vi) That in the case of a migrant who decides not to return, ownership of all his immovable property shall continue to vest in him and he shall have unrestricted right to dispose it of by sale, by exchange with an evacuee in the country, or otherwise. A Committee comprising of three representatives of the Government shall act as trustees of the owner. The Committee shall be empowered to recover rent for such immovable property according to law.

The Government of East Bengal, West Bengal, Assam and Tripura shall enact the necessary legislation to set up these Committees.

The Provincial or State Governments, as the case may be will instruct the district or other appropriate authority to give all possible assistance for the discharge of the Committee's function.

The provisions of this sub-paragraph shall also apply to migrants who may have left East Bengal, Assam or Tripura for any part of Pakistan, prior to the recent disturbances but after the 15th August 1947.

The arrangements in this sub-paragraph will apply also to migrants who have left Bihar for East Bengal owing to communal disturbances or fear thereof.

(C) As regards the province of East Bengal and each of the States of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura respectively, the two Governments further agree that they shall:

- (1) Continue their efforts to restore normal conditions and they shall take suitable measures to prevent recurrence of disorder.
- (2) Punish all those who are found guilty of offences against persons and property and of other criminal offences. In view of their deterrent effect, collective fines shall be imposed, where necessary. Special Court will, where necessary, be appointed to ensure that wrongdoers are promptly punished.
- (3) Make every possible effort to recover looted property.



- (4) Set up immediately an agency with which representatives of the minority shall be associated, to assist in recovery of abducted women.
- (5) Not recognise forced conversions. Any conversion affected during a period of communal disturbance shall be deemed to be a forced conversion. Those found guilty of converting people forcibly shall be punished.
- (6) Set up a Commission of Enquiry at once to enquire into and report on the causes and extent of the recent disturbances and to make recommendations with a view to preventing recrudescence of similar trouble in future. The personnel of the Commission which shall be presided over by judge of the High Court, shall be such as to inspire confidence among the minority.
- (7) Take prompt and effective steps to prevent the dissemination of news and mischievous opinion calculated to rouse communal passion by Press or Radio or by any individual or organisation. Those guilty of such activity shall be rigorously dealt with.
- (8) Not permit propaganda in either country directed against the territorial integrity of the other or purporting to incite war between them and shall take prompt and effective action against any individual or organisation guilty of such propaganda.

(D) Sub-paragraphs (1), (2), (3), (4), (5), (7) and (8) of 'C' of the Agreement are of general scope and applicable according to exigency to any part of India or Pakistan.

(E) In order to help restore confidence so that refugees may return to their homes, the two Governments have decided

- (i) to depute two Ministers, one from each Government to remain in the affected areas for such period as may be necessary,
- (ii) to include in the Cabinets of East Bengal, West Bengal and Assam a representative of the minority community. In Assam the minority community is already represented in the Cabinet. Appointments to the Cabinets of East Bengal and West Bengal shall be made immediately.

(F) In order to assist in the implementation of this Agreement the two Governments have decided, apart from deputation of their Ministers referred to in 'E' to set up Minority Commissions, one for East Bengal, one for West Bengal and one for Assam.

These Commissions shall be constituted and will have the functions described below:

- (i) Each Commission will consist of one Minister of the Provincial or State Governments concerned, who will be Chairman, and one representative each of the majority and minority communities from East Bengal, West Bengal and Assam, chosen by and from among their respective representatives in the Provincial or State Legislatures, as the case may be.
- (ii) The two Ministers of the Governments of India and Pakistan may attend and participate in any meeting or any Commission. A Minority Commission or any

- two Ministry Commissions jointly shall meet when so required by either Central Ministers for the satisfactory implementation of this Agreement.
- (iii) Each Commission shall appoint such staff it deems necessary for the proper discharge of its functions and shall determine its own procedure.
  - (iv) Each Commission shall maintain contact with the minorities in districts and shall have administrative headquarters through Ministry Boards formed in accordance with the Inter-Dominion Agreement of December 1948.
  - (v) The Minority Commission in East Bengal and West Bengal shall replace the Provincial Minority Boards set up under the Inter-Dominion Agreement of December, 1948.
  - (vi) The two Ministers of the Central Governments will, from time to time, consult such persons or organisations as they may consider necessary.
  - (vii) The functions of the Minority Commission shall be:
    - (a) To observe and to report on the implementation of this Agreement and, for this purpose, to take cognisance of breaches or neglect,
    - (b) To advise an action to be taken on their recommendations.
  - (viii) Each Commission shall submit reports, and when necessary copies of such reports shall be submitted simultaneously to the two Central Ministers during the period referred to in 'E'.
  - (ix) The Governments of India and Pakistan, and the State and Provincial Government will normally give effect to recommendations that concern them when such recommendations are supported by both the Central Ministers. In the event of disagreement between the two Ministers, the matters shall be referred to the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan who shall either resolve it themselves or determine the procedure by which it will be resolved.
  - (x) In respect of Tripura the two Central Ministers shall constitute a Commission and shall discharge the functions that are assigned under the Agreement to the Minority Commissions for East Bengal, West Bengal and Assam. Before the expiration of the period referred to in 'E' the two Central Ministers shall make recommendations for the establishment in Tripura of appropriate machinery to discharge the functions of the Minority Commissions envisaged in respect of East Bengal, West Bengal and Assam.

(G) Except where modified by this Agreement the Inter-Dominion Agreement of December 1948, shall remain in force.

Sd/- Jawaharlal Nehru  
Prime Minister of India

Sd/-Liaquat Ali Khan  
Prime Minister of Pakistan

NEW DELHI

8th April, 1950

## Appendix K

### Assam Accord

1. Government have all along been most anxious to find a satisfactory solution to the problem of foreigners in Assam. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) have also expressed their keenness to find such a solution.
2. The AASU through their Memorandum dated 2nd February 1980 presented to the late Prime Minister Smt Indira Gandhi, conveyed their profound sense of apprehensions regarding the continuing influx of foreign nationals into Assam and the fear about adverse effects upon the political, social, culture and economic life of the State.
3. Being fully alive to the genuine apprehensions of the people of Assam, the then Prime Minister initiated the dialogue with the AASU/AAGSP. Subsequently, talks were held at the Prime Minister's and Home Minister's level during the period 1980–83. Several rounds of informal talks were held during 1984. Formal discussions were resumed in March 1985.
4. Keeping all aspects of the problem including constitutional and legal provisions, international agreements, national commitments and humanitarian considerations, it has been decided to proceed as follows:

#### Foreigners Issue

- 5.1 For purposes of detection and deletion of foreigners, 1.1.1966 shall be the base data and year.
- 5.2 All persons who come to Assam prior to 1.1.1966, including those amongst them whose names appeared on the electoral rolls used in 1967 elections shall be regularised.
- 5.3 Foreigners who came to Assam after 1.1.1966 (inclusive) and up to 24th March, 1971 shall be detected in accordance with the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order 1964.
- 5.4 Names of foreigners so detected will be deleted from the electoral rolls in force. Such persons will be required to register themselves before the Registration Officers of the respective districts in accordance with the provisions of the Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939 and the Registration of Foreigners Rules, 1939.
- 5.5 For this purpose, Government of India will undertake suitable strengthening of the government machinery.

- 5.6 On the expiry of a period of ten years following the date of detection, the names of all such persons which have been deleted from the electoral rolls shall be restored.
- 5.7 All persons who were expelled earlier, but have since re-entered illegally into Assam shall be expelled.
- 5.8 Foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall continue to be detected, deleted and practical steps shall be taken to expel such foreigners.
- 5.9 The Government will give due consideration to certain difficulties expressed by the AASU/AAGSP regarding the implementation of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983.

### **Safeguards and Economic Development**

6. Constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote the culture, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people.
7. The Government take this opportunity to renew their commitment for the speedy all round economic development of Assam, so as to improve the standard of living of the people. Special emphasis will be placed on education and science and technology through establishment of national institutions.

### **Other Issues**

- 8.1 The Government will arrange for the issue of citizenship certificates in future only by the authorities of the Central Government.
- 8.2 Specific complaints that may be made by the AASU/AAGSP about irregular issuance of Indian Citizenship Certificates (ICC) will be looked into.
9. The international border shall be made secure against future infiltration by erection of physical barriers like walls, barbed wire fencing and other obstacles at appropriate places. Patrolling by security forces on land and riverine routes all along the international border shall be adequately intensified. In order to further strengthen the security arrangements, to prevent effectively future infiltration, an adequate number of check posts shall be set up.
  - 9.2 Besides the arrangements mentioned above and keeping in view security considerations, a road all along the international border shall be constructed as to facilitate patrolling by security forces. Land between border and the road would be kept free of human habitation, wherever possible. Riverine patrolling along the international border would be intensified. All effective measures would be adopted to prevent infiltrators crossing or attempting to cross the international border.
10. It will be ensured that relevant laws for prevention of encroachment of government lands in tribal belts and blocks are strictly enforced and unauthorised encroachers evicted as laid down under such laws.
11. It will be ensured that the relevant law restricting acquisition of immovable property by foreigners in Assam is strictly enforced.
12. It will be ensured that Birth and Death Registers are duly maintained.

### Restoration of Normalcy

13. The All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) call off the agitation, assure full co-operation and dedicate themselves towards the development of the country.
14. The Central and the State Government have agreed to:
  - a. review with sympathy and withdraw cases of disciplinary action taken against employees in the context of the agitation and to ensure that there is no victimisation;
  - b. frame a scheme for ex gratia payment to next of kin of those who were killed in the course of the agitation;
  - c. give sympathetic consideration to proposal for relaxation of upper age limit for employment in public services in Assam, having regard to exceptional situation that prevailed in holding of academic and competitive examinations, etc., in the context of agitation in Assam;
  - d. undertake review of detention cases, if any, as well as cases against persons charged with criminal offences in connection with the agitation, except those charged with commission of heinous offences;
  - e. consider withdrawal of the prohibitory orders/ notifications in force, if any.
10. The Ministry of Home Affairs will be the nodal Ministry for the implementation of the above.

Signed/-  
**(P.K. Mahanta)**  
*President*  
*All Assam Students Union*

Signed/-  
**(R.D. Pradhan)**  
*Home Secretary*  
*Govt. of India*

Signed/-  
**(B.K. Phukan)**  
*General Secretary*  
*All Assam Students Union*

Signed/-  
**(Smt. P.P. Trivedi)**  
*Chief Secretary*  
*Govt. of India*

Signed/-  
**(Biraj Sharma)**  
*Convenor*  
*All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad*

In the presence of  
Signed/-  
**(Rajiv Gandhi)**  
*Prime Minister of India*

Date: 15th August, 1985

Place: New Delhi

1. Election Commission will be requested to ensure preparation of fair electoral rolls.
2. Time for submission of claims and objections will be extended by 30 days, subject to this being consistent with the Election rules.
3. The Election Commission will be requested to send Central Observers.

Signed/-  
Home Secretary

1. Oil refinery will be established in Assam.
2. Central Government will render full assistance to the State Government in their efforts to re-open:
  - i. Ashok Paper Mill
  - ii. Jute Mills
3. I.I.T. will be set-up in Assam.

## Appendix L

# Memorandum of Understanding on Bodoland Territorial Council

1. The Government of India and the Government of Assam have been making concerted efforts to fulfil the aspirations of the Bodo people relating to their cultural identity, language, education and economic development. Towards this end, a series of talks were held between Government of India, Government of Assam and Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) since March, 2000. As a result, it is agreed to create a self-governing body for the Bodo Areas in the State of Assam as follows:

## 2. Objectives

The objectives of the agreement are: to create an Autonomous self governing body to be known as Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) within the State of Assam and to provide constitutional protection under Sixth Schedule to the said Autonomous Body; to fulfil economic, educational and linguistic aspirations and the preservation of land-rights, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos; and speed up the infrastructure development in BTC area.

## 3. Area

- 3.1 The area of proposed BTC shall comprise all the 3,082 villages and areas to be so notified by the State Government. The above mentioned villages and areas shall be divided into 4 contiguous districts after reorganisation of the existing districts of Assam within a period of 6 months of the signing of the agreement on the lines of the proposal given by BLT subject to clearance of the Delimitation Commission.
- 3.2 A committee comprising one representative each from Governments of India & Assam and BLT will decide by consensus on the inclusion of additional villages and areas in the BTC from out of 95 villages and areas on the basis of the criteria of tribal population being not less than 50 per cent, contiguity or any other agreed relevant criteria within a period of three months of signing of this MoS.

## 4. Status of Bodoland Territorial Council

The provision of the Sixth Schedule and other relevant Articles of the Constitution of India will apply to BTC, mutatis mutandis in terms of this agreement. The

safeguards/modifications for the non-tribals in BTC area, inter-alia, will include the following:

- 4.1 Provision of para1(2) of Sixth Schedule regarding Autonomous Regions will not be applicable to BTC.
- 4.2 A provision will be made in para 2(1) of the Sixth Schedule for increasing the number of members for BTC up to 46 out of which 30 will be reserved for Scheduled Tribes, 5 for non-tribal communities, 5 open for all communities and 6 to be nominated by Governor of Assam from the unrepresented communities for BTC area of which at least two should be women. Nominated members will have the same rights and privileges as other members, including voting rights. Election from the 40 constituencies of BTC shall be on the basis of adult franchise. The term of the elected members of BTC shall be for 5 years.
- 4.3 Safeguards for the settlement rights, transfer and inheritance of property etc. of non-tribals will be suitably incorporated in para 3 of the Sixth Schedule. Any such law as may be made by the BTC in this regard will not, in particular:
  - (a) Extinguish the rights and privileges enjoyed by any citizen of India in respect of their land at the commencement of BTC, and
  - (b) Bar any citizen from acquiring land either by way of inheritance, allotment, settlement or by way of transfer if such citizens were eligible for such bona fide acquisition of land within the BTC area.
- 4.4 Provision will be added in para 6 of Sixth Schedule that in BTC area, language and medium of instruction in educational institutions will not be changed without approval of the State Government.
- 4.5 Provision of para 8 of Sixth Schedule regarding power to assess and collect land revenue and impose taxes shall be applicable to BTC.
- 4.6 Para 10 of the Sixth Schedule will not be applicable to BTC area.
- 4.7 Provision of Article 332(6) of the Constitution will be so modified that the existing status of representation of BTC area in the State Assembly is kept intact. After the creation of BTC, the Parliamentary & Assembly Constituencies shall be delimited by the Delimitation Commission in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.
- 4.8 In the event, **Panchayati Raj** system ceases to be in force in the council area, the powers of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in such matters shall be vested with the Council.

The Amendments to the Sixth Schedule shall include provisions in such a manner that non-tribals are not disadvantaged in relation to the rights enjoyed by them at the commencement of BTC and their rights and privileges including land rights are fully protected.

## 5. Power and Functions

- 5.1 The Council shall have legislative powers in respect to subjects transferred to it as enumerated below. All laws made under this paragraph shall be submitted forthwith to the Governor and until assented to by him, shall have no effect. The BTC shall have executive, administrative and financial powers in respect of subjects transferred to it.



Subjects to Be Entrusted to BTC by Assam Government

1. Small, Cottage and Rural Industry; 2. Animal Husbandry and Veterinary; 3. Forest; 4. Agriculture; 5. PWD; 6. Sericulture; 7. Education (Primary Education, Higher Secondary including Vocational Training, Adult Education, College Education (General)); 8. Cultural Affairs; 9. Soil Conservation; 10. Co-operation; 11. Fisheries; 12. Panchayat and Rural Development; 13. Handloom and Textile; 14. Health and Family Welfare; 15. Public Health Engineering; 16. Irrigation; 17. Social Welfare; 18. Flood Control; 19. Sports and Youth Welfare; 20. Weights and Measures; 21. Library Services; 22. Museum and Archaeology; 23. Urban Development—Town and Country Planning; 24. Tribal Research Institute; 25. Land and Revenue; 26. Publicity/Public Relations; 27. Printing and Stationery; 28. Tourism; 29. Transport; 30. Planning and Development; 31. Municipal Corporation, Improvement Trust, District Boards and other local authorities; 32. Welfare of Plan Tribes and Backward Classes; 33. Markets and Fairs; 34. Lotteries, Theatres, Dramatic Performance and Cinema; 35. Statistics; 36. Food and Civil Supply; 37. Intoxicating Liquors, Opium and Derivatives etc.; 38. Labour and Employment; 39. Relief and Rehabilitation; 40. Registration of Births and Deaths.
- 5.2 There shall be an Executive Council comprising of not more than 12 Executive Members, one of whom shall be the Chief and another one the Deputy Chief of the said Executive Council. There shall be adequate representation for the non-tribal members in the Executive Council. The Chief and the Deputy Chief of the Council shall have the status equivalent to the Cabinet Minister and the other Executive Members equivalent to the Minister of the State of Assam for protocol purposes in BTC area.
- 5.3 The BTC shall have the full control over the officers and staff connected with the delegated subjects working in the BTC area and shall be competent to transfer officers and staff within the BTC area. ACRs of these officers shall also be written by the appropriated BTC authority.
- 5.4 BTC shall also be competent to make appointments for all posts under its control in accordance with the rules of appointment followed by the Government of Assam. However, the posts, where recruitment is made on the recommendation of APSC, shall not be covered under this provision. The Council may constitute a Selection Board for appointments to be made by it and may also make rules, with the approval of the Governor of Assam to regulate appointments and to ensure adequate representation for all communities living in the Council area.
- 5.5 No posts shall be created by BTC without concurrence of the Government of Assam and it shall also abide by the decision of the Government of Assam in respect of abolition of/temporarily keeping vacant any post.
- 5.6 Development functions and bodies within the competence of BTC shall be transferred to BTC. In respect of DRDA, concurrence of Government of India will be obtained.
- 5.7 The offices of the Dy. Commissioner and Superintendent of Police will be outside the superintendence and control of BTC.
- 5.8 The State Government would provide an amount, to be decided every year on population ratio basis, as grants-in-aid in two equal instalments to the BTC for

executing development works. The proportionate share for the BTC shall be calculated on the basis of the plan funds available after setting aside the funds required for earmarked sectors and the salary. This amount may be reduced proportionately if the state plan allocation is reduced or there is plan cut due to resource problem. In addition, the Council will be paid a suitable amount of plan funds and non-plan funds to cover the office expenses and the salaries of the staff working under their control. The BTC shall disburse the salaries of the staff under their control and would ensure strict economy in the matter.

- 5.9 BTC authority shall prepare a plan with the amounts likely to be available for development works, both under State share and Central share, covering any or all the activities of the departments under their control. The Council shall have full discretion in selecting the activities and choosing the amount for the investment under the same in any year covering all groups of people in a fair and equitable manner. This plan will be a sub set of the State plan and would be treated as its integral part. Once the plan of the State, including BTC plan, gets the approval of the Planning Commission the BTC authority will start execution of their plan in the BTC area. Modifications, if any, made by the Planning Commission in the BTC proposal, shall be binding on the BTC authority. The State Government shall not divert the funds allocated to the BTC to other heads and also ensure its timely release. BTC may have Planning Department to prepare the plans for BTC area to be submitted to Planning Commission through the Government of Assam.
- 5.10 The executive functions of the BTC shall be exercised through its Principal Secretary who shall be an officer of the rank not below of Commissioner/Secretary to Government of Assam. The sanctioning powers of the Government of Assam shall be vested with the Principal Secretary of BTC and sanctioning powers of head(s) of the Department(s) including for technical sanction shall be conferred on the senior most officer of that Department preferably not below the rank of Additional Director, who may be designated as Director of BTC for that department. The Principal Secretary and other officers shall exercise their powers under the overall guidance and supervision of BTC.

## 6. Law and Order

To strengthen the Police Administration, Government of Assam shall appoint an IGP for 4 districts of BTC and the jurisdiction of the DIG Kokrajhar shall also be modified to cover these 4 districts.

## 7. Revision of List of ST

Consequent to the inclusion of BTC area into the Sixth Schedule, the list of ST for the State of Assam shall be so modified so as to ensure that the tribal status of Bodos and other tribals living outside the BTC does not get affected adversely.

## 8. Grant of ST Status of Bodo Kacharis of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills Districts

The Government of India agrees to consider sympathetically the inclusion of the Bodo Kacharis living in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills Autonomous Council area in the ST (Hill) List of State of Assam.

## 9. Development of Bodo Language

- 9.1 The Government of India agrees to consider favourably the inclusion of Bodo Language in Devanagiri Script in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
- 9.2 Bodo language shall be the official language of BTC subject to the condition that Assamese and English shall also continue to be used for official purpose.

## 10. Additional Development Package for BTC

- 10.1 The State Government, within the limitation of financial and other constraints, may offer or allow the Council to offer, possible and sustainable additional incentives for attracting private investment in the Council area and would also support projects for external funding.
- 10.2 In order to accelerate the development of the region and to meet the aspirations of the people, the Government of India will provide financial assistance of Rs 100 crores per annum for 5 years for projects to develop the socio-economic infrastructure in BTC areas over and above the normal plan assistance to the State of Assam. The size of the Corpus will be reviewed after a period of 5 years. Suitable mechanism will be built in the system to ensure that the funds are transferred to BTC in time and at regular intervals. An illustrative list of projects which may be considered to be taken up in BTC given below:

### List of Projects

1. To establish a centre for development and research of Bodo language;
  2. Upgradation of existing educational infrastructure by way of renovation/addition of buildings, providing modern facilities for teaching such as computers, science laboratories etc. from primary level to college level in BTC area;
  3. A cultural complex to be established at Kokrajhar to promote and develop Bodo tradition and cultural heritage;
  4. To establish a super-speciality hospital with all modern facilities at Kokrajhar Government Hospitals shall be established in all district, sub-divisional and block headquarter;
  5. To establish sports complexes in all the district headquarters;
  6. Food processing plants and cold storage facilities at Kokrajhar, Kajolgaon, Udalguri and Tamulpur;
  7. Construction of a bridge over river Aai to connect Koilamoila, Amguri etc. with the rest of the district;
  8. To build a Bodoland Bhawan in Delhi;
  9. To set up integrated agro-processing park and textile-cum-apparel park;
  10. Revitalisation of Kokilabari Agricultural Farm;
  11. To develop adequate infrastructure to promote Manas sanctuary as an international tourist spot;
  12. To complete Champa, Suklai and Dhansiri irrigation projects;
  13. To construct a highway on the Indo-Bhutan border from Jamduar to Bhairabkunda to connect remote places located adjacent to the border;
  14. To set up model dairy, fishery, horticulture and poultry farms/training centres at different places in all the 4 districts to encourage youth for self-employment;
  15. To enhance the existing facilities in veterinary hospitals in BTC area.
- 10.3 Government of India will provide necessary one time financial assistance required for development of administrative infrastructure in the newly created district headquarters, sub-divisional headquarters and block headquarters, besides the BTC Secretariat Complex at Kokrajhar.

## 11. Centrally Funded University

- 11.1 A centrally funded Central Institute of Technology (CIT) will be set up to impart education in various technological/vocational disciplines such as Information Technology, Bio-Technology, Food Processing, Rural Industries, Business Management, etc.
- 11.2 The CIT will be subsequently upgraded to a Centrally Funded State University with technical and non-technical disciplines to be run by the BTC.

## 12. Relief and Rehabilitation

- 12.1 The BLT would join the national mainstream and shun the path of violence in the interest of peace and development. After the formation of the interim council of BTC, BLT will dissolve itself as an organisation and surrender with arms within a week of swearing-in of the interim council. The State Government would provide full support to relief and rehabilitation of the members of BLT who would surrender with arms in this process in accordance with the existing policy of the State. Financial support in such cases, however shall be limited to be provisions of the scheme prepared and funded by the Government of India. Withdrawal of cases against such persons and those related to overground Bodo movement since 1987 shall be considered according to the existing policy of the State of Assam.
- 12.2 The Government of India will initiate steps for review of action against the Bodo employees of Government of India and subordinate officers as well as in respect of Central Government Undertakings. Similar action would be taken by the Government of Assam.
- 12.3 Bodo youth will be considered for recruitment in Police, Army and Paramilitary forces to increase their representation in these forces.
13. Special Rehabilitation Programme for the people affected by ethnic disturbances: The Special Rehabilitation Programme (SRP) for the people affected by ethnic disturbances in Assam, who are at present living at relief camps in Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon etc. shall be completed by the Government of Assam with active support of BTC. Necessary funds for their rehabilitation shall be provided by the Government of India and lands which are free from all encumbrances required for such rehabilitation shall be made available by the BTC.

## 14. Interim Council

Immediately after signing of the agreement, Interim Executive Council for BTC shall be formed by Governor of Assam from amongst the leaders of the present Bodo movement, including the signatories to this settlement, and shall include adequate representation to the non-tribal communities in BTC area. The Interim Council shall not continue for a period beyond 6 months during which period election to the Council shall be held. Government of Assam shall dissolve the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) and repeal the BAC Act.

15. Government of Assam will consider inclusion of all tribals including Bodos in RHAC/MAC/LAC in consultation with leaders of these Councils.

**16.** The implementation of the provision of the Memorandum of Settlement shall be periodically reviewed by a Committee comprising representatives of Government of India, Government of Assam and BTC.

Signed on 10th February 2003 at New Delhi in the presence of Shri L.K. Advani, Hon'ble Deputy Prime Minister of India and Shri Tarun Gogoi, Chief Minister of Assam.

(Hagrama Basumatary)  
Chairman  
Bodo Liberation Tigers

(P.K. Dutta)  
Chief Secretary  
Govt. of Assam

(R.C.A. Jain)  
Secretary (BM)  
Ministry of Home Affairs  
Govt of India

## Appendix M

### 10 Year Akbar Hydari Agreement: June 1947

1. That the right of the Nagas to develop themselves according to their expressed wishes is recognised.

1. Judicial—All cases, whether civil or criminal, arising between Nagas in Naga Hills will be disposed of by duly constituted Naga Courts according to the Naga customary laws or such as may be introduced with the consent of the duly recognised Naga representative organisations save that where a sentence of transportation or death has been passed there will be right of appeal to the Governor.

In cases arising between Nagas and Non-Nagas in (a) Kohima and Mokokchung Town areas, and (b) The judge in the neighbouring plain districts, if not Naga, will be assisted by a Naga assessor.

2. Executive—The general principle is accepted that what the Naga National Council is prepared to pay for, the Naga National Council should control. This principle will apply equally to the work done as well as the staff employment. While the Naga District Officer will be appointed at the discretion of the Governor, sub-divs of the Naga Hills should be administered by a sub-divisional council, who would be responsible to the District Officer for all matters falling within the latter's responsibility and to the Naga National Council for all matters falling within their responsibility.

In regard to: (a) Agriculture—The Naga National Council will exercise all the powers now vested in the District Officers.

(b) C.W.D.—The Naga National Council will take over full control.

(c) Education and Forest Department. The Naga National Council is prepared to pay for all the services and staff.

3. Legislative—That no law passed by the provincial or Central Legislature which would materially affect the terms of this agreement or the religious practices of the Nagas shall have legal force in the Naga Hills without the consent of the Naga National Council. In case of dispute as to whether any law did so affect this agreement, the matter would be referred by the Naga National Council to the Governor who then may direct the law in question should not have legal force in the Naga Hills pending the decision of the Central Govt.

4. Land—That with all its resources, the Naga Hills should not be alienated to a non-Naga without the consent of the Naga National Council.

5. Taxation—That the Naga National Council will be responsible for the imposition, collection and expenditure of land revenue and house-tax and of such other taxes as may be imposed by the Naga National Council.

6. Boundaries—That the present administrative division should be modified so as (1) to bring back to the Naga Hills District all the forest areas transferred to the Sibsagar and Nowgong Districts in the past; and (2) to bring under one unified administrative unit, as far as possible, all Naga areas so included would be within the scope of the present proposed Agreement. No areas should be transferred out of the Naga Hills without the consent of the Naga National Council.

7. Arms Act—The District Officer will act on the advice of the Naga National Council in accordance with the provision of the Arms Act.

8. Regulations—The Chin Hills Regulations and the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations will remain in force.

9. Period of Agreement—The Governor of Assam as the agent of the Govt of Indian Union will have a special responsibility for a period of 10 years to ensure the due observance of this agreement; at the end of this period, the Naga National Council will be asked whether they require the above Agreement to be extended for a further period, or a new agreement regarding the future of the Naga people be arrived at.

## Appendix N

### The Shillong Agreement of November 11, 1975

1. The following representatives of the underground organisations met the Governor of Nagaland, Shri L.P. Singh representing the Government of India, at Shillong on 10th and 11th November, 1975.
  1. Shri I. Temjenba
  2. Shri S. Dahru
  3. Shri Veeniyi Rhakhu
  4. Shri Z. Ramyo
  5. Shri M. Assa
  6. Shri Kevi Yallay
2. There was a series of four discussions. Some of the discussions were held with the Governor alone; at others, the Governor was assisted by the two Advisors for Nagaland, Shri M. Ramunny, and Shri H. Zopianga, and Shri M. L. Kampano, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs. All the five members of the Liaison Committee, namely Rev. Longri Ao, Dr M. Aram, Shri L. Lungalang, Shri Kenneth Kerhuo, and Shri Lungshim Shaiza, participated in the discussions.
3. The following were the outcome of the discussions:
  - (i) The representatives of the underground organisations conveyed their decision, of their own volition, to accept, without condition, the Constitution of India.
  - (ii) It was agreed that the arms, now underground, would be brought out and deposited at appointed places. Details for giving effect to this agreement will be worked out between them and representatives of the Government, the security forces, and members of the Liaison Committee.
  - (iii) It was agreed that the representatives of the underground organisations should have reasonable time to formulate other issues for discussion for final settlement.

Dated Shillong,  
November 11, 1975

Sd/-(I. Temjenba)

Sd/-(S. Dahru)

Sd/-(Z. Ramyo)

Sd/-(M. Assa)

Sd/-(Kevi Yallay)



On behalf of the representative of underground organisations.

Representative of the Government of India  
Sd/-(L.P. Singh)  
On behalf of the Government of India.

## Supplementary Agreement of January 5, 1976

Implementation of Clause II of the Shillong Accord of November 11, 1975

1. It was decided that the collection of arms, initially at collection centres, would commence as early as possible, and will be completed by 25th January, 1976. Initial places of collection to be decided through discussion between Commissioner, representatives of underground organisations and the members of the Liaison Committee.
2. Once all arms are collected, these will be handed over to Peace Council team at the respective places of collection.
3. Peace Council team will arrange to transport the arms from collection centres to Chedema peace camp and arrange guards, etc., for safe custody of arms.
4. Similar arrangement at agreed place/places will be made in Manipur with the concurrence of the Manipur Government.
5. The underground may stay at peace camps to be established at suitable places, and their maintenance will be arranged only by the Peace Council. Any voluntary contribution from any source will be made to the Peace Council who will utilise the fund according to necessity.

Sd/-

(L.P. Singh)

Governor

1. Sd/-

(Biseto Medom Keyho)

2. Sd/-

(Pukrove Nakru)

3. Sd/-

(Z. Ramyo)

4. Sd/-

(I. Temjenba)

Place: Shillong

Dated January 5, 1976

## Appendix O

# Manipur Merger Agreement, 1949

Agreement made this twenty first day of September, 1949 between the Governor General of India and His Highness, The Maharaja of Manipur.

Whereas in the best interests of the State of Manipur as well as the Dominion of India it is desirable to provide for the administration of the said State by or under authority of the Dominion Government.

IT IS HEREBY AGREED AS FOLLOWS:

### Article I

His Highness The Maharaja of Manipur hereby cedes to the Dominion Government full and exclusive authority, jurisdiction and powers for and in relation to the governance of the State and agrees to transfer administration of the State to the Dominion Government on the fifteenth day of October 1949 (there in after referred to as 'the said day'). As from the said day the Dominion Government will be competent to exercise the said powers, authority and jurisdiction in such manner and through such agency as it may think fit.

### Article II

His Highness the Maharaja shall continue to enjoy the same personal rights, privileges, dignities, titles, authority over religious observances, customs, usages, rites and ceremonies and institutions in charge of the same in the State, which he would have enjoyed had this agreement not been made.

### Article III

His Highness the Maharaja shall with effect from the said day be entitled to receive for his lifetime from the revenue of the State annually for his Privy Purse the sum of Rupees three lakhs free of all taxes. This amount is intended to cover all the expenses of the Ruler and his family, including expenses on account of his personal staff and armed guards, maintenance of his residences, marriages and other ceremonies, etc. and the allowances to the Ruler's relations who on the date of execution of this agreement were in receipt of such allowances from the revenues of the State, and will neither be increased nor reduced for any reason whatsoever. The Government of India undertake

that the said sum of Rupees three lakhs shall be paid to His Highness the Maharaja in four equal instalments in advances at the beginning of each quarter from the State treasury or at such other treasury as may be specified by the Government of India.

#### **Article IV**

His Highness the Maharaja shall be entitled to the full ownership, use and enjoyment of all private properties (as distinct from State properties) belonging to him on the date of this agreement. His Highness the Maharaja will furnish to the dominion Government before the first January 1950, an inventory of all the immovable property, securities and cash balance held by him as such private property. If any dispute arises as to whether any item of properties, the private property of His Highness the Maharaja or State property, it shall be referred to a Judicial Officer qualified to be appointed as a High Court Judge, and the decision of that officer shall be final and binding on both parties. Provided that His Highness the Maharaja's right to the use of the residences known as 'Redlands' and 'Les Chatalettes' in Shillong, and the property in the town of Gauhati known as 'Manipuri Basti' shall not be questioned.

#### **Article V**

All the members of His Highness's family shall be entitled to all the personal rights, privileges, dignities and titles enjoyed by them whether within or outside the territories of the State, immediately before the 15th August, 1947.

#### **Article VI**

The Dominion Government guarantees the succession, according to law and custom, to the gaddi of the State and to His Highness the Maharajah's personal rights, privileges, dignities, titles, authority over religious observances, customs usages, rites and ceremonies and institutions in charge of the same in the State.

#### **Article VII**

No enquiry shall be made by or under the authority of the Government of India, and no proceedings shall lie in any Court in Manipur, against His Highness the Maharaja whether in a personal capacity or otherwise in respect of anything done or omitted to be done by him or under his authority during the period of his administration of that State.

#### **Article VIII**

The Government of India hereby guarantees either the continuance in service of the permanent members of the Public Services of Manipur on conditions which will be not less advantageous than those on which they were serving before the date on which the administration of Manipur is made over to the Government of India or the payment of reasonable compensation.

The Government of India further guarantees the continuance of pensions and leave salaries sanctioned by His Highness the Maharaja to servants of the State who have retired or proceeded on leave preparatory to retirement, before the date on which the administration of Manipur is made over to the Government of India.

The Government of India shall also undertake to make suitable provisions for the employment of Manipuris in the various branches of Public Services, and in every way encourage Manipuris to join them. They also undertake to preserve various laws, customs and conventions prevailing in the State pertaining to the social, economic and religious life of the people.

## Article IX

Except with the previous sanction of the Government of India no proceedings, civil or criminal, shall be instituted against any person in respect of any act done or purporting to be done in the execution of his duties as a servant of the State before the day on which the administration is made over to the Government of India.

In confirmation whereof Mr Vapal Pangunni Menon, Adviser to the Government of India in the Ministry of State, has appended his signature on behalf and with the authority of the Governor General of India and His Highness Maharaja Bodh Chandra Singh, Maharaja of Manipur has appended his signature on behalf of himself, his heirs and successors.

BODH CHANDRA SINGH,

Maharaja of Manipur

V.P. MENON,  
Governor of Assam  
Shillong

SRI PRAKASH  
Adviser to the Government of India  
(Ministry of State)

September 21, 1949

## Appendix P

# Memorandum of Settlement with MNF

Test signed in New Delhi between the MNF leader Laldenga and the Government of India, 30 June 1986.

### **Preamble**

1. Government of India have all along been making earnest efforts to bring about an end to the disturbed conditions in Mizoram and to restore peace and harmony.

Towards this end, initiative was taken by the late Prime Minister, Smt Indira Gandhi. On the acceptance by Shri Laldenga on behalf of Mizo National Front (MNF) of the two conditions, namely cessation of violence by MNF and holding of talks within the framework of the Constitution of India, a series of discussions were held with Shri Laldenga. Settlement on various issues reached during the course of the talks is incorporated in the following paragraphs.

### **Restoration of Normalcy**

1. With a view to restoring peace and normalcy in Mizoram the MNF party, on their part, undertakes within the agreed timeframe, to take all necessary steps to end all underground activities to bring out all underground personnel of the MNF with their arms, ammunition and equipment to ensure their return to civil life, to abjure violence and generally to help in the process of restoration of normalcy. The modalities of bringing out all underground personnel and the deposit of arms, ammunition and equipment will be as worked out. The implementation of the foregoing will be under the supervision of the Central Government.
2. The MNF party will take immediate steps to amend its articles of association so as to make them conform to the provision of law.
3. The Central Government will take steps for the resettlement of underground MNF personnel coming overground after considering the schemes proposed in this regard by the Government of Mizoram.
4. The MNF undertakes not to extend any support to Tripura/Tribal National Volunteers (TNV), People's Liberation Army of Manipur (PLA) and any other such groups, by way of training, supply of arms providing protection or in any other manner.

## Legal, Administrative and Other Steps

1. With a view to satisfying the desires and aspirations of all sections of the people of Mizoram, the Government will initiate measures to confer Statehood on the Union Territory of Mizoram, subject to other stipulations contained in this Memorandum of Settlement.
2. To give effect to the above, the necessary legislative and administrative measures will be undertaken, including those for the enactment of Bills for the amendment of the Constitution and other laws for the conferment of Statehood as aforesaid, to come into effect on a date to be notified by the Central Government.
3. The amendments aforesaid shall provide, among other things, for the following.
  - I. The territory of Mizoram shall consist of territory specified in Section 6 of the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971.
  - II. Notwithstanding anything contained in the Constitution, no Act of Parliament in respect of
    - a. religious and social practices of the Mizos,
    - b. Mizo customary law or procedure,
    - c. administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Mizo customary law,
    - d. ownership and transfer of land, shall apply to the State of Mizoram unless the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram by a resolution so decides:  
Provided that nothing in this clause shall apply to any Central Act in force in Mizoram immediately before the appointed day.
  - III. Article 170, Clause (1) shall, in relation to the Legislative Assembly of Mizoram, have effect as if for the word 'sixty', the word 'forty' has been substituted.
1. Soon after the Bill for conferment of Statehood becomes law, and when the President is satisfied that normalcy has returned and that conditions conducive to holding of free and fair elections exist, the process of holding elections to the Legislative Assembly will be initiated.
2.
  - a. The Centre will transfer resources to the new Government keeping in view the change in status from Union Territory to a State and this will include resources to cover the revenue gap for the year.
  - b. Central assistance for Plan will be fixed taking note of any residuary gap in resources so as to sustain the approved Plan outlay and the pattern of assistance will be as in the case of special category States.
3. Border trade in locally produced or grown agriculture commodities could be allowed under a scheme to be formulated by the Central Government, subject to international arrangements with neighbouring countries.
4. The Inner Line Regulations, as now in force in Mizoram, will not be amended or repealed without consulting the State Government.

## Other Matters

5. The rights and privileges of the minorities in Mizoram, as envisaged in the Constitution, shall continue to be preserved and protected and their social and economic advancement shall be ensured.

6. Steps will be taken by the Government of Mizoram at the earliest to review and codify the existing customs, practices, laws or other usages relating to the matters specified in clauses (a) to (d) of para 4.3 (II) of the Memorandum, keeping in view that an individual Mizo may prefer to be governed by Acts of Parliament dealing with such matters and which are of general application.
7. The question of the unification of Mizo-inhabited areas of other States to form one administrative unit was raised by the MNF delegation. It was pointed out to them, on behalf of Government of India, that Article 3 of the Constitution of India prescribes the procedure in this regard but that the Government cannot make any commitment in this respect.
8. It was also pointed out on behalf of the Government that as soon as Mizoram becomes a State
  - i. the provisions of Part XVII of the Constitution will apply and the State will be at liberty or more of the languages in use in the State as the language to be used for all or any of the official purposes of the State;
  - ii. it is open to the State to move for the establishment of a separate University in the State in accordance with prescribed procedure;
  - iii. in light of the Prime Minister's statement at the joint conference of the Chief Justice, Chief Ministers and Law Ministers held at New Delhi on 31st August, 1985, Mizoram will be entitled to have a High Court of its own, if it so wishes.
1. (a) It was noted that there is already a scheme in force for payment of ex gratia amount to heirs/dependants of persons who were killed during disturbances in 1966 and thereafter in the Union Territory of Mizoram. Arrangements will be made to expeditiously disburse payment to those eligible persons who had already applied but who had not been made such payments so far.
  - a. It was noted that consequent on verification done by a joint team of officers, the Government of India had already made arrangements for payment of compensation in respect of damage to crops; buildings destroyed/damaged during the action in Mizoram; and rental charges of buildings and lands occupied by the Security Forces. There may, however be some claims which were preferred and verified by the above team but have not yet been settled. These pending claims will be settled expeditiously. Arrangements will also be made for payment of pending claims of rental charges for lands/buildings occupied by the Security Forces.

(Signed)  
LALDENGA  
On behalf of  
Mizo National Front

(Signed)  
R.D. PRADHAN  
Home Secretary  
Government of India

LALKHAMA  
Chief Secretary  
Government of Mizoram

Date: 30 June, 1986  
Place: NEW DELHI

## Sequence of Events

The Memorandum of Settlement contemplates the following sequence of events:

1. Coming overground of MNF personnel and depositing of arms, ammunition and equipment by them in accordance with the time bound programme as already agreed upon between the Ministry of Home Affairs and the MNF delegation.
2. The MNF Party should take immediate steps to amend its Articles of Association to make them conform to the provisions of law.
3. Government will initiate steps for rehabilitation of MNF personnel coming overground.
4. After completion of action under paragraph (1) and (2) above, a Constitution Amendment Bill will be introduced in Parliament for the grant of Statehood and other consequential legislative measures to be taken up.
5. After the Bill becomes law, preparation for delimitation of constituencies and holding elections to the State Legislature will be taken on hand when the President is satisfied that normalcy has been restored.



## Appendix Q

### Memorandum of Understanding with TNV

The following is the text of the 'memorandum of understanding' to end insurgency in Tripura.

#### **Preamble**

Government of India has been making efforts to bring about a satisfactory settlement of the problems of tribals in Tripura by restoring peace and harmony in areas where disturbed conditions prevailed.

The Tripura National Volunteers (TNV), through their letter dated 4 May 1988, addressed to the Governor of Tripura and signed by Shri Bijoy Kumar Harankhawl, stated that keeping in view the Prime Minister Shri Rajiv Gandhi's policy of solution of problems through negotiations, TNV have decided to abjure violence, give up secessionist demand and to hold negotiations for peaceful solution for all the problems of Tripura within the Constitution of India. The TNV also furnished its by-laws which conform to the laws in force. On this basis a series of discussions were held with representatives of TNV.

The following were the outcome of the discussions:

#### **Deposit of Arms and Ammunition and Stopping of Underground Activities by TNV**

The TNV undertakes to take all necessary steps to end underground activities and to bring out all undergrounds of the TNV with their arms, ammunition and equipment within one month of signing of this memorandum. Details for given effect to this part of settlement will be worked and implemented under the supervision of the Central Government.

The TNV further undertakes to ensure that it does not resort to violence and to help in restoration of amity between different sections of the population.

The TNV undertakes not to extend any support to any other extremist group by way of training, supply of arms or providing of protection or in any other manner.

#### **Rehabilitation of Undergrounds**

Suitable steps will be taken for the resettlement and rehabilitation of TNV undergrounds coming overground in the light of the schemes drawn up for the purpose.

## **Measures to Prevent Infiltration**

Stringent measures will be taken to prevent infiltration from across the border by strengthening arrangements on the border and construction of roads along vulnerable sections of the Indo-Bangladesh border in Tripura Sector for better patrolling and vigil. Vigorous actions against such infiltrators will also be taken under the law.

## **Reservation of Seats in the Tripura Legislative Assembly for Tribals**

With a view to satisfying the aspirations of tribals of Tripura for a greater share in the governance of the State, legislative measures will be taken including those for the enactment of the Bill for the amendment of the Constitution.

The Constitutional amendments shall provide that notwithstanding anything in the Constitution, the Legislative Assembly of Tripura reserved for scheduled tribes shall be such number of seats, a proportion not less than the number, as on the date of coming into force of the constitutional amendment, of members belonging to the scheduled tribes in the existing Assembly bears to the total number of seats in the existing Assembly.

The Representation of People's Act, 1950, shall also be amended to provide for reservation of 20 seats for scheduled tribes in the Assembly of Tripura. However, the amendments shall not effect any representation in the existing Assembly of Tripura until its dissolution.

## **Restoration of Alienated Lands of Tribals**

It was agreed that following actions will be taken:

- i. Review of rejected applications for restoration of tribal land under the Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960;
- ii. Effective implementation of the law for restoration;
- iii. Stringent measures to prevent fresh alienation;
- iv. Provision of soil conservation measures and irrigation facilities in tribal areas; and
- v. Strengthening of the agricultural credit system so as to provide for an appropriate agency with adequate tribal representation to ensure easy facilities for both consumption and operational credit to tribals.

## **Redrawing of the Boundaries of Autonomous District Council Area**

Tribal majority villages which now fall outside the autonomous district council area and are contiguous to such area will be included in the autonomous district and similarly placed non-tribal majority villages presently in the autonomous district and on the periphery may be excluded.

## **Measures for Long-run Economic Development of Tripura**

Maximum emphasis will be placed on extensive and intensive skills-formation of the tribal youths of Tripura so as to improve their prospects of employment including

self-employment in various trades such as motor workshops, pharmacies, electronic goods, carpentry, tailoring, stationery, weaving, rice and oil mills, general stores, fishery, poultry, piggery, horticulture, handloom and handicrafts.

Special intensive recruitment drives will be organised for police and paramilitary forces in Tripura with a view to enlisting as many tribal youth as possible.

All-India Radio will increase the duration and content of their programmes in tribal languages and dialects of Tripura. Additional transmitting stations will be provided for coverage even to the remoter areas of the State.

The demands relating to self-employment of tribals, issue of permits for vehicles to tribals for commercial purposes, visits of tribalmen and women to such places in the country as may be of value from the viewpoint of inspiration, training and the experience in relevant fields will be considered sympathetically by the Government.

At least 2,500 *Jhumia* families will be rehabilitated in five centres or more in accordance with model schemes based on agriculture, horticulture including vegetable growing, animal husbandry, fisheries and plantations, with a view to weaning them away from Jhum cultivation. The scheme would also provide for housing assistance.

In the autonomous district council area of Tripura, rice, salt and kerosene oil will be given at subsidised rates during lean months for a period of three years.

Conscious effort will be made for effective implementation of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution insofar as it relates to Tripura.

## Appendix R

# Memorandum of Settlement with GNLF

The demands of GNLF have been considered by the Government of India and the Government of West Bengal and consequent upon the tripartite meeting between Shri Buta Singh, Union Home Minister, Shri Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister of West Bengal and Shri Subash Ghising, President, GNLF at New Delhi on 25.7.1988, it is hereby agreed between Government of India, Government of West Bengal and GNLF as below:

### 1. Separate State of Gorkhaland

In the overall national interest and in response to Prime Minister's call, the GNLF agree to drop the demand for a separate State of Gorkhaland. For the social, economic, educational and cultural advancement of the people residing in the Hill areas of Darjeeling District, it was agreed to have an autonomous Hill Council to be set up under a State Act. The salient features of the Hill Council would be as follows:

- 1(i) The name of the Council will be '**Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council**'.
- 1(ii) The Council will cover the three hill sub-divisions of Darjeeling district, namely Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kureong, plus the Mauzas of Lohagarh T.C. Lohagarh Forest, Eangmohan, Barachenga, Panighata, Choto Adalpur, Paharu, Sukna Forest, Sukna Part-I, Pantapati Forest-I, Mahanadi Forest, Champasari Forest and Salbari Chhat Part I within Siliguri subdivision.
- 1(iii) The State Government agrees to lease to the Council after it is formed, or acquire for it the use of such land as may be required and necessary for administrative and development purposes, anywhere in the State and in particular in or around 'Darjeeling More' in Siliguri subdivision.
- 1(iv) The executive powers of the Council will cover the following subjects, subject to the provisions of the Central and State laws:
  - (1) The allotment, occupation or use, or setting apart, of land other than any land which is a reserved forest, for the purpose of agriculture or grazing, or for residential or non-agricultural purposes, or for any other purpose likely to promote the interest of the inhabitants of any village, locality or town;
  - (2) The management of any forest, not being a reserved forest;
  - (3) The use of any canal or water course for the purpose of agriculture;
  - (4) Agriculture;
  - (5) Public health and sanitation, hospitals and dispensaries;
  - (6) Tourism;

- (7) Vocational training;
  - (8) Public works—development and planning;
  - (9) Construction and maintenance of all roads except National highways and State highways;
  - (10) Transport and development of transport;
  - (11) Management of burials and burial grounds, cremation and cremation grounds;
  - (12) Preservation, protection and improvement of livestock and prevention of animal diseases, veterinary training and practice;
  - (13) Pounds and the preservation of cattle trespass;
  - (14) Water, that is to say, water supplies, irrigation and canals, drainage and embankment, water storage;
  - (15) Fisheries;
  - (16) Management of markets and fairs not being already managed by Municipal authorities, Panchayat Samiti or Gram Panchayats;
  - (17) Education—primary, secondary and higher secondary;
  - (18) Works, lands and buildings vested in or in the lawful possession of the Council.
  - (19) Small scale or cottage industries.
- 1(v) The Council shall exercise the general powers of supervision over Panchayats and Municipalities falling within the area of the Council's jurisdiction.
  - 1(vi) The General Council will have a total of 42 Members out of which 28 will be elected and the rest nominated by the State Government.
  - 1(vii) There will be an Executive Council and the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the General Council will be ex-officio members of the Executive Council with the Chairman of the Executive Council functioning as the Chief Executive Councillor. The Chief Executive Councillor will nominate 5 members to the Executive Council from out of the elected members of the Council and the State Government will nominate 2 members to the Executive Council from out of the non-official nominated members of the General Council.
  - 1(viii) The Chairman of the General Council cum Chief Executive Councillor will have the ex-officio status and privileges of a Minister in the Council of Ministers in the State.
  - 1(ix) The Bill for the setting up of the Hill Council will be introduced and passed in a special session of the State Legislature which has been summoned. The election to the Hill Council will be held by the 15th December, 1988.

## 2. Restoration of Normalcy

### 2(i) Review of pending criminal cases:

It is agreed that a review will be done by the State Government of all the cases registered under various laws against persons involved in the GNLF agitation. Action will be taken, in the light of the review, not to proceed with prosecution in all cases except those charged with murder. Release of persons in custody will follow the withdrawal of cases. This review will be completed within 15 days of signing of the agreement.

2(ii) Action against Government servants:

The State Government agrees to withdraw all cases of disciplinary action taken against employees in the context of the agitation. There will be no victimisation of Government servants.

2(iii) The GNLF agrees to issue a call to its cadres for the surrender of all unauthorised arms to the district administration. It will be made clear in the call that such surrenders made voluntarily within the prescribed date will not attract any prosecution.

2(iv) The GNLF hereby agrees to withdraw all agitation activities and to extend full cooperation to the administration for the maintenance of peace and normalisation of the political process in the hill areas of Darjeeling.

Subash Ghising  
President, GNLF  
On behalf of GNLF

R.N. Sen Gupta  
Chief Secretary,  
On behalf of the  
Govt. of West Bengal

C.G. Somiah  
Union Home Secretary  
On behalf of the Central Government

In the presence of:  
Union Home Minister

Chief Minister  
Government of West Bengal

Place: Calcutta  
Date: August 22, 1988

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