



**crisis states programme**

development research centre



Working Paper no. 80

**A STATE OF ONE'S OWN: SECESSIONISM  
AND FEDERALISM IN INDIA**

**Neera Chandhoke**  
Developing Countries Research Centre

September 2006

Copyright © Neera Chandhoke, 2006

Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of material published in this Working Paper, the Crisis States Research Centre and LSE accept no responsibility for the veracity of claims or accuracy of information provided by contributors.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of the publisher nor be issued to the public or circulated in any form other than that in which it is published.

Requests for permission to reproduce this Working Paper, or any part thereof, should be sent to:  
The Editor, Crisis States Research Centre, LSE, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE

---

**Crisis States Programme**  
**Working papers series no.1**

ISSN 1740-5807 (print)  
ISSN 1740-5815 (on-line)

Development  
**DESTIN**  
Studies Institute



## Crisis States Research Centre

### ‘A State of One’s Own’: Secessionism and Federalism in India

Neera Chandhoke

Developing Countries Research Centre

*(I wish to thank Praveen Priyadarshi and Noni Meitei for great research assistance. I also wish to thank the members of the research team who conducted the surveys. This paper is part of a work in progress and comments, criticisms, and suggestions are more than welcome)*

#### Introduction

Ever since the ‘ethnic explosion’<sup>1</sup> and secessionism blasted across the world in the mid-1980s, theorists have worked overtime to devise solutions to what appears to be an intractable problem. The problem is simply this: how can the escalation of ethnic discontent into violence, armed struggle and demands for separation be pre-empted? Violent conflicts can be managed, but when politics in the violent mode overlaps with identity issues, the problem verges on the insoluble. However, ethnic wars have to be forestalled, simply because they have inflicted incalculable harm on the human condition - grave and massive violations of human rights, dislocations, homelessness, desecration, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

Basically, three solutions are on offer to resolve the problem: institutionalisation of democracy; federalism or decentralisation of power and resources;<sup>2</sup> and minority rights. Democracy assures citizens that their fundamental rights will be protected through the institutionalisation of two basic norms - participation and accountability. Federalism in and for plural societies is not only about decentralisation of power and resources to territorially distinct administrative units, it is also about such decentralisation to the dominant ethnic group which inhabits these territories, so that the group acquires a stake in the system. Democracy and federalism must be backed by the constitutional sanction of minority rights in order to prove effective.

This formulation is by no means uncontroversial.<sup>3</sup> Studies of the break-up of the former Soviet Union and erstwhile Yugoslavia suggest that control over local institutions supplies political elites with the political and economic resources to undertake mass mobilisation and wage separatist struggles. Bunce, for instance, argues that the communist federations ‘put into place virtually all the building blocks that are necessary for the rise of nationalist movements and for the formation of states’.<sup>4</sup> These federations recognised and promoted a common language,

---

<sup>1</sup> The term ethnicity is employed as shorthand for linguistic, religious, and tribal identities, this is not to say that each of these identities are not specific.

<sup>2</sup> The classic statement on political decentralisation has been made by Arendt Lipjhart, 1977, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, also Chaim Kaufman, 1996, ‘Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars’, *International Security*, 20, 4, 133-175, Donald Horowitz, 1991, *A Democratic South Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society*, Berkeley, University of California Press, and Eric Nordlinger, 1972, *Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of relevant literature see Ian S. Lustick, Dan Miodownik, and Roy J. Eidelson, 2004, ‘Secessionism in Multicultural States: Does Sharing Power Prevent or Encourage It?’ *American Political Science Review*, 98, 2, May, pp 209-229.

<sup>4</sup> Valerie Bunce, *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism*

created a sub-intelligentsia, trained and funded sub-national political elites, and provided the resources which sub-elites could use for legitimation.<sup>5</sup> On balance, however, the federal argument is preferred to the one that opposes federal arrangements. ‘Whereas decentralisation may provide cultural minorities with greater resources to engage in collective action...’ writes Hechter, ‘at the same time it may erode the demand for sovereignty’.<sup>6</sup>

The problem is that the establishment of democracy, federalism, and minority rights in India<sup>7</sup> has not precluded violent politics, armed rebellion, and secessionism in Punjab, Mizoram, Jammu and Kashmir (J and K), and Manipur. Today, Punjab and Mizoram are post-conflict societies but until the late 1980s these two states were wracked by tremendous violence and demands for secession. The other two states continue to be torn apart by the same phenomenon. Something has gone seriously wrong with the performance of democratic and federal institutions in this part of the country and it is the task of a responsible political theorist to see what has gone wrong and where. As Dunn sagely reminds us ‘the purpose of political theory is to diagnose political predicaments and to show us how best to confront them.’<sup>8</sup>

### Some Research Findings

The research team carried out surveys in the highest conflict district in each of the four states. Within the highest conflict district we carried out surveys in two sets of villages: high conflict areas [HCA] and low conflict areas [LCA]. A total of 1,298 surveys were conducted over the four states. The sample size is admittedly small and inadequate if the objective is to present work which is data-based and data-driven. However, the survey does not seek to provide a comprehensive base for explanation, nor was it meant to do so. The objective of the survey in the highest conflict areas of the four states was to capture resonances of voices ‘from below’, as distinct from the voices of either militant leaderships or that of the government, both of which claim to represent the inhabitants of conflict areas. I am more than aware that ‘voices from below’ are not only constituted by the experiential but also by the expressive, or by the way the problem has been articulated by the media, scholars, militant leaders and the government. In these days of transnational information flows, we can hardly attach authenticity to what we term ‘voices from below’, or regard these voices as a purely unmediated phenomenon. However, what can be done is to see these voices as a referral for an explanation that builds an argument on and around them.

For instance, secessionist demands in all four states can be easily and perhaps conveniently interpreted in terms of ethnic/religious identity. After all, erstwhile militants in Punjab fought -

---

*and the State*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 49.

<sup>5</sup> Valerie Bunce, 2004, ‘Federalism, Nationalism, and Secession: The Communist and Postcommunist Experience’ in Ugo M. Amoretti and Nancy Bermeo, ed *Federalism and Territorial Cleavages*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Press, p 49

<sup>6</sup> Michael Hechter, 2000, *Containing Nationalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, p 146

<sup>7</sup> In India, the formation of constituent states of the federation was based on the principle of language in the first round, and the principle of ethnicity combined with regional backwardness in the second and third rounds. Protective discrimination is extended to Scheduled Castes and Tribes, and minorities are assured of the right to their religion, culture, script, and the right to set up their own educational institutions, via articles 25 to 30 in the Constitution, with article 29 and 30 providing specific instances of minority rights.

<sup>8</sup> John Dunn, 1990, *Interpreting Political Responsibility*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

and today's militants in the Kashmir valley fight - in the cause of a religion that differs from the dominant religion in India which is Hinduism. The Mizo community is Christian. Radical sections of the Meitei community in Manipur increasingly reject Hinduism and opt for their traditional Sanamahi religion. Yet a larger percentage of respondents who said that democracy and accountability of institutions is the most important thing for them, think that identity is the cause of the conflict, compared to those who opted for independence/secession as the most important (table 1). Secondly, neglect of identity does not come across as a significant reason for blaming a particular agency or institution for conflict. Only 2.9 percent of those who think that political parties are one of the biggest factors for the outbreak of conflict think this is so because parties ignore identity issues and 6.5 percent of those who said that respective state governments are the biggest factor for the eruption of conflict, think this is so because the institution has ignored identity. A further 14 percent of respondents believe that the central government is responsible for the conflict because it has ignored identity issues. In the category of those who think that meeting basic needs is most important, 10 percent feel that the central government has ignored identity issues, and roughly 23 percent of those who want to secede from India want to do so because the central government has ignored identity issues. It should be noted that above all, respondents are equally divided on the issue, since an equal proportion of respondents (39 percent) think that identity is, or is not, a reason for conflict. This trend is also seen in the case of those who want independence from India - 45 percent think identity is a reason for conflict and 47 percent do not. In short, those who hold political institutions responsible for the conflict, because these institutions ignore identity issues, are generally those who desire independence, *as well as* those who expect greater accountability from institutions.

**Table 1: Distribution of Identity as a reason for conflict across what is most important for the respondent**

Identity reason for Conflict	What is most important to you?							Total
	Independence from India	Accountability of Institutions	Functioning Democracy	Meeting Basic Needs	Others	DK/NR	Missing	
Yes	45.9	55.6	53.0	30.9	29.3	30.6	41.7	39.2
No	47.2	37.8	35.4	36.6	56.0	27.8	16.7	39.8
DK/NR	5.6	5.9	9.9	31.3	13.8	38.9	16.7	19.6
Missing	1.3	0.7	1.7	1.2	0.9	2.8	25.0	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No. of Observations	233	135	181	585	116	36	12	1,298

This is not to say that identity is not important for most people most of the time. Compared to the 27 percent of respondents for whom independence is most important, 38 percent of those respondents for whom a functioning democracy is most important see identity as *very* important. Furthermore, whereas only 18 percent of our potential secessionists see identity as important, almost 30 percent of those respondents for whom institutional accountability is most important see identity as important. The fact that identity is important for people across the board is further borne out by the finding that a greater percentage of respondents who felt that meeting basic needs was most important for them, visit religious places more often than those who want to

separate from India.<sup>9</sup> In effect, *more* people who do *not* subscribe to secessionism view identity as *very* important or as *important* compared to those who do subscribe to it (table 2).

**Table 2: Distribution of the importance of identity across what is most important for the respondent, (answers for all tables in percentages)**

Identity	What is most important to you?							Total
	Independence from India	Accountability of Institutions	Functioning Democracy	Meeting Basic Needs	Others	DK/NR	Missing	
V. Important	27.0	23.0	38.1	14.4	14.7	11.1	41.7	21.0
Important	18.0	29.6	11.0	16.6	14.7	19.4	0.0	17.2
Negligible	0.4	1.5	1.7	0.5	0.9	2.8	0.0	0.8
Not Imp.	0.4	0.0	1.1	0.0	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.3
DK/NR	1.3	1.5	3.3	2.4	0.0	2.8	0.0	2.0
Missing	52.8	44.4	44.8	66.2	69.0	63.9	58.3	58.6
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No. of Observations	233	135	181	585	116	36	12	1,298

We can accept that identities are important for people across the board; perhaps it gives us a metaphorical address in an otherwise homeless world. However, a political analyst is more interested in another question - how and why do identities come to be politicised and harnessed to particular projects, e.g. secessionism, in the first place? The case of Mizoram is exceptional; the ethnic factor plays a negligible role here, because Mizo society is more or less mono-religious and therefore less susceptible to the kind of politicisation, fractionalisation and polarisation that we have seen in, for example, Manipur. But in the other three states, identities have been politicised to a large extent, even if identity anxieties may not be a proximate cause for conflict.

The first proposition of this essay accordingly is this: we need to look beyond the enactment of what are euphemistically termed identity wars to see what led to the politicisation of identities in the first place.

The second proposition is the following: identities are politicised and harnessed to projects of violent resistance/secessionism when political agreements are violated, when institutions default on the promises that underpin the institutionalisation of norms - that politics will be conducted according to rules and not according to arbitrary and whimsical personalised regimes - and when popular expectations of institutions remain unfulfilled. For instance, if we look at the statistical profile of our potential secessionists, out of the 18 percent of our total respondents for whom independence/secession is most important, 51 percent feel that basic needs are a problem. Surprisingly, 24 percent of those who want independence believe that democracy has functioned well, but 60 percent in the same category are not satisfied with the functioning of the democratic system in India. On the other hand an equal number of respondents are of the opinion that neglect

<sup>9</sup> 45 percent of our respondents who identified basic needs as most important- as opposed to independence, democracy and institutional accountability- visit religious places more than once in a week. Comparably, only 17.5 percent of those for whom independence is most important go to their religious places that often.

of identity is, or is not, a cause for conflict. Clearly the so-called ‘ethnic wars’ appear to be wars not only over identity anxieties but over other things as well.

More importantly, 50 percent (or 650 out of a total of 1,298 respondents) are of the opinion that three political institutions - political parties, the state government and the central government - are the biggest factors for the outbreak of conflict. In this category 17 percent believe that political parties are the biggest factor, while figures for the state and central government stand at 14.7 percent and 15.1 percent respectively. If we combine these figures with the answers of those respondents who hold that these three institutions are an important reason for conflict, the numbers add up to a staggering total. About 70 percent of our total respondents have identified three political institutions as either the biggest or an important factor for the outbreak of conflict (Table 3).

**Table 3 Distribution of biggest or important factor for the three political institutions (answers in percentages)**

Political Institutions	Numbers	Percent
<b>Biggest Factor</b>		
Political Party	221	17.03
State Government	192	14.79
Central Government	196	15.1
<b>Important Factor</b>		
Political Party	92	7.09
State Government	131	10.09
Central Government	86	6.63
<b>Others</b>	380	29.28
Total	1,298	100

Why do respondents consider political institutions responsible for the outbreak of conflict? About 50 percent of respondents hold political institutions responsible for the conflict because they are corrupt; 60 percent of those who feel that political parties are the biggest reason for conflict consider this is so because parties are corrupt and about 40 percent of those respondents who hold the state government as the biggest factor for conflict said this was so because state governments are corrupt. In the category of those for whom accountability of institutions is important, a significant proportion of people have expressed the opinion that political institutions are corrupt. Notably, for those respondents who desire independence from India, corruption in political parties and in the state government is one of the main reasons for conflict. Among those for whom a functioning democracy is important, 22 percent feel that the central government is corrupt and 11 percent of those who want to secede from India also feel the same. The second largest percentage of respondents (39) who believe that political institutions are responsible for the conflict feel that this is so because they ignore basic needs, and about 20 percent of this number hold the state government responsible for the same. This finding with regard to basic needs is reinforced when we look at the responses to the question of what is important to the

respondent: independence, democracy, accountability or governance, and basic needs. The survey shows that 18.1 percent of respondents are of the opinion that independence is most important for them,<sup>10</sup> 10.5 percent feel that accountability is most important for them, 14.1 percent responded that democracy is most important for them, and as many as 45.5 percent are of the opinion that meeting basic needs is most important for them. As mentioned above, a relatively small number of respondents said that political institutions are responsible for the outbreak of conflict because they neglect identity.

**Table 4 Distribution of the reasons for conflict across political institutions**

Political Institutions	Corrupt	Ignore basic needs	Ignore identity	Others	DK/NR	Missing	Total
Political Parties	23.0	10.2	2.9	3.0	1.2	59.7	100
State Government	18.3	20.9	6.5	2.9	0.8	50.5	100
Central Government	8.2	8.5	13.9	15.0	0.8	53.6	100

The third proposition is that none of the three factors identified by the respondents as reasons for the outbreak of conflict i.e. corruption (the political factor), neglect of basic needs (the economic factor) and neglect of identity (the ethnic factor), stand alone. In all four cases, conflict has resulted from the intersection of at least two out of the three factors identified above. In Punjab if the denial of a linguistic state (the ethnic factor) catalysed mobilisation by the Akali Dal (AD), over time this initial resentment was compounded by the violation of the federal principle of regional autonomy by the central government (the political factor). In J and K, if a major breach of the terms on which the state acceded to India created anger, this was intensified when democracy was not given a chance to work in the state, again through violations of the principle of regional autonomy (political factors). The fact that the majority of inhabitants in the valley are Muslim, the majority of the inhabitants in Jammu - except in a few pockets - are Hindu and Sikh and the majority of the inhabitants in Ladakh are Buddhist, has served to sharpen the ethnic edge of politics and policies (the ethnic factor). Conflict in Manipur is the outcome of a major overlap between the political and the ethnic factor, whilst in Mizoram economic factors have intertwined with political ones to create armed violence.

Two issues need to be clarified before proceeding to elaborate these propositions. Firstly, we need to see what implications the employment of the term ‘corruption’ holds for the performance of political institutions. At one level, corruption is a descriptive term indicating misuse of public office for private gain. But at a deeper level corruption is a pejorative, and for that reason an

<sup>10</sup> As expected, those respondents who said that independence is most important for them are concentrated in conflict areas. 30 percent of our respondents in high conflict areas (HCAs) and 33 percent in low conflict areas (LCAs) in the Kashmir valley replied that independence is most important. In Manipur 39 percent in HCAs and 28 percent in LCAs said that independence is most important for them. In Boras, which is a LCA in Kashmir, 42.5 percent of the respondents saw independence as most important, but 31.3 percent also saw basic needs as most important. Similarly in Lamlai which is a HCA, 39 percent opted for independence as most important for them, but 20.8 said basic needs are most important for them. The respondents who did not see independence as important are predictably from the two post-conflict states of Punjab and Mizoram.

evaluative, term. Whereas corruption implies lack of probity, it also implies that the abuse of public office for private gain has led to mis-governance and a resultant loss of confidence in the capacity of institutions to regulate collective life. This is evident when we look at the linguistic and cultural connotations of corruption. In Punjab the word *bhrashtachar* indicates violation of codes of propriety. In the Mizo language the synonym for corruption carries strong moral overtones. *Eirukna* means misappropriation of public funds and *Hlemhletna* (*lemletna*) means general misconduct of both private and public affairs. In specifically political terms, these words indicate an increasing crisis of governance caused largely by unaccountability. The Kashmiri synonym for corruption- *Khunz* - stands for moral and political corruption in both private and public spheres. In Manipuri/ Meitei language, corruption is synonymous with *Senja-Thumja* or a non-performing government and a materially corrupt system.

To sum up, whereas the term corruption was interpreted as misconduct in both personal and public spheres, in the specific context of the question: ‘why are political institutions the most important factor for the outbreak of conflict?’, corruption can legitimately be interpreted to mean (a) appropriation of public office for personal ends, (b) mis-governance resulting in malfunctioning of political institutions and (c) loss of confidence in the capacity of institutions to govern according to rules.

Arguably, loss of confidence in public institutions carries far-reaching implications. For one, institutions embody a commitment that political or collective life will be conducted according to norms.<sup>11</sup> The legitimacy of institutions is predicated upon this, on the assumption that collective life will not prove chancy, contingent, or capricious. This is the classical Hobbesian resolution to the problem of contingency: human beings will give up everything except their right to self-preservation, provided the sovereign lends predictability to individual and collective life. The moment he stops doing so, the contract is dissolved. In the same way, institutions engender expectations that the activity we call politics will be governed by rules. But when the rules that govern relations between citizens and the state (democracy) or between different units of the state (federalism) are dishonoured or broken, citizens lose confidence in the ability of institutions to regulate collective life according to embedded norms. The use of the term corruption, which emerges as the single largest cause of conflict (re. political institutions), captures precisely this aspect of institutional performance in the four states.

It does not require a gigantic leap of the imagination to assume that when citizens lose confidence in institutions, they are compelled to resort to violence outside the sphere of formal politics, or in an extra-institutional space. Or because the political domain has been debilitated by the malfunctioning of institutions, politics spills out of institutional channels into the streets, the forests, and the hills. In other words, conflict occurs when the ability of political institutions to contain demands is incapacitated by the misuse of public office for private gain. This leads to mis-governance on the one hand and to lack of confidence on the other; processes which breed the expected results. The strong response to the issue of corruption by the people we surveyed seems to carry serious implications for the performance of political institutions.

The second issue is this: there is no necessary relationship between democracy and federalism. But if we assume that democracy rests on the normative precepts of participation and accountability, then federalism best serves to realise these precepts. Both institutions realise

---

<sup>11</sup> Political institutions need not be norm based; they may well rest on pragmatic considerations. However, democratic institutions should logically embody the norms of democracy.

popular sovereignty, which is the linchpin of modern democracies. It is this assumption that governed the adoption of both democracy and federalism in India. Therefore, when the federal principle is violated - for instance when regional autonomy is infringed by the central government - the democratic principles of participation and accountability are also violated.

### **Accounting for Conflict**

Let me reiterate the three propositions made above. Firstly, we need to look beyond the enactment of what are euphemistically termed identity wars and see what led to the politicisation of identities in the first place. Secondly, identities are politicised and harnessed to projects of violent resistance when political agreements are violated, when institutions default on the promises that underpin the institutionalisation of norms - that politics will be conducted according to rules and not according to arbitrary and whimsical personalized regimes - and when popular expectations of institutions are belied. Thirdly, none of the three factors identified by the respondents as reasons for the outbreak of conflict stand alone or by themselves. In all four cases, conflict has resulted from the intersection of at least two out of these three factors. However, I shall argue that *one* factor has proved decisive in the outbreak of conflict - the performance of political institutions, or the lack thereof.<sup>12</sup> I shall also argue that the decentralisation of power to dominant ethnic groups within the constituent states of the Indian Federation has actually resulted in the mobilisation of ethnicity. It is when violations of the federal/democratic principle combine with the politicisation of ethnicity, that conflicts become intractable.

This is not to say that basic needs are not significant. Whatever reasons different people have for pursuing their own projects, all of them have an essential interest in having their basic needs met. In other words, basic needs have to be met in order to allow people to do anything else. This is clear when the responses to two questions in our survey, (a) 'what is most important to you?' and (b) 'what do you identify as the biggest problem?' are correlated (table 5)

---

<sup>12</sup> Notably these three institutions-the central government, the state governments, and national and regional political parties - are a constitutive part of federalism in the country. Whereas power and resources are constitutionally divided between the central and the state governments, national and regional political parties simply make the system work.

**Table 5: Percentage distribution of biggest problem identified across ‘what is most important to you?’**

Biggest Problem	What is most Important to You?							
	Independence from India	Accountability of Institutions	Functioning Democracy	Meeting Basic Needs	Others	DK/NR	Missing	Total
Basic Needs	51.1	45.9	53.6	68.5	33.6	55.6	50.0	57.3
Security	10.7	12.6	4.4	1.9	4.3	11.1	0.0	5.4
Agricultural Productivity	1.3	0.0	2.8	1.7	3.4	0.0	0.0	1.7
Agricultural Inputs	0.0	0.7	2.2	1.2	0.9	0.0	0.0	1.0
Agricultural Prices	0.4	1.5	1.1	1.4	3.4	0.0	8.3	1.4
Unemployment	16.3	16.3	16.6	11.1	23.3	2.8	16.7	14.3
Governance	5.2	5.2	4.4	0.5	0.9	2.8	8.3	2.5
Issues Raised by Actors of Conflict	6.4	4.4	3.9	1.2	3.4	5.6	0.0	3.2
Others	0.0	0.7	0.6	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2
Missing	8.6	12.6	10.5	12.3	26.7	22.2	16.7	13.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

The finding that the neglect of basic needs is a reason for conflict in the four states makes sense when we recollect that all four states are predominantly agricultural economies with a large proportion of their citizens engaged in cultivation. Over the years agriculture has shown a consistent decline all over the country and the case of the four states is no different. For instance, in the mid 1960s the agricultural sector in Punjab was transformed by the introduction of Green Revolution technologies. Consequently the state emerged as the granary of India and led the country in terms of per-capita income until the end of the 1990s. Although the uneven effects of the agrarian revolution bred a class of dispossessed farmers and marginal peasants, Punjab has simply not experienced the kind of poverty we find in other states. More importantly, we cannot discover a negative correlation between militancy and agricultural performance during the highest phase of militancy from 1980 to 1992.<sup>13</sup> Amritsar and Gurdaspur in the Majha region, Ludhiana in the Malwa region, and Jullunder in the Doaba region, all of which were high conflict areas, actually performed better than low conflict areas. Therefore, there is little evidence that lack of economic opportunities was a direct reason for the outbreak of militancy. It was only in the 1990s that the Green Revolution ran out of steam. This was compounded by increased costs of production, stagnating returns, over-exploitation of natural resources, declining public and private sector investments, inadequate marketing and pricing mechanisms, insufficient processing of vegetables, fruits and other crops, dwindling research and extension inputs, low investment flows in agro-processing industries, and above all the withdrawal of the state from the supportive role that it played till the late 1980s. By 1998, 20 percent of the farming population - 24 percent of small farmers and 31 percent of marginal farmers - were below the poverty line.<sup>14</sup> In short,

<sup>13</sup> Militancy adversely affected both the real estate and the service sector to some extent.

<sup>14</sup> See Ramesh Chand, 1999, “Emerging Crisis in Punjab Agriculture: Severity and Options for Future” *Economic and Political Weekly. Special Issue on Agriculture*, March 27, pp A7-A10 in pg A3.

basic needs may be a problem today because of the crisis in Punjab agriculture. But Punjab is still way ahead of the other three states when it comes to economic opportunities.<sup>15</sup> It ranks low on the scale of poverty in the country, and the rate of unemployment which increased from 3.08 percent during 1993-94 to 4.15 percent on current daily statuses during 1999-2000, with urban unemployment among the educated youth higher than rural unemployment, is not high compared to the rest of the country.

J and K is a success story for another reason: the radical transformation of property relations via an ambitious programme of land reforms, which were initiated by Sheikh Abdullah from 1948 onwards. Land reforms were crucial since 80 percent of the population is engaged in agricultural activity. However, whereas increases in small holdings created a greater sense of equity, they also resulted in extreme fragmentation and parcelisation of land, with the average farm size (0.9 hectare) considerably below the size required for optimal farming. Small land holdings are negatively correlated with productivity because these do not benefit from modern techniques of production. Although by the mid 1960s financial assistance from the central government and institutional innovations led to high yields, cropping patterns, lack of irrigation, power shortages, climatic difficulties, and the low size of landholdings have resulted in a deficit of food grains. The state has to import grain, milk, mutton, cereals, vegetables and wool from neighbouring states. Low performance in agriculture and allied sectors has resulted in about 35 percent of the inhabitants being unemployed.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the state ranks low on human development indicators, particularly literacy.

Whereas Mizoram and Manipur rank high on human development indicators, both states have witnessed over the years stagnation in agriculture and rising unemployment. As part of the Northeast, Mizoram and Manipur fall within the genus of 'special category' states, directly receiving funds from the Central Government for development. In sharp contrast to the rest of the country, 90 percent of these funds are allocations and only 10 percent are treated as loans. Yet both states are economically backward. As a district of Assam, Mizoram received few benefits in terms of resources or investment and whatever resources were invested in the state went into agriculture and not into ameliorating the inadequate infrastructure. Matters did not improve after Mizoram was accorded the status of a Union Territory and then statehood. Until 1971 more than 83 percent of the work force was involved in agriculture, mainly shifting cultivation, and the figure came down to 61 percent only by 1991. The Third Five Year Plan introduced a special development plan for the state in 1963-64, but the outbreak of armed insurgency in 1996 hampered development. For one, during the course of the militancy about 20,000 families were displaced and resettled in new villages for security reasons. This undercut the system of land holdings and affected production of food grains. Since then the state has imported food from the rest of the country. Mizoram is one of the most economically underdeveloped states in the country. Only 17.44 percent of the net cultivated area is irrigated, per capita power consumption is far below national figures, and per capita incomes are much below the national average. Above all, unemployment is a serious problem with 400,000 youth seeking jobs.

---

<sup>15</sup> But only Goa and J and K have poverty levels lower than Punjab.

<sup>16</sup> *State Development Report: Jammu and Kashmir*, 2004, Delhi, Planning Commission, Government of India, pg xxvi.

In Manipur, agriculture and allied activities are the mainstay of the economy in both the hills and the valley. The Fifth Five Year Plan which focussed on the development of irrigation, power and infrastructure boosted agricultural growth in the state. But from the late 1970s food production in the state has been badly affected by successive droughts and floods on the one hand, and by a volatile political situation on the other. This has led to negative or low growth in food grain production from the 1970s onwards. Decline in agriculture has resulted in a major problem of unemployment, compounded by seasonal unemployment and under-employment in rural areas. Whereas more than 200,000 people were registered on the live register of the employment exchange in 1993, the number went up to more than 300,000 in 2000.<sup>17</sup> Per capita income in the state is well below the national average and 40 percent of rural people in the state are below the poverty line compared to the 27 percent national average.

It is clear that agricultural decline in all four states has led to serious unemployment, which is compounded by the fact that all four states have weak industrial economies. Since all four are border states, the central government has not invested in heavy industry for security reasons, and private entrepreneurs have shied away because of political instability. Punjab, which inherited a weak industrial base in 1947, is dominated by small scale industries which do not generate commensurate employment. In J and K, poor infrastructure and an adverse investment climate have left the industrial sector in its infancy. Medium scale industries operating under the public sector have performed badly, as a result of which under-employment and unemployment have grown into serious problems. The growth in job opportunities has simply not kept pace with population growth. In Mizoram and Manipur an underdeveloped infrastructure and lack of investment in power, irrigation, communications and transport, has discouraged the establishment of industries which could provide employment.

Therefore, our respondents in the four states correctly perceive that basic needs are a problem, and that political institutions are guilty on this score. After all, democratic practices have established by now that it is the state that is responsible for meeting basic needs either through enhancing the buying capacities of the poor, or by providing goods to the poorer sections of society on the non-market principle. But whether non-access to basic needs leads directly to conflict is debatable; the case of Punjab disproves such assumptions. On the other hand economic underdevelopment and neglect of basic needs was an important cause of disaffection in Mizoram. However, discontent escalated into violence only when the government of India refused the Mizo people their own state within the federation. It seems that the dynamics of poverty, unemployment and neglect of basic needs matter more when they overlap with the political dimensions of conflict. Therefore, even if we take neglect of basic needs as a given in our case studies, we have to venture beyond the economic factor and into the domain of the political to search for the causes of conflict. Towards this end I seek to make two interlocking arguments. Firstly, when the working of federalism and democracy disprove the very assumptions upon which these two institutions are founded, namely participation and accountability, some amount of discontent can be expected. Secondly the federal principle in India has led to the politicisation of identities simply because a determinate identity helps groups to claim the goods that are due to them as a collective entitlement. It is when the ethnic factor supervenes onto the political factor that conflicts become intractable.

---

<sup>17</sup> S. Brajamani, 2003, *Economic Growth in Manipur: An Empirical Analysis*, Imphal, S. Romesh Singh, pg 73

## The Making of the Federation

Let me begin this section of the argument by suggesting that in all four states the founding moment of violence can be traced to the founding moment of the Indian Federation. The cases of J and K and Manipur rank rather high on this scale.<sup>18</sup> J and K and Manipur were princely states that lay outside the ambit of what was known as British India. The relationship of the 700 or so princely states to the colonial government was regulated through a series of agreements which gave the latter a great deal of political clout in these territories. However, the impending independence of India transformed the political scene dramatically. On 12 May 1946 the Cabinet Mission suggested that when India achieved independence, British paramountcy over princely states would lapse. Therefore it was desirable that rulers should negotiate terms with successor governments. The Partition Plan of June 3 1947 precipitated matters, and the Governor General Lord Mountbatten set up two state departments to tackle the issue. According to a formula devised by Sardar Patel, those princely states that wished to accede to India would cede control over certain subjects to the Indian government. In other matters, pledged Patel, the government of India would scrupulously respect the power of the rulers.

In late July 1947, Lord Mountbatten summoned a conference of rulers and persuaded some of them to sign the Instrument of Accession. Some rulers acceded readily, others bargained with both the successor states. In some states their peoples' movement for responsible government decided which way to go, and in other rulers proved recalcitrant. The Indian National Congress at its session on 15 August 1947 resolved that the right of any princely state to declare independence was not acceptable. Pandit Nehru, slated to be the first Prime Minister of the Country, had already declared in April 1947 that states which refused to join the Constituent Assembly would be treated as hostile.<sup>19</sup>

After the promulgation of the Indian Independence Act 1947 the princely states became technically independent. Most rulers with the exception of the rulers of Junagadh, Kashmir and Hyderabad had signed the Instrument of Accession and given up their control over defence, external affairs, and communications in exchange for privy purses.<sup>20</sup> The ruler of J and K, deciding to keep his options open, proposed a 'Standstill Agreement' with both India and Pakistan on 15 August,<sup>21</sup> though he did consider the option of joining Pakistan if that would leave his powers and privileges intact.<sup>22</sup> Internal developments in the state accelerated the resolution of the issue. In August 1947, the Muslim community of Poonch, provoked by the misrule of the Maharaja and by reports of massacres of Muslims in Hindu dominated eastern Jammu districts during the Partition, revolted under the leadership of demobilised soldiers. By 3 October the

---

<sup>18</sup> The case of Punjab is discussed below under the heading of ethnic mapping

<sup>19</sup> This was at the Gwalior session of the All India State Peoples Conference.

<sup>20</sup> Though the Constitution allowed for the administrative status for some former princely states to continue, in time the status and the identities of princely states lapsed.

<sup>21</sup> A standstill agreement vide the Government of India Act 1935 ensured the continuation of essential relations in communication, trade, and posts between a princely state that had not decided upon its options and one or both dominions.

<sup>22</sup> At the time of partition of India J and K including Aksai Chin stretched over an area of 222,236 square kilometers; the valley constituted 10 percent of the total area, Jammu 14.4 percent, and the frontier districts as much as 75.6 percent.

rebels who had acquired control over much of Poonch, along with the pro-Pakistani chieftains of Muzaffarabad and Mirpur in Western Jammu district, proclaimed the formation of 'azad Kashmir' in Pakistan. Shortly afterwards Gilgit and neighbouring states including Hunza and Nagar signed Instruments of Accession with Pakistan on 18 November 1947.<sup>23</sup> Matters worsened when on 21 October 1947, Pakistan backed an armed incursion into the state by some several thousand Pashtun tribals from the North West Frontier Province. After taking the town of Muzaffarabad, the raiders headed for Baramulla and moved on towards Srinagar, inflicting terrible atrocities on the population and killing almost 3,000 of the 14,000 population of Baramulla.

The Maharaja, who sought India's assistance to repel the invaders and restore order in the state, signed the Instrument of Accession with India on 26 October 1947.<sup>24</sup> Lord Mountbatten, the Governor General of India, accepted it the next day. But there is a twist in the tale, a twist which still haunts politics in the Kashmir valley today. In the letter that accompanied the acceptance of the Instrument of Accession, Lord Mountbatten stipulated that after the invasion had been dealt with and law and order restored, the question of the State's accession should be settled by a plebiscite. This was consistent, wrote Mountbatten, with the policy of the Government of India: in any state where accession was disputed, the matter should be decided in accordance with the wishes of the people.

The plebiscite could not be held since (a) the invasions continued even though they had been contained by the Indian army and (b) India and Pakistan went to war over Jammu and Kashmir in April 1948. In January 1948, India lodged a formal complaint against Pakistani aggression in the Security Council and the issue was internationalised. The Security Council adopted a series of resolutions in 1948, 1949, and 1952 calling for the withdrawal of Pakistani forces, a reduction of Indian armed forces in the state, and the appointment of a plebiscite Commissioner to oversee the holding of a plebiscite. The UN resolution adopted on 13 August 1948 recommended that a final decision on the status of Jammu and Kashmir 'shall be determined in accordance with the will of the people'. Thus not only was a bilateral problem internationalised, a rider was once again attached to the act of accession - the holding of a plebiscite. This was followed by a call for a ceasefire in August 1948 as an essential step for the holding of the plebiscite.

The ceasefire finally came into effect on 1 January 1949, and in July 1949 the military representatives of the two countries signed the Karachi Agreement which demarcated the ceasefire line. The ceasefire line stopped short at the Siachen Glacier [at map coordinate Point NJ 9842]<sup>25</sup> and formalised the tripartite division of the territory of J and K. India retained less than half of undivided J and K i.e. a major part of Jammu, Ladakh and the Kashmir valley. One third

---

<sup>23</sup> However they have never been formally accepted as a part of Pakistan, and as part of the Northern Territories along with Baltistan they remain under Pakistani administration without the same rights and privileges as the rest of the provinces in the country.

<sup>24</sup> The Government of India had insisted that it could not send troops otherwise.

<sup>25</sup> Since 1949 the ceasefire line has remained the de facto border between the two parts of Kashmir on the one hand and between India and Pakistan on the other. During the 1972 Simla negotiations between India and Pakistan, the ceasefire line was renamed the Line of Control [LOC]. The LOC stopped short at the Siachen glacier which extends for forty miles to the de facto border with China. In 1984 Indian troops took control of part of the glacier and now Indian and Pakistani troops confront each other in the highest war zone in the world.

of the region, which consists of a sliver of territory extending from the north to the south of western Jammu district, is under the control of Pakistan. Pakistan also controls Skardu in Ladakh, and the thinly populated Northern Territories of Gilghit and Baltistan. Aksai Chin, constituting 16.9 percent of the area of the state, came under the control of China during the 1950s. In 1963 Pakistan ceded to China another 2.33 percent of the land claimed by India.<sup>26</sup>

The promised plebiscite was never held, but J and K's accession to the Indian Union was seen by India as settled for the following reasons. Firstly, the Maharaja had signed the Instrument of Accession. Secondly, although Sheikh Abdullah the leader of the National Conference (NC) party and the head of the state government since 1947, had vacillated on the issue of whether J and K should opt for independence or join India or Pakistan, declared at the Security Council in 1948 that 'Kashmir and the people of Kashmir have lawfully and constitutionally acceded to the dominion of India'.<sup>27</sup> Thirdly a few weeks after the Maharaja had acceded to India on 27 October 1947, the working committee of the NC adopted a resolution recommending the accession of J and K to India. The resolution was ratified by a special convention of the representatives of the people of the state. Throughout the Indo-Pakistan war from October 1947 to December 1948, the NC supported India.<sup>28</sup> Fourthly, the State Constituent Assembly which was convened in October 1951 and to which delegates were elected on the basis of full adult franchise, approved accession and the Constitution of J and K which was adopted in 1957 made the state an integral part of India. Fifthly, although the Security Council had recommended that Pakistan withdraw its troops from the territory as a condition for holding the plebiscite, this was not carried out. Nevertheless, the issue continues to be controversial and continues to overshadow politics in the valley.

In Manipur, the circumstances in which the former princely state merged into India are equally contentious. Manipur stands out in the annals of Indian democracy, because the first democratic elections in the country were held in the state.<sup>29</sup> A series of democratic movements since the late nineteenth century had opposed the monarchy and demanded democracy and representative government. On 12 December 1946 the Maharaja finally gave in to pressure and set up a committee to prepare a new constitution for the state. This was submitted to the Maharaja on 27 June 1947. The Manipur State Constitution Act came into force in 1948. With the enforcement of the 1948 Manipur State Election Rules, Manipur became the first state in India to hold elections on the basis of universal adult franchise in June 1948. An elected assembly was sworn in on October 1948. The Praja Shanti Sabha party along with independent members formed a coalition government, and the younger brother of the Maharaja, Priya Brata Singh, was appointed by the Maharaja as Chief Minister in consultation with elected members.

---

<sup>26</sup> Today 45.62 percent of the original territory of the state is with India, 35.15 percent with Pakistan, and 19.23 percent with China. The valley of Kashmir consists of 15.8 percent of the area of Indian J and K, Jammu consists of 25.9 percent, and Ladakh 58.3 percent. According to the 2001 census the population of Kashmir totals 10.01 million, of which Muslims form 64.2 percent, Hindus 32.2 percent, and others 3.6 percent. Muslims form 95 percent of the population in the valley.

<sup>27</sup> Cited in Riyaz Punjabi, 1995, 'Kashmir imbroglio: the socio-political roots', *Contemporary South Asia*, 4, 1, pp 39-53, in pg 47. However, as Punjabi notes, Sheikh Abdullah declared in a public meeting in September 1947 that 'Our first demand is complete transfer of power to the people in Kashmir. Representatives of the people in a democratic Kashmir will then decide whether the state should join India or Pakistan', *ibid*, pg 46.

<sup>28</sup> Vergehes Koithara, 2004, *Crafting Peace in Kashmir*, Delhi, Sage, pg 55

<sup>29</sup> Technically Manipur was not at that time a part of India.

The Maharaja had signed the Instrument of Accession on 11 August 1947 according to which defence, external affairs, communications, custom, excise, and coinage were entrusted to the Government of India. The Government of India in turn assured the protection of the internal autonomy of Manipur without stipulating the future status of the state. A Standstill Agreement was signed on other matters. As the process to integrate princely states into the Union of India gained momentum, opinion was divided in Manipur regarding the full merger of the state into the Indian Union. One group, mainly consisting of the Manipuri branch of the Indian National Congress, pressed for full integration. A second group, consisting of Nagas from the hills, wanted to join Nagas across the border, who had proclaimed themselves independent on the eve of 15 August 1947. But the third group, led by the Communist leader Irabot, resisted merger because he felt that this would endanger the political identity of the region.

The Governor of Assam, Sir Akbar Hydari, who visited Manipur to study the situation, became convinced that Irabot was planning a Communist coup. The Government of India alarmed by the report, banned the Krishak Sabha, the Praja Sangha, the Mahila Sammelan, and the Students Federation. As attempts were made to arrest him, Irabot went underground and began to mobilise the peasants to launch a Telengana-like movement in the state and to establish an independent Peasant Republic of Manipur.<sup>30</sup> Beset by fears that Manipur would renege on accession, the Indian Government decided to settle the issue through pressure. The Maharaja was invited to meet Sri Prakasha, the Governor of Assam, on 17 September 1949 in Shillong (because Manipur came under the jurisdiction of Assam) to discuss the differences between him and the Dewan appointed by the Central Government to oversee the affairs of the state. The Maharaja was reportedly confined to his residence until he signed the merger agreement, despite his request that he should be allowed to consult his Council of Ministers before he did so.<sup>31</sup> On 15 October 1949 the Maharaja under duress signed the merger agreement thereby ceding to the dominion government full and exclusive authority, jurisdiction and power for and in relation to, the government of the state. In return he was granted a privy purse of Rs 300,000. In effect, Manipur formally merged with the Indian Union without the act being ratified by the elected assembly. The Government of India dissolved the Prajashanti Sabha coalition ministry and the assembly, and appointed a Dewan-cum-Chief Commissioner from outside the state to administer the state. Even today the circumstances under which the Maharaja was made to sign the agreement are contentious. The elected representatives of the people were completely bypassed, the Maharaja was not allowed to consult the ministry, and the Government of India in its haste to integrate the princely state into the Union trampled upon the democratic traditions of Manipuri people in the process.

The case of Mizoram was different in that it voluntarily joined the Indian Union but on certain conditions. As an administrative unit, Mizoram pre-existed the formation of the Union of India,

---

<sup>30</sup> He subsequently escaped to Myanmar where he set about organising a revolt against the merger, but he died in 1951.

<sup>31</sup> Baruah writes that the Maharaja was virtually imprisoned in his residence in Shillong, the house was surrounded by soldiers and under the pressure of considerable misinformation, the Maharaja 'isolated from his advisors, council of ministers, and Manipuri public opinion' signed the merger agreement. When the ceremony which proclaimed an end to the ancient kingdom took place on 15 October 1949 in Imphal, the Indian army was in place to guard against possible trouble, Sanjib Baruah, 2005, *Durable Disorders: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, pg 60.

but it had a different status from the other two princely states. In 1935, the Mizo Hills were categorized as an 'Excluded Area' in the North East of India by the British government and were placed under the executive control of the Governor of Assam.<sup>32</sup> No act of the Indian legislature or the Assam government could apply to the excluded areas, without the discretion of the Governor who was empowered to make regulations for the hills. Moreover since the territory fell within the 'inside line', it was isolated territory, with outsiders not being allowed to enter Mizoram.

Traditionally Mizoram has been a pre-state society, mainly because the Lushais were a mobile community constantly in search of agricultural lands where they could practice shifting or *jhoom* cultivation. Every Mizo village was an independent unit claiming a certain portion of the territory for agricultural purposes. The British introduced two institutions which changed the shape of Mizo society: private property and hereditary chiefdom. This not only damaged political traditions of consultation and consensus, it led to the concentration of power in the institution of chiefdom.

In addition, the British did not allow the Mizo people to engage in political activities. They could not establish political parties, nor could they directly participate in politics. Moreover Mizoram, which was a district of Assam, was not represented either in the Assam legislature or in the Central Legislative Council. Nevertheless, by the early decades of the twentieth century the Mizo youth rebelled against political censorship. Two factors facilitated political awareness among the Mizos. Firstly, Christian missionaries gave to them literacy,<sup>33</sup> health care and a rallying point in the form of a common religion.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, the educated and progressive middle class was exposed to the outside world during the two world wars, when Mizos served in the British armed forces. However, demands that Mizo Hills should be included under the Government of India Reform Act of 1919, that Mizos be represented in the provincial legislature of Assam after the Government of India Act of 1935, and that the Mizo youth should be allowed to form political organisations, hold political meetings, and be granted rights were ruthlessly suppressed. Despite these restrictions, the first political party - the Mizo Union - was established in 1936.

It was only on the eve of India's independence that the British began to encourage political activity, but efforts to bring the Mizo people into the political domain were accompanied by determined efforts to strengthen the power of the Chiefs. The Mizo Union (MU) challenged these plans. At its first General Assembly held in 1946, the MU decided to boycott the District Conference convened by the colonial administrative officer, because it was dominated by the Chiefs. The assembly also decided that the British District Officer be kept out of any exercise meant to decide the future constitutional status of Mizoram.

The assembly debated three options that had been thrown up by the imminent independence of India: to declare independence, to join the Union of Burma, and to remain within India. Exhibiting great pragmatism the party refused the invitation of the leader of the Nagas, Phizo, to join the Naga movement and declare independence, even though Phizo committed that the Mizo

---

<sup>32</sup> The Naga Hills and the area which is at present Arunachal Pradesh also had this status.

<sup>33</sup> Today Mizoram has the highest literacy rates in the country though the art of reading was introduced in the area only in 1894

<sup>34</sup> This is why the Mizos have not been prone to fragmentation and internal factionalism as have other tribes in Northeast India

language would become the *lingua franca* of the independent state of Mizo and Naga Hills. The second suggestion that Mizo Hills be joined with Myanmar was also dropped. The General Assembly decided that Mizo Hills should for the time being remain with India, subject to the condition that accession to the Union of India be reviewed in ten years.

In early 1947 the MU supported the position of the Chief Minister of Assam, Bordoloi, that Assam should not be grouped with Bengal. In return the Mizos asked for full representation in the Constituent Assembly and autonomy for Mizo Hills. The Bordoloi Sub-Committee for Assam and Partially Excluded Areas and Excluded Areas in the Constituent Assembly, invited two representatives of the MU to serve as co-opted members. On 22 April 1947, the MU submitted a proposal to H.M government, the interim government, and the Constituent Assembly through the sub-committee. The proposal stated that the Mizo people had the right of territorial unity, solidarity and self determination within the province of Assam in free India. Secondly Mizos should retain sole proprietary right over the land. Thirdly, the central government should extend special financial help until such time as the Mizos were able to maintain their territorial integrity and self-determination without financial aid. All the above items shall, stated the memorandum, be subject to revision according to the future trend of events even to the extent of seceding after ten years. The MU endorsed the Bordoloi Committee Report that Mizoram should be given autonomy within the province of Assam through the setting up of an Autonomous District Council.

In short, the accession of the princely states of J and K and Manipur to the Indian Union was attended by great controversy. In J and K, not only was the promised plebiscite not held, the special status accorded to the state was progressively pared down, which in the process boosted discontent in the Valley. In Manipur, militants still resent the fact that their institutions were ignored and that the Maharaja was forced to sign the merger agreement and sections of Meitei youth have begun to question the legitimacy of the merger. In Mizoram, conditional integration into India was highlighted when armed insurrection broke out in the state in the mid 1960s.

It is also important to note that democratic movements in all our four case studies had instilled tremendous political awareness in the people about their rights. In J and K in the 1930s even as a major movement under the leadership of Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference (NC) party challenged the oppressive rule of the Dogra monarch, it also aimed at the eradication of extreme inequalities and oppression through major restructuring of land relations. Over time, the NC became democratic, egalitarian, secular and inclusive. In Manipur we have witnessed one of the most democratic and visionary movements in the country since the late nineteenth century. This was accompanied by the politicisation of women and the establishment of a radical tradition under the leadership of Irabot. In Mizoram, a political movement coalesced by the 1930s despite great odds and demanded the institutionalisation of democracy. In Punjab the Akali Dal (AD) had participated in the freedom struggle on the one hand and articulated the interests of the Sikh community on the other, since the 1920s. For these reasons, violations of the federal agreement generated extreme indignation among the highly politicised citizens of all four states.

### **Violations of the Federal Principle**

The controversy over the process of accession into the Indian Union could still have been neutralised in the period that followed, *if* democracy and federalism had been given a chance to

work. That they were not allowed to work was cause enough for initial anger to soar. The reasons for the violation of the democratic/federal principle are complex, but basically after 1967 when the Congress lost power in half the state legislatures, and in the aftermath of the 1969 split in the Congress party, the leader of the party Prime Minister Indira Gandhi adopted a series of strategies which transformed the nature of federalism in the country. Being more than aware that effective power depended on control of the states, Ms Gandhi proceeded to dissolve the boundaries between the domain of state politics and central politics. The central government wilfully selected and dismissed Congress and non-Congress governments in state after state, imposed President's rule arbitrarily and in general treated states as feudal fiefs. States consequently lost whatever autonomy they had been granted under the federal system. This not only led to popular dissatisfaction, it also de-legitimised state leaders who were seen as incapable of safeguarding regional autonomy.

In J and K if the issue of the never-held plebiscite constitutes the first axis of dissatisfaction in the state, the steady erosion of the special status of the state within the Indian federation constitutes the second. In May 1949 leaders of the central government and the NC agreed that the federal provisions of the Constitution would not apply to J and K and that the state would have its own constitution. The special status of J and K was codified in article 370 according to which Parliament could legislate for J and K in only three matters: external affairs, defence, and communications. Other provisions of the Indian Constitution could be extended to the state only with the prior concurrence of the state government and subject to ratification by the Constituent Assembly of the state. The first Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order issued in 1950 limited the application of Indian constitutional provisions to those mentioned in Article 370.

In October 1951, J and K elected a Constituent Assembly to draft a constitution for the state. In 1952 the Delhi Agreement between the central government and the leaders of the NC stated that all powers other than those specified in the Instrument of Accession would remain with the state government. While the fundamental rights chapter of the Indian Constitution would apply to J and K, some provisions were modified to allow land reforms without compensation. Hereditary rule was abolished, all disputes between the centre and the state and between the state of J and K and other states were to be decided by the Supreme Court, and the jurisdiction of the election commission was limited to parliamentary, presidential and vice presidential elections. Whereas the provisions of article 352, which empowers the central government to declare an emergency and suspend normal government functioning in the states, applied to J and K in the case of external aggression, a declaration of an internal emergency would not apply to the state without the approval of the state government. Finally, J and K fell outside the ambit of articles 356 and 360 which respectively empower the central government to impose President's rule in the state and to impose financial emergency.

However, within ten years the terms of the contractual agreement were completely violated by the central government. In 1953 Sheikh Abdullah was arrested because despite his own earlier defence of accession to India in the Security Council, he had gone public on independence for J and K. Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed took over as 'Prime Minister' of Kashmir for ten years. Under his rule the special status of J and K was steadily eroded. In 1957 the Constituent Assembly ceased to exist after having drafted a constitution for J and K which came into force on 26 January 1957 and after having formalised accession to India on 15 February 1954. Now the

only barrier to the full integration of J and K into the Indian Union was the state government - a barrier which was removed by the compliant Prime Minister of J and K. In 1958 the special provisions governing the representation of the citizens of the state in the civil services were abolished and the state ceased to be financially autonomous. In 1959 and 1961 the permit system which regulated the entry of non-citizens into the state was done away with. The jurisdiction of the Supreme Court and the Central Election Commission was extended to the state. In 1964, article 356 of the Indian Constitution was made applicable to J and K. A Delhi-appointed governor replaced the Sadar-i-Riyasat who had formerly been appointed by the state legislative assembly. However, the governor of J and K continued to exercise the powers meant for the Sadar-i-Riyasat under article 92 of the J and K Constitution, without being responsible to the legislative assembly.

The bitterness generated by the whittling away of the special status granted to J and K, was intensified by the repeated arrests of the charismatic leader Sheikh Abdullah who had begun to speak of an independent J and K. The desire of the central government to control the political affairs in J and K was motivated by one main fact: Pakistan continued to claim J and K on the grounds that the majority of the population was Muslim and alleged that the accession of the state to India was based on fraud. The ethnic factor has intensified the insecurity of the government of India which has been habitually suspicious of any kind of political activity in the state. However, the activities of the regional party, the NC, also failed to breed confidence in the democratic process. Firstly the NC monopolised political power right up to 2002,<sup>35</sup> often through massive electoral malpractices, thereby denying space to other political formations. Secondly, the NC entered into often amoral alliances with the Congress party in order to retain its hold on power, a fact that led to enormous rancour. That political groups were forced to resort to extra-institutional means, particularly the use of violence to press their point is not entirely unexpected.<sup>36</sup>

For example in the 1983 elections, the turnout was around 70 percent but the electoral process was marked by widespread malpractices, which served to accelerate the destruction of an incompletely institutionalised democratic spirit. In July 1984, the new Governor of the state, Jagmohan dismissed the NC government headed by Farooq Abdullah on the charge that the party had lost a majority in the state. This followed the defection of 13 members of the government, of which 12 belonged to the NC. Farooq was ordered to step down *without* a vote of confidence in the assembly. However, a new government under G.M Shah lasted only two years. In March 1986 the central government withdrew its support to Shah and imposed Governor's rule. But six months before the Governor's rule was to end, the central government reinstated Farooq Abdullah as the C.M. The re-establishment of cordial relations between the Congress and Farooq Abdullah generated tremendous distrust of both the NC and the Congress. This was exacerbated when the two parties, blithely ignoring earlier differences, allied to fight the 1987 elections.

The turnout in the 1987 election was as high as 75 percent, the NC won in the valley and the Congress in Jammu, but communal organisations arrived on the scene with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) securing two seats. Four among eight independents belonging to the Muslim United

---

<sup>35</sup> The NC secured a majority in the 1957, 1962, 1967, 1972, and 1977 elections.

<sup>36</sup> The findings of the research project: that the largest numbers of respondents in the Kashmir valley hold the state government and political parties more responsible than central government for the conflict makes sense in this context.

Front; a front of the Jamaat-e-Islami under the leadership of Ali Shah Geelani and several other Islamic groups, secured two seats in the legislature. The 1987 elections themselves were marked by coercion, electoral malpractices of a high order, and massive vote rigging. For instance the founder of the Peoples Conference in 1978, Abdul Ghani Lone, was declared as having lost the election, even though according to all reports he was winning. Subsequently Lone opted out of electoral politics. Bose suggests that electoral malpractices in the 1987 elections were the reason why Yusuf Shah – who belonged to the Jamaat-i-Islami which contested under the banner of the MUF - became Syed Salahuddin, the commander-in-chief of the dreaded Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, the largest guerrilla force fighting the Government of India in the valley. When Yusuf Shah protested, he was imprisoned along with Yassin Malik, his election officer. Yassin Malik upon his release subsequently joined the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) as a core member, having received training in arms in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK).<sup>37</sup> He now heads the JKLF, which demands independence for the state. Leaders who were denied a chance to participate in electoral democracy turned to militancy simply because the democratic system was corrupted by two parties determined to hold on to power.

The controversial 1987 elections proved to be the flashpoint in the turn to armed struggle. Widmalm concludes that when democracy was functioning in a relatively peaceful way in J and K, the demand to change the political status of the region was neither heard nor supported.<sup>38</sup> But after the 1987 elections, thousands of young men crossed the border to undergo training in Pakistan. In 1988 widespread protests and violence rocked the valley and President's rule was imposed on the state. This provoked protests, demonstrations, large scale arrests and police firing. In February 1988 the state assembly was dissolved. By 1990 violence had escalated, and the scale of the uprising led by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front took everyone including the JKLF by surprise. The army's presence in the valley was reinforced with the extension of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and the introduction of the Disturbed Areas Act. These Acts along with the J and K Public Safety Act and the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities [Prevention] Act, which had been introduced in 1978 and 1987, completely paralysed life in the state. Whilst moderate leaders belonging to the JKLF were arrested, the Hizbul-ul-Mujahadeen a party backed by Pakistan, came to play a dominant role in militant politics. By 1992 discontent in the valley had abated but in the meantime militants from outside the country had entered the valley and militancy rapidly assumed the form of a Low Intensity War which has not been controlled to date.

In Punjab we see the same phenomenon. The Congress party which had commanded politics in Punjab from 1950 to 1966, and which had incorporated the AD in 1948-51 and 1956, thereby reducing the latter to a mere lobby representing Sikh interests, could not come to terms with the fact that it lost the 1967 elections. From then on the Congress systematically worked to subvert the support base of the AD which came into power in the state in 1967 in alliance with other parties. The ministry lasted only eight months as some members defected and set up a minority government with the support of the Congress. However within nine months the Congress withdrew support and the government fell, resulting in the imposition of President's rule. In the

---

<sup>37</sup> Sumantra Bose, 2003, *Kashmir: Roots of Conflict: Paths to Peace*, Delhi, Vistaar Publications, pg 48-50

<sup>38</sup> Sten Widmalm, 1998, 'The Rise and Fall of Democracy in Jammu and Kashmir' in Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli edited *Community Conflicts And The State In India*, Delhi, OUP, pp 149-182, in pg 153-54.

1969 mid-term elections the AD once again came to power in coalition with the Jan Sangh. This government lasted until 1971, when factionalism once again led to the demise of the coalition, the fall of the government and the imposition of President's rule in June 1971.

In 1977, however, matters took a more serious turn when the Congress secured a mere 17 seats in the state legislative assembly. Alarmed at its declining electoral fortunes, the Congress leadership began to once again undercut the social base of the AD by cultivating the preacher Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, head of the historic seminary the Damdami Taksal. Bhindranwale was a well-known and charismatic preacher, but he was also a dogmatic and intolerant religious reformer whose ambition was to purify the Sikh community, which in his estimation had strayed from the straight and narrow religious path. This was the man who was propped up by Congress leaders as an alternative centre of power. It was an act that the Congress had to pay for dearly, as Bhindranwale gathered a motley group of the discontented, the educated unemployed, small farmers who had not benefited from the Green Revolution, and above all members of the All India Sikh Students Federation, and set out to confront the Congress and the Akalis. As a result, the politics of fundamentalism and rabidly communal rhetoric came to dominate Punjab by the end of the 1970s.

Violence became the order of the day with Bhindranwale's followers targeting the Nirankari sect, seen as heterodox by orthodox Sikhs and Hindus. Extremist organisations like the Dal Khalsa, Akhand Kirtani Jatha and the National Council of Khalistan began to raise slogans for Khalistan, though the Sant himself never demanded an independent state. In the process, Bhindranwale not only de-legitimised both the Akali and Congress leadership he also took politics to the street and ultimately towards the use of the gun.

All this was to reverberate on the politics of the AD, which was forced to resort once again to the religious idiom and to the slogan of the '*panth* [religious community] in danger' even though in the 1960s the AD had moved towards a secular idiom due to the compulsions of coalitional politics. Confronted by an unresponsive central government on the one hand, and a rebellious group of Sikh youth under the leadership of Bhindranwale claiming that the AD was incapable of securing the interests of the community on the other, the Akalis intensified the struggle for the recasting of federal relations and raised the pitch of anti-centre rhetoric. From 1982 to 1984 the party initiated a number of campaigns, but the political initiative had passed into the hands of extremists. In the aftermath of the assault on the Golden Temple by the Indian army, the secessionist movement gained popular support. It was only by 1992 that the security forces controlled the movement. What is of interest is the fact that violations of the federal/ democratic principle drove politics out of institutionalised channels and into the avenues provided by militant politics, which employed another kind of idiom - that of violence.

In Manipur, state politics have followed the same path - defection leading to the fall of state governments, floor crossings, what in India is called 'horse-trading', non-cohesive coalitions, proliferation of parties, and the active interference of both the national parties, the Congress and the BJP, in the making and unmaking of governments. In 1972, the moment Manipur was granted statehood the Congress party began to meddle with the functioning of the regional party - the Manipur Peoples Party - which led the first coalition government. Engineered defections led to the collapse of the state government and the central government therefore imposed President's Rule in the state. Since that period, defections have stalked the political careers of governments in Manipur. Since 1972 Manipur has witnessed 18 changes of government. In the period 1995-

2002 defections succeeded in demolishing four governments. In 2001 alone, two governments – the first led by Wahengbam Nipamacha and the second by Radhabinod Koiyam - were dismissed within months and President's rule was imposed on the state.

In Mizoram the situation was far worse since it was complicated by massive neglect of Mizo interests. Initially, Mizoram was granted the status of an autonomous district within the state of Assam. Where the Mizo Union and the Assam Pradesh Congress, which ruled the government of Assam, had worked in tandem and represented the Mizo people both in the district council and in the Assam legislature, in time the relationship between the two parties became strained. Tensions were exacerbated when a major famine affected the area in 1959.<sup>39</sup> The delay of the Assam Government in providing relief measures exacerbated tensions and a section of the Mizo Union formed the Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF) for organising relief work. In time the MNFF transformed itself into the Mizo National Front (MNF) which under the leadership of Laldenga was to launch an armed struggle for a sovereign state of Mizoram. At the same time, the MNF began to accuse the MU of not representing the interests of the Mizo people, and of being complicit with the ruling Congress in Assam.

As in the case of Punjab, militancy transformed the rhetoric and the practices of the governing party. In 1960 the leadership of the MU parted company with the Assam Congress over major issues such as the mishandling of the famine, the language issue, and division of powers between the Assam government and the district council. One section of the leadership of the MU began to demand statehood and raised an unarmed volunteer force to launch a non-violent struggle for this purpose. The MNF participated in elections in order to capture power but also contacted the government of erstwhile East Pakistan for help and sanctuaries, recruited and trained volunteers and stockpiled arms. In 1965, the two parties came together to demand a Greater Mizoram, and the MNF gave up its secessionist demands. However, the Central government did not respond favourably. Consequently, the MNF which initiated an armed uprising on 1 March 1966, declared independence and overran the Mizo Hills. Even as the MU and other political formations kept up the pressure for statehood, the GOI in 1972 upgraded Mizoram to the status of a Union Territory. This was seen by some MU leaders as a transitional phase, but other leaders resigned from the party in protest at not being granted statehood.

Politics in the state diverged from here on. The domain of electoral politics became a battleground between the national party (the Congress), the MU and other parties which emerged out of repeated splits in the MU. In 1972, after losing power in the legislative assembly, the Congress, under the direction of the party High Command, persuaded the MU to dissolve itself and to join the party, even though the Congress had been rejected by the electorate in the elections for practicing amoral politics and for fielding a large number of ex-rebels as candidates. By means of this *coup d'état* the Congress came to power in the legislative assembly with a massive mandate and in the process the leadership of the MU was completely discredited in the same way as the leadership of the NC had been discredited in J and K after the 1987 elections.

In the meantime the war for the liberation of Bangladesh had resulted in the destruction of sanctuaries provided to the MNF in the Chittagong Hill Tracts by erstwhile East Pakistan.

---

<sup>39</sup> The famine was known as the Mautam famine and was caused by the destruction of crops by rats. This followed the flowering of the Mau bamboo tree.

Deprived also of a steady supply of arms and training facilities, the MNF fell into disarray and hundreds of its volunteers left to join electoral politics. By 1974, however, the MNF regrouped its depleted cadres and surfaced to launch a series of strikes from sanctuaries in Bangladesh and Myanmar. In January 1975, MNF cadres shot dead several high ranking police officers in a daring raid on a police station. This pushed the central government to gather its strength and its forces and launch an onslaught on the MNF. More importantly, central government officials set about overhauling the administration, engaging in confidence building measures to secure the loyalty of the citizens of Manipur, and educating the citizens about the issues involved in the militancy. They also embarked on a strategy of persuading the moderates in the armed movement to return to the mainstream of politics. The strategy succeeded spectacularly and mass surrenders once again depleted the cadres of the MNF which by 1975 found it extremely difficult to find support in the state for its violent struggle. Above all, the central government turned its attention to development issues to improve the lives of ordinary people.

Meanwhile leaders of the MNF sent out feelers to the central government with a view to initiating talks for a resolution of the Mizo problem, but negotiations between Laldenga and the GOI proceeded in a series of fits and starts. After months of prolonged negotiations Laldenga signed a Peace Accord with New Delhi in 1978. However, he immediately retracted on his commitment and resumed militant operations. It was only in 1985 after a series of aborted negotiations, that Laldenga signed a Peace Accord with PM Rajeev Gandhi's government. According to this agreement, the Congress ministry in Mizoram was dissolved and replaced by an interim coalition ministry consisting of the Congress and the MNF, which was headed by Laldenga. On 20 February 1987 Mizoram was granted full statehood. This is the only case in India where insurgency has ended with the signing of a Peace Accord. Laldenga became the Chief Minister but when he lost office after two years, he did not return to militancy.

### **Practices of Ethnic Mapping**

In three of our four cases, conflict has proved intractable because violations of the federal principle have intersected with another factor - the politicisation of identities in and through state policies of ethnic mapping. The precise point of reference implied by the phrase 'ethnic mapping' here is the way in which the GOI has tied collective entitlements to political goods, such as statehood or autonomous hill districts within the constituent states, to ethnic identity. The fact that designated groups such as 'Scheduled Tribes' have been granted access to economic opportunities has also served to propel mobilisation on the ethnic principle. In sum, the core principle of federalism in India - devolution of power to ethnic groups concentrated in a distinct territory - has bred great tension. When aligned to violations of the federal principle, the practices of ethnic mapping have led to the eruption of conflict. Conflict thus becomes an obdurate problem when the ethnic principle is superimposed onto political grievances.

The grant of special status to particular ethnic groups, let me hasten to add, is unquestionably normative and just. Even if the multicultural moment has peaked, we have learnt a great deal from theories that urge governments to adopt differential policies towards different groups.<sup>40</sup> The leaders of the freedom struggle in India had recognised this in the early decades of the twentieth century, when linguistic states, protective discrimination, and minority rights were codified in the

---

<sup>40</sup> I myself have written on the desirability of minority rights in my 1999 *Beyond Secularism: The Rights of Religious Minorities*, Delhi, Oxford University Press.

various documents drafted by the Indian National Congress. However, let me suggest, even at the risk of sounding politically incorrect, that the political consequences of what Baruah has termed the ‘protective discrimination regime’ in India have not always been positive.<sup>41</sup> In many cases they have rebounded on the central government and often in violent ways. In other cases they have divided civil society even as groups rush to claim the collective entitlements that are due to them as a group. This may be a purely unintended consequence of ethnic plus territorial federalism. However, the activity we call politics is replete with instances of unintended consequences. This gives us reason to take another look at federal practices in the country.

Firstly and undeniably, the connection of entitlements to collective goods - such as the grant of statehood and relatively autonomous political and administrative units - to group identity, reinforces the ethnic bond. This in turn circumscribes the range of other political options such as class or citizenship. This is not to say that *every* member of *every* group thinks of herself or himself as belonging to *one* identity group out of the many that are available in a modern and complex society. But politics unfortunately is based on the silence of majorities, whereas leaderships that may well represent the minority in the group are articulate and forceful. Therefore, it is precisely this section that becomes politically significant. Secondly, group entitlements to collective goods: religious and cultural rights of minorities, protective discrimination for marginal groups, and grant of states or autonomous administrative units, not only results in the invention of identities and an eager rush to claim the particular status that will entitle the group to goods, but boosts competition between groups. That the state thus acquires a great deal of power as the arbiter of competitive ethnic politics is perhaps predictable. Thirdly, as in all cases of competition, some groups win and others lose out in the process; it is not surprising that members of the latter category tend to interpret their losses in terms of generic discrimination against the group. Perceptions of discrimination on grounds of ethnic identity lend grist to the ethnic mill, which grinds both quickly and surely.

I am not suggesting that identities are conjured out of nothing but that they are politicised because group identity is necessary in order to claim certain goods. For example, let us consider the formation of linguistic states as constituent units of the federal system. Although the Indian National Congress became committed to the principle of linguistic states as early as the first decade of the twentieth century, its central leadership fearing further balkanisation of the country in the wake of Partition on religious grounds, hesitated and prevaricated on the issue after independence. This provoked a series of protest movements, beginning initially in Andhra Pradesh, which rapidly spilled over to the rest of the community. Pandit Nehru was compelled to appoint a States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) in 1953 to examine the issue of linguistic states. After examining as many as 150,000 representations for or against linguistic states, the SRC decided in favour of the formation of such states

Four issues emerge as particularly relevant for our discussion in this context. Firstly, unlike the USA, in India the constituent units of the federation were created by the central government, which has the power to create new states out of existing ones. The Union of India is indestructible, but the constituent states are not. Secondly, the central government exercised a great deal of power and discretion in deciding which of the competing language groups in the first round and ethnic groups in the second and third rounds of state formation were to be given

---

<sup>41</sup> Sanjib Baruah, op cit, pg 193.

their own state. Thirdly, the grant of statehood as a collective entitlement to linguistic and ethnic groups, in the successive rounds of state formation, led to the reification of ethnic identities, although this led to some groups rushing to ask for a state of their own, while other groups in the same region resisted this demand. Fourthly, the grant of statehood to some groups and the denial of statehood to other groups bred resentment in the latter, who alleged that their language, culture and identity had been devalued.

Consider the case of Punjab, the Akali Dal claimed a Punjabi *Suba* from the SRC on the basis of the Punjabi language.<sup>42</sup> But matters were complicated by the fact that under the influence of communal Hindu organisations, Punjabi-speaking Hindus in the state discarded their own language and declared Hindi as their mother tongue in the 1951 and the 1961 census. The idea was to establish that Punjab was bilingual and that Punjabi is a mere dialect of Hindi.<sup>43</sup> The SRC rejected the demand for a Punjabi *Suba* on the grounds that Punjab was bilingual and that a majority of the people were opposed to the formation of a Punjabi *Suba*. Pandit Nehru, already shaken by the Partition, and fearful of further partitions on the grounds of religion, dismissed the demand as communal and divisive, as did the Congress Chief Minister of Punjab Kairon.

The rejection of the Punjabi *Suba* by the SRC generated great acrimony because in 1946 the AD had demanded an independent state of Sikhistan. It was a demand that was neither made nor taken seriously because it was clearly meant to counteract the 1940 Pakistan resolution, and because the Sikhs were not geographically concentrated in undivided Punjab. Nor did they form a majority in the region. But Pandit Nehru promised that in a post-independence India, the Sikh community, which had participated massively in the freedom movement, would be assured of a 'favoured status' where it could experience the 'glow of freedom'. Holding aloft this commitment, the Akalis demanded a Punjabi *Suba* in the Constituent Assembly.<sup>44</sup> The demand was rejected and the representatives refused to sign the Constitution. Further rejection by the SRC led to heightened politicisation among the Akalis, who articulated a sense of hurt that Punjabi had been denied its rightful status. For instance on the 15 August 1961, when the AD leader Master Tara Singh undertook a 'fast unto death' for a Punjabi *Suba* he was to state that:

A national principle has been adopted that to make the people feel the glow of freedom, states should be created on the contiguity of language affording full scope for the development of one's language in the state. Whereas this principle had been implemented in other parts of India in Punjab the area, which even the government experts feel is a Punjabi speaking area, is not being afforded the status of a state, simply because the Hindus do not agree to it.<sup>45</sup>

Whilst the Akalis launched a massive non-violent struggle to be recognised as a *staatsvolk* in 1955, the Hindus initiated the 'Save Hindi' agitation in 1957-58. In the main, Punjabi Hindus

---

<sup>42</sup> The party suggested that Punjabi-speaking areas in existing Punjab, PEPSU, and Rajasthan be amalgamated to constitute a new Punjab and that Hindi speaking areas of Punjab and PEPSU should be merged into the neighbouring Hindi speaking regions.

<sup>43</sup> However, in the 1971 census only half of the Hindu community recorded its language as Hindi.

<sup>44</sup> After Partition, though the Sikhs were in a minority of 35% of the population compared to 62% Hindus, they were concentrated in the central districts of Punjab. This encouraged the Akali leadership to demand the special status that the community had been promised before partition.

<sup>45</sup> K. Singh, *A History of the Sikhs*, Delhi Penguin, vol 2, pg 300.

feared that the AD which is closely tied to the religious organisation that controls *gurudwaras* - the Shrimoni Gurudwara Prabhandak Committee - was exclusive, communal and oriented towards the establishment of a Sikh state. By the time the second campaign for a Punjabi *Suba* was launched in 1962, under the leadership of Sant Fateh Singh, the AD had read the writing on the wall. The demand for a *Suba* was now couched in more inclusive terms of culture and language and not that of religion. By 1965 the situation had altered. PM Nehru and Pratap Singh Kairon who had opposed the formation of the *Suba* were no more and by the mid 1960s a movement for the formation of a Hindi speaking state of Haryana in the South East of Punjab modified the thrust of the Hindu/Hindi movement within the state. After the end of the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, a Parliamentary Committee set up to look into the issue recommended the creation of the linguistic state of Punjab. On 1 November 1966 the Punjab Re-organisation Act came into effect with the state being once again divided into Punjab and Haryana, with some of the mountainous areas going to the new state of Himachal Pradesh. By now the Sikhs constituted almost 60 percent of the population of Punjab and dreams of a Sikh majority state were finally realised.

The division of the state, however, left major issues unresolved: the non-transfer of Chandigarh which was constructed as the proposed capital of Punjab, but which after 1966 became a Union Territory and the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana; and the exclusion of many Punjabi speaking areas from the new state. The delay in the grant of a 'state of one's own' and an incomplete agenda loomed large over politics in Punjab, with the sanctity of the Indian state being challenged in the space of barely fifteen years.

If the suggestion that the grant of collective entitlements to identity groups serves to harden the hold of identity on the collective imagination of the group, and breeds resentment if the said group is not granted entitlements approved for others, proves valid for Punjab, then the case of Manipur provides further proof. Manipur became a Part C state in 1950<sup>46</sup> and was granted the status of a Union Territory ruled directly by the central government in 1956, after the SRC did not accept its claim for statehood. It was only in 1972 that Manipur was granted the status of a fully fledged state, 23 years after the merger and later than Meghalaya and Nagaland. As in the case of Punjab, this generated tremendous bitterness for historical reasons. The Manipuris had established a sophisticated kingdom at a time when state formation was unknown to most parts of the region. The ancient chronicle of the Meiteis, the *Cheitharol*, lists 74 Meitei kingdoms going back in time to 33 A.D. Not only have the Meiteis possessed a distinct political and territorial status for centuries, they can also legitimately boast of a highly literate and developed culture, an advanced literary tradition which stretches back a thousand years, and a distinctive linguistic tradition. However, the Manipuri language – Meiteilon - was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution as one of the recognised languages of the country only in 1992, although the National Sahitya Academy had recognized Manipuri as a modern advanced language. This led to the perception that the Meitei culture had been discriminated against. The denial of statehood to Manipur and the dismissal of its culture has been seen as arbitrary and as discriminatory and this has fed into the rhetoric of grievances and secessionism against the central government.

---

<sup>46</sup> Part B and C states categorised erstwhile princely states

Matters have been made more complex due to the fact that the Meiteis reside in the Imphal valley. The 29 hill tribes have been granted the status of Scheduled Tribes (ST) under the Fifth and the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and have accordingly been granted reservations in educational institutions and in public jobs, and preferential treatment in the grant of various licences. This has resulted in an over-representation of the hill tribes in the civil services and in the state government, creating resentment among the Meiteis, since unemployment is high in the Imphal valley and the government is seen as the main provider of jobs. Moreover, whereas the valley people cannot buy land in the hills, the converse does not hold true. Thus while the Imphal valley forms only 10 percent of the land area of the state, it supports almost 72 percent of the population and the population continues to expand because of migration. This has stretched resources and exacerbated unemployment with the result that groups of Meiteis who felt that they had received neither the privileges which accrue to Hindus in the rest of the country, nor the benefits which are attached to ST status, proceeded to mobilise for two incompatible goals. Some Meitei groups demanded the status of 'Other Backward Castes' (OBC) and the collective benefits attached to this category, notably reservations. This status has now been granted to them. Other sections of Meitei youth demand independence and renounce their Hindu identity. In the process, a major revivalist movement to recover a pre-Hindu identity, the old *Sanamahi* religion, the traditional vocabularies of the Meitei people, and above all the status of an independent state has erupted in the valley. Whilst the grant of OBC status would lead to the integration of the Meitei youth into the country, revivalism is leading them to insurgency and secessionism. This is the paradox of Manipur.

Manipur is today one of the most troubled states in India, wracked by inter-ethnic strife, militarisation of ethnic groups in the pursuit of different causes, and secessionism. The situation is complex because the state is crisscrossed by competing claims and clashing projects. On the one hand, sections of Meitei youth demand secession from India, whilst the Nagas demand either an ethnic homeland which would include Nagas across the borders of Manipur (Nagalim), or the status of an autonomous hill district within Manipur under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.<sup>47</sup> The Meiteis resent both Naga demands. Matters are further complicated, since whereas the Zemi Nagas, the Lianmai Nagas, and the Rangmai Nagas want a Zeliangrong state or an autonomous district under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, the Kuki tribes demand a Kukiland within the Indian Constitution, and a SADAR (Selected Area Development and Administrative Region) district. Not only do the Meiteis resist this demand, the Nagas do so as well. The Kukis have formed a Kuki Independence Army to protect themselves against the Nagas,<sup>48</sup> the Nagas have joined one of the two major armed groups of Nagas across the borders of Manipur, and the Meiteis have organised into four rival armed groups. Not only does Manipur have the highest number of private militias in the country but inter-ethnic clashes, which were not a general feature of Manipuri politics in earlier decades, have become common since the 1980s, making the state one of the most troubled in the region.

In J and K, the politicisation of ethnicity is indisputably a structural feature of politics in the state. The ethnic dimension of the Kashmir problem needs more elaboration than is possible here. Briefly, even though the NC eventually professed secularism, it was from the beginning steeped

---

<sup>47</sup> The Sixth Schedule which provides for autonomous districts and areas within states is applicable only to the Northeast.

<sup>48</sup> The ultimate objective is to attain an independent Kukiland in Northern Myanmar dominated by the Kuki tribe.

in Muslim *mores* and a shared Muslim identity, mainly because it articulated the grievances of a highly oppressed Muslim peasantry, and because it challenged the power of a Hindu Dogra ruler. As with the case of Punjab, this has drawn a sharp response from other groups in the state and now sections of the Hindu community in Jammu have mobilised under communal organisations to resist Muslim domination of the state. Moreover, whereas India sees the integration of a Muslim dominated state as validation of its policy of secularism, Pakistan sees the non-accession of the state as part of the unfinished business of the Partition. Politics has been once again submerged into the religious idiom. This has lent politics a distinctly religious cast in the valley. Furthermore, communal Hindu organisations in India, notably the RSS and its parliamentary wing the BJP, allege that special status has been allotted to J and K because the majority of the population is Muslim. Accusing the Congress of practising what they call 'pseudo-secularism', Hindu communal organisations demand the abolition of article 370. In short, even though the popular uprising in the valley was prompted by the fact that democracy was simply not given a chance to work there and by the fact that repeated violations of the federal principle truncated regional autonomy, the secular origins of the uprising have been completely obfuscated. This carries serious consequences since overuse of the religious idiom has facilitated the entry of armed groups who now fight in the cause of *Jehad*.

### **Implications of the Argument**

I have suggested above that none of the factors identified by our respondents as responsible for the outbreak of conflict - corruption, basic needs, and neglect of identity (re political institutions) - stand alone. They intertwine in complex ways to lend to discontent a militant and a secessionist edge. Inability to meet basic needs is a cause for disaffection but whether it leads to militancy is doubtful. Punjab agriculture is in a state of decline, the state has a fragile industrial base, and both these factors have exacerbated unemployment. But Punjab ranks third in the hierarchy of Indian states in terms of per capita income. J and K suffers from unproductive land holdings, a weak industrial base, and unemployment, as do Mizoram and Manipur, but poverty figures in J and K are much below other states. Mizoram and Manipur rank much higher than other states in social development indicators such as infant and maternal mortality rates. Only Kerala has higher literacy levels than Mizoram, whilst Manipur is second to only Kerala when it comes to gender equity.

In Mizoram we can trace a connection between neglect of basic needs by the state and subsequent armed insurrection. Originally discontent arose when the Assam government showed complete indifference when a major famine struck the Mizos. The Mizo leadership, convinced that the future of the people could only be guaranteed when they were given a state of their own, began to mobilize for statehood within the Indian Union. What they got was the status of a Union Territory (administered directly by the Central Government) in 1972 after prolonged negotiations. In the meantime, another political group, the MNF, launched an armed struggle for independence under the leadership of Laldenga. It was only in 1985, after a series of protracted and often abortive negotiations with Laldenga, that the insurrection was controlled and Laldenga gave up violence. This is the only case in India where a Peace Accord has led to the cessation of violence and where the movement was not reinvented. In part this is because the Central Government adopted a massive strategy of 'winning hearts and minds' in Mizoram and launching development initiatives for the betterment of society. In part it is due to the fact that the Indian Government was willing to recognise an insurgent leader as the representative of the people. The

Mizo case shows clearly that when the Central Government sincerely sets out to tackle the structural causes of the insurgency, conditions become favourable for cessation of violence. But the Mizo situation also proved amenable to resolution because of the absence of the ethnic factor.

In the other three states, though neglect of basic needs is a given, conflict has been caused in and through a combination of two factors: violation of the federal and democratic principle, and practices of ethnic mapping. In Punjab the SRC dismissed the claims of the Akalis for a Punjabi *Suba* when other linguistic groups were given states of their own. This was cause enough to propel mobilisation. But after the linguistic state of Punjab had been conceded, repeated infringement of regional autonomy by the Congress party (then in power at the Centre), the fact that the Akalis had to temper their own agenda to meet the necessities of coalitional politics, and the fact that Chandigarh was not transferred to the state, gave rise to a third set of agents - the militants under Bhindranwale. Ironically enough, they had been propped up by the Congress party to counteract the Akalis. Even as the Akalis intensified the tone of anti-centre rhetoric, the militants took over the politics of the state through a series of violent acts. The army assault on the Golden Temple brought popular support to the militants for almost eight years. The movement failed for a number of reasons: lack of ideological cohesiveness; personalized enmities among the militants which led to a splintering of the movements, the shallow support base of the Khalistan movement in society; and the fact that the Sikh trading and industrial class is firmly integrated into the Indian market. However, this does not cancel out the fact that the non-grant of the state of Punjab in the first instance and the repeated violations of the federal/democratic principle in the second instance produced major violence in one of the most prosperous states of the Indian Union.

The case of J and K tells us that 'bad faith' creates and sustains discontent. The issue of holding a referendum in J and K on the accession may have been sidelined by now, but it has not ceased to draw forth ire. The fact that the special status, accorded to the state after it acceded to India, was systematically eroded within a space of a decade added to discontent. Furthermore, if in J and K the federal principle of regional autonomy has been repeatedly violated by competitive party politics, it should be noted that the regional party (the NC) closed off the democratic and electoral space to other political groups. It is worthwhile considering that if the participation of these groups in the electoral process had been encouraged, we may have seen the normalisation of politics in the state. But since this was not so, political groups were compelled to function in an extra-institutional political space and were forced to resort to the religious idiom to mobilise the population. As in Punjab, both state and the national parties were completely discredited in J and K, and a third set of leaders emerged to lend violent overtones to the political processes. The frustration of the people of the Kashmir valley with the electoral process was more than evident in the series of popular demonstrations that overwhelmed the valley in 1989. Within four years popular mobilisation ebbed but in the meantime it was replaced by militants from outside the valley fighting for a different cause altogether and not that of independence for J and K.

In Manipur, ethnic conflict has proved intractable for the following reasons. Firstly, the Maharaja was compelled to sign the merger agreement with India and democratic institutions, which the state had justifiable reason to be proud of, were completely sidelined. Secondly, the Manipuri people with a long history of sophisticated state-making were not granted a state of their own until 1972. The resentment this generated, along with their resentment that the Manipuri language was not initially included in the Eighth Schedule led to discontent. Thirdly, the fact that hill tribes were granted collective entitlement to certain goods bred resentment. To put it bluntly,

the Meiteis feel that they and their rich culture have been discriminated against. Fourthly, even as some sections of the Meiteis began to employ violence in order to press their demand for secession from India, hill tribes have employed violence to press for other demands. This has created inter-ethnic tensions of gigantic proportions and control over the many insurgencies in Manipur seems problematic. In the four Manipur cases studied for this project, we found identity wars firstly to be about neglect of identity by the central government and secondly to be about resentment against the mobilisation of identity by other groups. In short, one cannot present federalism as an answer to problems of conflict without reference to the context in which federal institutions play out their roles. When federalism is based on territory as well as on ethnic identities, the grant of statehood to some groups can work both ways. It can both resolve tensions and generate tensions. Ironically, Pandit Nehru accepted the formation of linguistic states in order to quieten the discontent which had erupted over the issue in South India, particularly in Andhra Pradesh. However, in Punjab, Manipur and Mizoram the denial of statehood accelerated discontent so that even though all three states were subsequently granted statehood, resentment that other groups were given a state of their own earlier than Punjab, Manipur and Mizoram, imprinted on the collective memory of the group in question. It was precisely this resentment that was tapped by militant leaders when they set out to confront the Indian state.

**Reference:**

- Baruah, S., *Durable Disorders: understanding the politics of Northeast India*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2005
- Bose, S., *Kashmir: roots of conflict, paths to peace*, Delhi, Vistaar Publications, 2003
- Brajamani, S., *Economic Growth in Manipur: an empirical analysis*, Imphal, S. Romesh Singh, 2003
- Bunce, V., *Subversive Institutions: the design and the destruction of socialism and the state*, New York, CUP, 1999
- Bunce, V., 'Federalism, Nationalism and Secession: the communist and postcommunist experience' in Amoretti, U.M. and Bermeo, N. eds. *Federalism and Territorial Cleavages*, Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 2004
- Chand, R., "Emerging Crisis in Punjab Agriculture: severity and options for future" in *Economic and Political Weekly: special issue on Agriculture*, March 27, 1999
- Chandhoke, N., *Beyond Secularism: the rights of religious minorities*, Delhi, OUP, 1999
- Dunn, J., *Interpreting Political Responsibility*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990
- GOI, Delhi Planning Commission *State Development Report: Jammu and Kashmir*, 2004
- Hechter, M., *Containing Nationalism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000
- Horowitz, D. *A Democratic S Africa? Constitutional Engineering in a Divided Society*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991
- Kaufman, C. 'Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars' in *International Security*, 20/4 pp 133-175, 1996
- Koithara, V., *Crafting Peace in Kashmir*, Delhi, 2004
- Lipjhart, A *Democracy in Plural Societies: a comparative exploration*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1977
- Lustick, I.S., Miodownik, D. and Eidelson R.J. 'Secessionism in Multicultural States: does sharing power prevent or encourage it?' in *American Political Science Review*, 98/2, May 2004
- Nordlinger, E. *Conflict Regulation in Divided Societies*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1972
- Punjabi, R., "Kashir imbroglio: the socio-political roots" in *Contemporary South Asia* 4:1, 1995
- Singh, K., *A History of the Sikhs*, Delhi, Penguin, Vol 2., 1963-66
- Widmalm, S., 'The rise and Fall of Democracy in Jammu and Kashmir' in Basu, A and Kohli, A (eds) *Community Conflicts and the State in India*, Delhi, OUP, 1998

## Other Crisis States Publications

### *Working Papers (Series 2)*

- WP1 James Putzel, 'War, State Collapse and Reconstruction: phase 2 of the Crisis States Programme' (September 2005)
- WP3 Frederick Golooba-Mutebi, Gabi Hesselbein and James Putzel, 'Political and Economic Foundations of State making in Africa: understanding state reconstruction', (July 2006)

### *Working Papers (Series 1)*

- WP1 Crisis States Programme, 'Concept and Research Agenda' (April 2001) – *Also available in Spanish*
- WP7 Hugh Roberts, 'Co-opting Identity: The manipulation of Berberism, the frustration of democratisation and the generation of violence in Algeria' (December 2001) – *Also available in Spanish*
- WP8 Shaibal Gupta, 'Subaltern Resurgence: A reconnaissance of Panchayat election in Bihar' (January 2002)
- WP13 John Harriss, 'The States, Tradition and Conflict in North Eastern States of India' (August 2002)
- WP18 James Putzel, 'Politics, the State and the Impulse for Social Protection: The implications of Karl Polanyi's ideas for understanding development and crisis' (October 2002)
- WP22 Apurba Baruah, 'Tribal Traditions and Crises of Governance in North East India, with special reference to Meghalaya' (March 2003)
- WP26 Manoj Srivastava, 'The Dynamics of achieving 'Power' and 'Reform' as a Positive-Sum Game: A report on the preliminary ethnographic explorations of the politics-governance nexus in Madhya Pradesh, India' (March 2003)
- WP34 Hugh Roberts, 'North African Islamism in the Blinding Light of 9-11' (October 2003)
- WP39 Apurba Baruah, 'Ethnic Conflicts and Traditional Self-governing Institutions: A Study of Laitumkrah *Dorbar*' (January 2004)
- WP50 Laurie Nathan, 'The Absence of Common Values and Failure of Common Security in Southern Africa, 1992-2003' (July 2004)
- WP52 Manorama Sharma, 'Critically Assessing Traditions: The Case of Meghalaya' (November 2004)
- WP60 Manoj Srivastava, 'Crafting Democracy and Good Governance in Local Arenas: Theory, Dilemmas and their Resolution through the Experiments in Madhya Pradesh, India?' (April 2005)
- WP67 Antonio Giustozzi, 'The Ethnicisation of an Afghan Faction: Junbesh-i-Milli from the Origins to the Presidential Elections (2004)' (September 2004)
- WP68 Andrew Fischer, 'Close Encounters of an Inner-Asian Kind: Tibetan-Muslim Coexistence and Conflict in Tibet Past and Present' (September 2005)
- WP75 Neera Chandhoke, 'Of Broken Social Contracts and Ethnic Violence: The Case of Kashmir' (December 2005)
- WP79 Sajjad Hassan, 'Explaining Manipur's Breakdown and Mizoram's Peace: the state and identities in North East India', (February 2006)

### *Discussion Papers*

- DP1 James Putzel, 'The Politics of 'Participation': Civil Society, the State and Development Assistance' (January 2004)
- DP2 James Putzel, 'The 'new' imperialism and possibilities of co-existence' (January 2004)
- DP4 Manoj Srivastava, 'Moving Beyond "Institutions Matter": Some Reflections on how the "Rules of the Game" Evolve and Change' (March 2004)
- DP5 Laurie Nathan, 'Accounting for South Africa's Successful Transition to Democracy' (June 2004)
- DP7 James Putzel, 'The Political Impact of Globalisation and Liberalisation: Evidence Emerging from Crisis States Research' (November 2004)
- DP11 Laurie Nathan, 'The Frightful Inadequacy of Most of the Statistics: A Critique of Collier and Hoeffler on Causes of Civil War' (September 2005)
- DP12 Jon Lunn, 'The Power of Justice, Justice as Power: Observations on the Trajectory of the International Human Rights Movement' (September 2005)
- DP14 Neera Chandhoke, 'The Political Consequences of Ethnic Mapping' (December 2005)

These can be downloaded from the Crisis States website ([www.crisisstates.com](http://www.crisisstates.com)), where an up-to-date list of all our publications and events can be found.

The aim of the Crisis States Programme (CSP) at DESTIN's Development Research Centre is to provide new understanding of the causes of crisis and breakdown in the developing world and the processes of avoiding or overcoming them. We want to know why some political systems and communities, in what can be called the "fragile states" found in many of the poor and middle income countries, have broken down even to the point of violent conflict while others have not. Our work asks whether processes of globalisation have precipitated or helped to avoid crisis and social breakdown.

### Crisis States Programme collaborators

*In India:*

Asia Development Research Institute (Patna, Bihar)  
NEIDS, North-East Hill University (Shillong)  
Developing Countries Research Centre (University of Delhi)

*In South Africa:*

Wits Institute of Social & Economic Research (WISER)  
Sociology of Work Workshop (SWOP)  
Department of Sociology  
(University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg)

*In Colombia:*

IEPRI, Universidad Nacional de Colombia  
Universidad de los Andes  
Universidad del Rosario

### Research Objectives

- 1 We will assess how constellations of power at local, national and global levels drive processes of institutional change, collapse and reconstruction and in doing so will challenge simplistic paradigms about the beneficial effects of economic and political liberalisation.
- 2 We will examine the effects of international interventions promoting democratic reform, human rights and market competition on the 'conflict management capacity' and production and distributional systems of existing polities.
- 3 We will analyse how communities have responded to crisis, and the incentives and moral frameworks that have led either toward violent or non-violent outcomes.
- 4 We will examine what kinds of formal and informal institutional arrangements poor communities have constructed to deal with economic survival and local order.



**Development Research Centre,**  
Development Studies Institute (DESTIN),  
LSE, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE  
Tel: +44 (0)20 7849 4631 Fax: +44 (0)20 7955 6844  
e-mail: [csp@lse.ac.uk](mailto:csp@lse.ac.uk)

