

An Empirical Analysis of Islamic Extremism in North East India

Saroj Kumar Rath

Extremism perpetuated by Islamic organizations in the Northeastern region has received near no scholarly scrutiny despite the overwhelming evidence that there is rise of extremist violence amongst the Muslim population of Northeast India. A less known fact about Assam is, it is the only province, among the Indian provinces, which successfully defeated Islamic invasion throughout the Islamic rule in India. Surprisingly, Islam made its rampant entry into the province during the Christian-led East India Company and British Crown rule in India. It was the time when British took full control of Assam. Exponential population growth among the adherents of Islam coupled with unrestricted influx of migrants from the neighbouring areas changed the demographic composition of Assam. The growth of Muslim population particularly since the turn of 20th century directly pitted the community against the ancient local Assamese culture. The infighting, when aided by outside powers, soon received a transnational character where global Islamic extremists opened contact with Assamese Muslims and started guiding on how to protect Islam and establish a model Islamic State in the region. Two issues would be dealt in this paper. Firstly, the paper would make an empirical analysis on how Islamic extremism permeates into the Northeastern India and secondly, the research would scrutinize linear contributing factors responsible for the growth and thriving of extremism in the region with special focus on Pakistan's motivation to take over Assam and support armed groups.

Keywords: Northeastern India, Islamic Militancy, Assam, Terrorism, Security and Radicalization

Introduction

There is huge gap in scholarly publications on the subject of extremism perpetuated by Islamic extremists in the Northeast. Most scholars and authors dealing with the subjects have so far published small reportages or sporadic accounts in popular media. Empirical analysis of the subject and explanation about the evolution of Islamic extremism in Northeast India is yet to be done by serious researchers. It is argued by

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numerous researchers that Islamic insurgency in Northeast is a post-1990 development, a calculated ventilation of anger by the Muslims against the wrong done by the Hindus at Ayodhya where they destroyed the Babri Masjid in 1992 (Saikia 2004; Rajamohan 2003). Contrastingly, the same research work talks about participation of Muslim extremists in the operation of Northeast based terrorist groups like United Liberation Front for Assam (ULFA) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the support of Pakistan's external security agency Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) to such groups. Empirical evidence suggests that extremism of Islamic origin in the Northeast has a long history where migration from the neighbouring state aided (Patel 2018: 88-99) to the ongoing process of radicalization of the local population (Chari & Raghavan 2010; Saikia 2004; Rajamohan 2003; Kiessling 2016).

A Historical Explanation

Coined by British civil servant Alexander Mackenzie, the term 'Northeastern Frontier' (Mackenzie 2001: 1) in the contemporary time comprised of eight Indian states viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Peculiar geographic location opens the region's border to five foreign powers namely China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal. These five countries encircle the region leaving only a small land area to interact with India. Historically identified with names like Pragjyotishpura, Kamrupa and Assam, the region is steeped in Sanatan Dharma philosophy and Hindu way of living since millennia.

India's Northeastern region is historically identified with three names Pragjyotishpura, Assam and Kamrupa (Konow 1982; Sastri 1983; Choudhury 1959: 448; Lahiri 1991: 14). Other than oral history, the earliest mention of Assam can be found in Kalika Puran, Vishnu Puran and Jogini Tantra. Puranas and Tantra describes Assam as Kamrupa while the province is known as Pragjyotishpura in Mahabharata (The Mahabharata, 1997). Recorded history about Assam starts with the decoding of Nidhanpur Copper plates Grant and the Doobi Plates. The Nidhanpur Copper Plates Grant¹ takes the history of Assam from Puranic script to recorded history. Starting from Fourth Century AD, Nidhanpur Copper Plates Grant describes the genealogy of the Varman dynasty that continued until Seventh century AD. Bana Bhatta's 'Harsha Charita' and Hiuen Tsiang's Si-Yu-Ki narrates the history of Assam until Seventh Century (Shastri 2017; Beal 2017: 404).

Copper Plate inscriptions of Ratna Pal and Dharam Pal along with the Koch Bansabali filled the historical gap about rulers until 13th century (Choudhury 1977: 61-69). In 1228 AD, when Ahom kings taken over the territory from Koch kings, they started calling the region as Assam. The Ahoms were one of the most history conscious dynasties endowed with a high degree of historical faculty. Ahom priests and leading families possessed Buranjis, or genealogies, which were periodically brought up to date. They were written on oblong strips of bark, and were very carefully preserved and handed down from father to son (Gait 2008: iii). The Ahoms were an interesting dynasty most conscious of written history. Global academia, especially the one dominated by the west disregard Indian history as oral and hearsay. This runs contrary to the perception that Indians were not conscious of written history or mostly relied on oral traditions.

Oral history ascribes the word Assam as a vulgar form of Sanskrit word 'Asama' meaning uneven. Sankaradeva, the eminent saint and socio-religious reformer of Assam, in his Bhagavata Purana written in Asamese during the early 16th century popularized the name Asama². Assam, inextricably linked with Hindu way of life since time immemorial, is the only province in India that has never surrendered to the invading Muhammadans. In early 13th century Muhammad Bakhtyar Khilji tried to subdue Assam only to face a crushing defeat at the hands of Koch king (Minhaj-e-siraj 1980: 561-69). Bakhtyar Khilji's armies were killed and along with a handful of lieutenants Khilji was lucky to save his life while beating a retreat to the safety of Bengal plain. History repeated itself when Mughal general Mir Jumla invaded Assam in 1663 only to face the fate of Khilji (Provincial Gazetteer of Assam 1999: 15-16). Mir Jumla not only faced a crushing defeat at the hands of the Ahom King Jayadhvaj Singh but also forced to sign a humiliating treaty with the Ahom king. Mir Jumla's official historian wrote that 'A similar case had never happened before in the history of Delhi' (Talish 1907). Assam remained out of bound for the invading Muhammadans as well as their co-religionists. The province was closely affiliated with the core of ancient India and defied the 'surrendering and subjugating tendencies of mainland India at the hands of a handful of invading Islamic rulers from Afghanistan and Central Asia'.³

Assam, during the Mughal-British era, divided into three regions Sylhet, Manipur and Assam. The three regions interacted separately with various foreign regimes namely the Mughal, Burmese and British. Sylhet passed into the hands of the British in 1765, together with the rest of Bengal (Lindsay 1849: 163). It was during the Mughal rule, precisely during early 1700s, the region first interacted with the Muhammadans. Ain-i-Akbari of Abul Fazl clarified that Sylhet was an independent region (Allami 1938: 125). In Aurangzeb's reign (1648-1707), it is said that Raja Gobind of Sylhet was summoned to Delhi and there he became a Muhammadan (Gait 2008: 329). Since the conversion of Raja Gobind, some Muslims settled in Sylhet and that was the beginning of Islamic presence in Assam and adjacent regions.

Manipur and Assam constantly threatened by the Burmese invasion starting from 1755 that was continued until 1826. In 1824, Purandar Singh of Ahom dynasty faced the invasion of Burmese army. The Ahom king started negotiation with British Political Officer David Scott to save Assam from the Burmese invasion. However, he was reluctant to compromise his independence. It was not possible for Assam to avoid British influence and with the aid of the East India Company, the First Anglo-Burmese War concluded with the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo on 24 February 1826 (Snodgrass, 1827). As per the treaty, Burmese agreed not to interfere in the affairs of Assam and recognized the Raja of Manipur Gambhir Singh.

Although by virtue of negotiation with the British Assam saved her territorial limit from Burmese invasion, the Treaty of Yandabo established the grip of another foreign power, the Christian-led British East India Company. The Company took control of Western Assam. Although the Company allowed the Ahom king to continue his rule, its indirect control started with the stationing of a political agent at Ahom capital. Gobind Chandra was reinstated as the Raja of Cachar who by virtue of the treaty of Badarpur signed on 6 March 1824 acknowledged the allegiance of East

India Company and agreed to pay a tribute of Rs. 10,000 a year (Atichison 1931: 230-33). The Company reinstated Purandar Singha as king of upper Assam in 1832. The gradual grip of East India Company over Assam increased with clinical efficiency.

By 1838, the entire region including Upper Assam, Khasi Hills, Jaintia Kingdom, Cachar, Garo Hills and Khamtis were annexed (Jenkins 1995: 1777). The province was made part of Bengal Presidency in 1838. By the year 1874, Assam was separated from Bengal and formed 'North-East Frontier non-regulation province' or Assam Chief-Commissionership (Roman 1892: 89)⁴.

Alexander Mackenzie was the first to use the term 'North-east Frontier' to identify Assam, including the adjoining hill areas and the princely states of Manipur and Tripura in his book 'North-east Frontier of India' in 1884 (Mackenzie, 2001). Mackenzie said, 'The North-east frontier of Bengal is a term used sometimes to denote a boundary line, and sometimes more generally to describe a tract. In the latter sense it embraces the whole of the hill ranges north, east, and south of the Assam Valley, as well as the western slopes of the great mountain system lying between Bengal and independent Burma, with its outlying spurs and ridges (Mackenzie 2001: 1).'

During the partition of Bengal in 1905-1911, Assam was placed under the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. In 1912, after the end of Bengal's partition, Assam became a separate province (Taylor 1842: 505-07). Although the British East India Company was motivated by commercial profit and rule a vast prosperous land, letting the catholic mission to spread Christianity was one of their important objectives (Sword 1935: 36.). British entry into India and the spread of Christianity was a calculated and a well-organized endeavor, which cannot be discounted an inevitable result of British political culture steeped in Catholic and then Protestant ethic. Enough documentary evidence available on the question how the British East India company was led by a Christian conversion vision, rather than an inevitable consequence of their rule (Barkataki 1985: 86). Although Christian Missionaries landed in Assam in as early as 1626 AD when Portuguese Jesuit Missionaries, Cacella and Cabral landed in Guwahati on 26 September 26 1626 and introduced Christianity to the locals, it was first British agent Governor General of North East Frontier David Scoot, who heralded formal introduction of Christianity in the region in 1929. Scoot played a leading role in establishing a mission school in Guwahati and encouraged the Baptist Missionary Society to run missionary activities in Assam (Gammel 1850: 212). Subsequent British administrators, Adam White, T.C. Robertson and Francis Jenkins to mention a few provided higher visibility and accesses to Christian mission staff in the region for the growth and development of Christianity.

The departing Britishers envisioned 'Crown Colony' (Syiemlieh, 2014) in the line of Aden, Singapore or Hong Kong for the hills of North East that would have included all tribal areas of North East and portion of Burma. A line system was introduced with the Eastern Bengal Frontier Regulation Act of 1873 and in 1935, the hill areas were demarcated and divided into 'Excluded Areas' and 'Partially Excluded Areas'. The 'Crown Colony' goal was pursued by Sir Robert Neil Reid, Governor of Assam (1937-1942), his successor Sir Andrew Gourlay Clow (1942-1947), James Philip Mills, Advisor to the Government of Assam for Tribal Areas and States, and

his successor Philip F Adams. Infuriated by such a proposal, Assam Premier Gopinath Bordoloi and Jawaharlal Nehru opposed it vehemently, which finally forced the British to drop the plan (India Office Library and Record, 1946).

Islam's Entry into North East

The Muslims who accompanied Muhammad Bakhtiyar Khilji during his infamous invasion of Assam in 1205 faced hostile opposition from the local tribes that forced Khilji's army of followers to retreat rather soon without leaving a footprint (Baruah 1999: 278). As explained at the above, Khilji's failed expedition followed by a series of unsuccessful invasion by other Muslim invaders including Mir Jumla, the fierce general of Aurangzeb, who all tasted failure in Assam (Talish 1907). However, by this time few Muslim soldiers preferred to settle in Assam instead of going back with their defeated leaders (Baruah 1999: 278). These people married local Assamese girls some of whose relatives also converted into Islam.

The finesse with which the Muslims adopted local culture prompted Mir Jumla's official historian Shihabuddin Talish to quote that 'the local Muslims in Assam are nothing of Islam except the name. Their hearts are inclined for more towards mingling with the Assamese, than towards association with the Muslims' (Talish 2013: 153). Subsequently, in the middle of the 17th century a Muslim Saint Hazarat Shah Milon popularly known as Azan Fakir came to Assam. It is argued that being a fakir (mendicant) and a Sufi saint, he was successful in stabilizing Islam in Assam (Baruah 1999: 279).

After the Battle of Plassey in 1757, when the East India Company established its administration in Bengal and when Assam came under the Company's protection after the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, Muslims from the two provinces interacted frequently with each other. A number of Muslims from Bengal migrated to Assam and settled in the province. The new settlers encouraged their fellow religionists from Bengal to come to Assam and settle there to augment their economic prosperity (Roy 2003: 10).

The vast virgin valley and hills of Assam attracted and absorbed Muslim peasants and settlers which contributed to the growth of Islam in the province. So much was the growth of number of Muslims in Assam in the subsequent time that the elections to the Legislative Assembly of 1937 produced a coalition government led by Muslim League leader Muhammad Saadulah (Ashfaq 2013). Muhammad Sadullah became the chief minister from 1 April 1937 to 10 September 1938; from 17 November 1939 to 25 December 1941 and from 24 August 1942 to 11 February 1946. Sadullah was a member of the Executive Committee of the All India Muslim League when the league meets at its Annual gathering at Lahore on 23 March 1940 and passed 'Pakistan Resolution' (Ahmed 1960: 116-18).

During Sir Mohammad Sadulla's Muslim League Ministry, a concerted effort was made to encourage the migration of Bengali Muslims into Assam for political reasons. After a visit to Assam in December 1943, Lord Wavell, the Viceroy, wrote in the Viceroy's Journal, 'The chief political problem is the desire of the Muslim Ministers to increase this immigration into the uncultivated Government lands under the slogan of Grow More Food but what they are really after, is Grow More Muslims' (Wavel

1943; Kar 1990: 68).’

After partition, Saadullah decided to stay in Assam and he was the only member from the Northeast India to be elected to the Drafting Committee of Constituent Assembly of India in 1947 (The London Gazette 1946).

During 6-7 July 1947, Government of India decided to organize Sylhet referendum to determine the future of Sylhet. Voters were given two options in the referendum either to join India or to join Pakistan. A Muslim majority district, Sylhet decided in favor of Pakistan. Out of the 423,660 valid votes, 56.56% voted in favor of joining Pakistan while 43.44 percent decided to remain with India (Governor of Assam 1947). On 3 June 1947, Viceroy Mountbatten announced that ‘Though Assam is predominantly a non-Muslim province, the district of Sylhet which is contiguous to Bengal in predominantly Muslims. The rest of the Assam province will in any case continue to remain in India (India Office Record 1947).’

Sylhet referendum had a peculiar background. Not only Sylhet was a Muslim-majority district within a Hindu-majority Assam but also its Muslim inhabitants speak Sylheti language. It is argued by scholars that since the Muslims of Sylhet were Muslim League supporters, in an effort to consolidate Congress party’s position in Assam, Congress leaders surgically ceded the Muslim majority Sylhet to East Pakistan. During his discussion with the Cabinet Mission, Congress leader Gopinath Bardoloi expressed his desire to ‘hand over Sylhet to Eastern Bengal’ (Moon 1998: 234).

Prelude To Rise of Islamic Extremism

Until 1951, except Assam and Tripura, the rest of the Northeast provinces had miniscule Muslim population. In 1901, Assam’s Muslim population was 15.03 percent that had reached 24.68 percent in 1951. Presently, the province houses 34.22 percent Muslims. Tripura is the only province which witnessed a sudden decline in Muslim population in 1971 owing to the creation of Bangladesh and large-scale migration of Muslims to the new country. Rest of the provinces witnessed growth of Muslim population on a geometric proportion since 1901. Even Tripura started showing growth of Muslim population after 1981.

Shri Indrajit Gupta, the then Home Minister of India stated in the Parliament on 6 May 1997 that there were 10 million illegal migrants residing in India. Quoting Home Ministry/Intelligence Bureau source, the 10 August 1998 issue of India Today reported that in Assam 4 million and in Tripura 8 million illegal Bangladeshi immigrants residing (Sinha 1998). On 15 July 2004, then Minister of State for Home Mr. Sriprakash Jaiswal stated in Rajya Sabha that the number of illegal Bangladeshi migrants in India is 12 million. Jaiswal said that 1,20,53,950 illegal Bangladeshi migrants were residing in 17 states and union territories as on 31 December 2001. He also stated that Assam alone accounted for 50 lakh Bangladeshi squatters (Two Crore Illegal Migrants 2016). On 16 November 2016, while replying to a question in the same house, India’s Minister of State for Home Affairs Mr. Kiren Rijiju stated that ‘there are around 20 million (2 crore) illegal Bangladeshi migrants staying in India’.⁵ The Intelligence Bureau, which relied on authentic record, has put the number of illegal migrants to an unexpectedly low figure. It said, the Ministry of Home Affairs,

in a circular on 23 November 2009 provided guidelines to all states and union territories for detection and deportation of illegal Bangladeshi migrants. With respect to Assam, Foreigners Tribunals are functioning under Foreigners (Tribunal Order 1964) to detect such illegal immigrants for further deportation and since 1986, over 62,000 of them have been identified by the Tribunals' (Lok Sabha 2019: 73). However, the Intelligence Bureau explained that as per its records 'only about 2400 could be deported and deportation of others could not materialize for various reasons.' The Director General of Police of Assam submitted in evidence a different figure altogether and stated that so far, '76740 persons were declared as foreigners in Assam. Out of this 32,243 belong to the 1966-71 stream and 43,497 belong to the post 71 stream (Lok Sabha 2019: 74).'

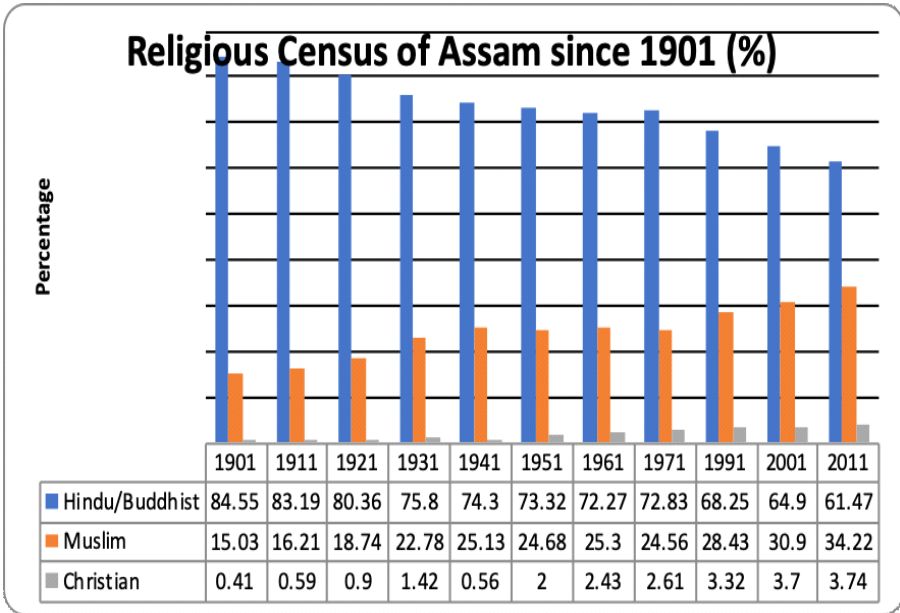
The huge concentration of illegal migrants in the Northeast with its porous borders with five countries is a recipe for growing Islamic extremism where rival powers pitched in to exploit the growing dissension among local population. What is significant is out of the 20 million odd Bangladeshi illegal migrants only a miniscule 193,000 are Hindus (Hindus from Pakistan 2016; India mulls granting Citizenship 2016; Mehta 2012). Rests of the migrant are Muslims who solicit the service of Islamic extremist organization for their illegal transport into India and for their survival in India (Prakash 2007: 697; Saikia 2004: 126; Singha 2018: 41; Sahni, 2012). Local insurgency in Assam was mainly fed by illegal migration from Bangladesh.

All Assam Students Union (AASU) and Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AGSP) were formed to oppose illegal migrants. As a counter force to these organizations, Islamist extremist organization like Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) formed in 1993. After 1985, insurgency and extremism in Assam bear religious character because of emergence of as many as 29 Muslim fundamentalist groups in North East. The list of 29 Islamic fundamentalist groups is discussed later in this article. The illegal migrants feared that administration would never support their migration and therefore, almost all these organisations came into existence as a result of a fear that the administration was not aware of the problems of the Muslim community. MULTA even demanded thirty per cent reservation in education and employment for Muslims, establishment of Muslim Court in Assam and reservation of seats in Legislative Assembly for the Muslims of the Barak Valley among other demands (Prakash 2007: 697; Saikia 2004: 126). Therefore, from the outset illegal migrant groups are vulnerable to support Islamic extremists for their safety and survival.

The movement of Hindu refugees into Assam got largely arrested due to anti-Bengali riots and as a result of violence in the wake of insurgency in the State. Illegal migrants from Bangladesh into Assam are now almost exclusively Muslims (Sinha 1998).

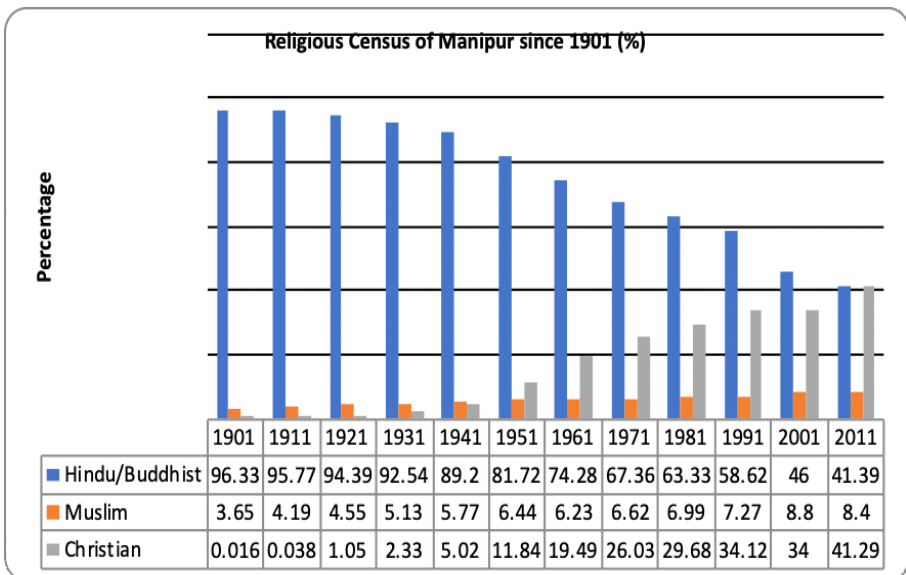
Former Governor of Assam Lt. Gen. S.K. Sinha stated that with the growth of illegal migrants in Northeast, 'Muslim militant organizations have mushroomed in Assam' (Sinha 1998). Following charts show the disproportionate growth of Muslims since 1901 in Northeastern states. The charts explain how the growth of Muslim migrants is directly linked with growing extremism in the region.

Chart 1 – Assam



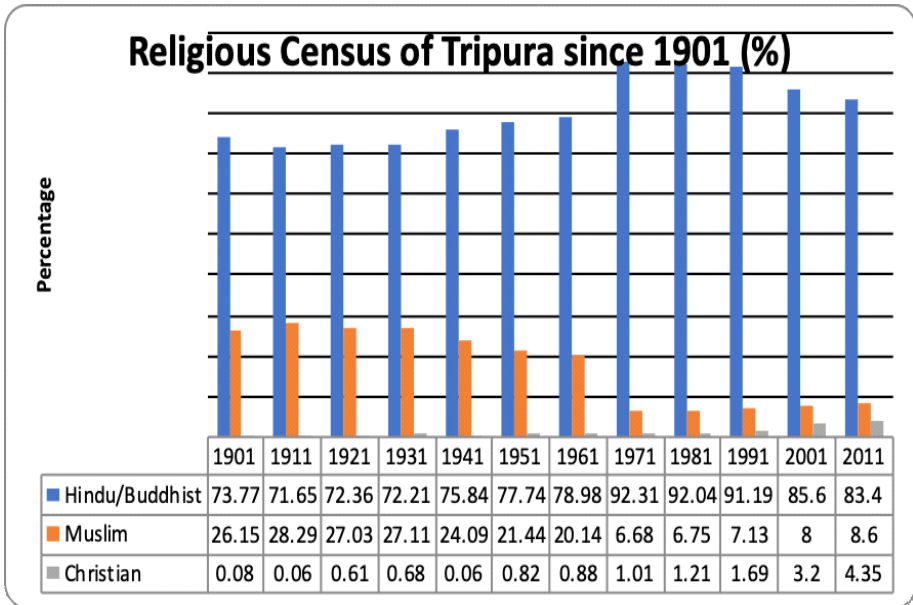
- Census in 1981 was not held due to insurgency in the province.
- Source: Compiled from Census of India Reports, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Chart 2 – Manipur



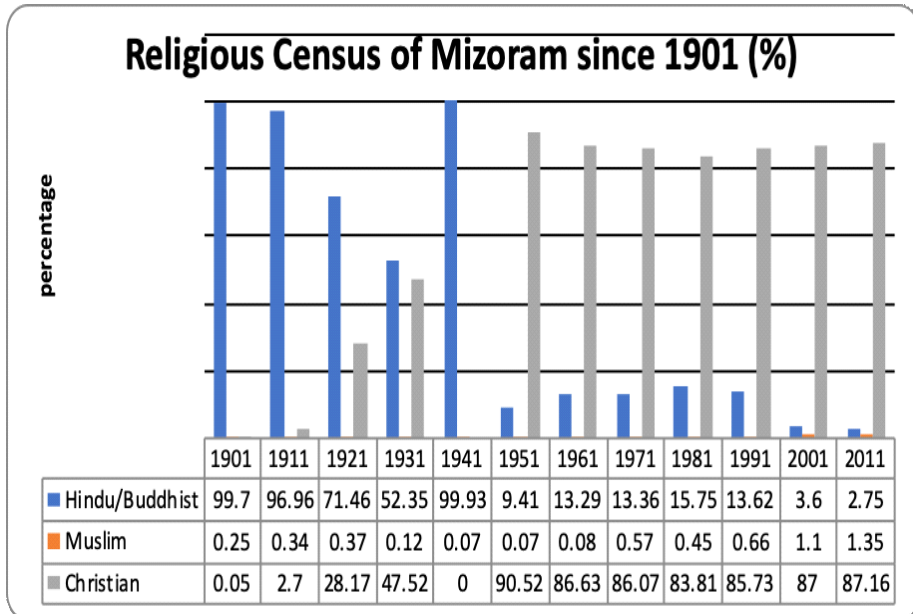
- Compiled from Census of India Reports, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Chart – 3 Tripura



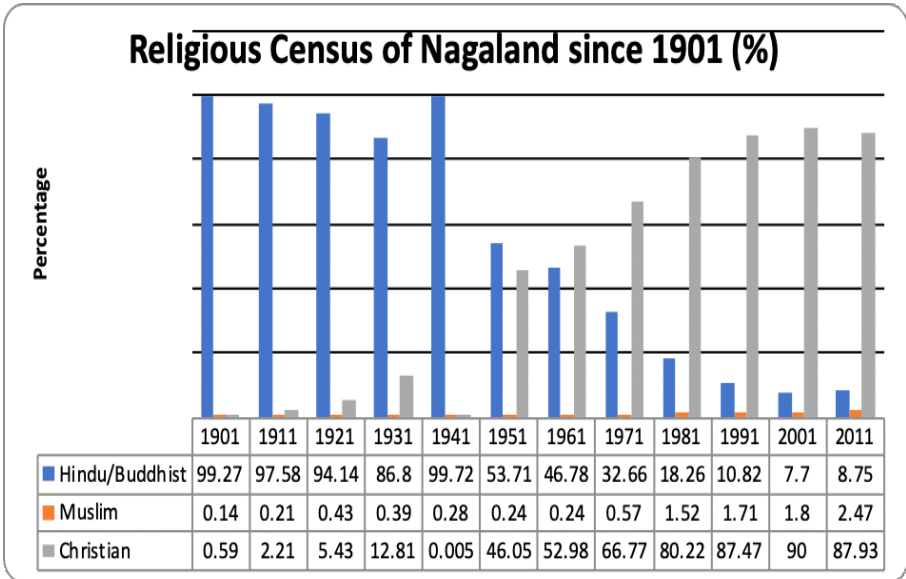
- Compiled from Census of India Reports, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Chart – 4 Mizoram



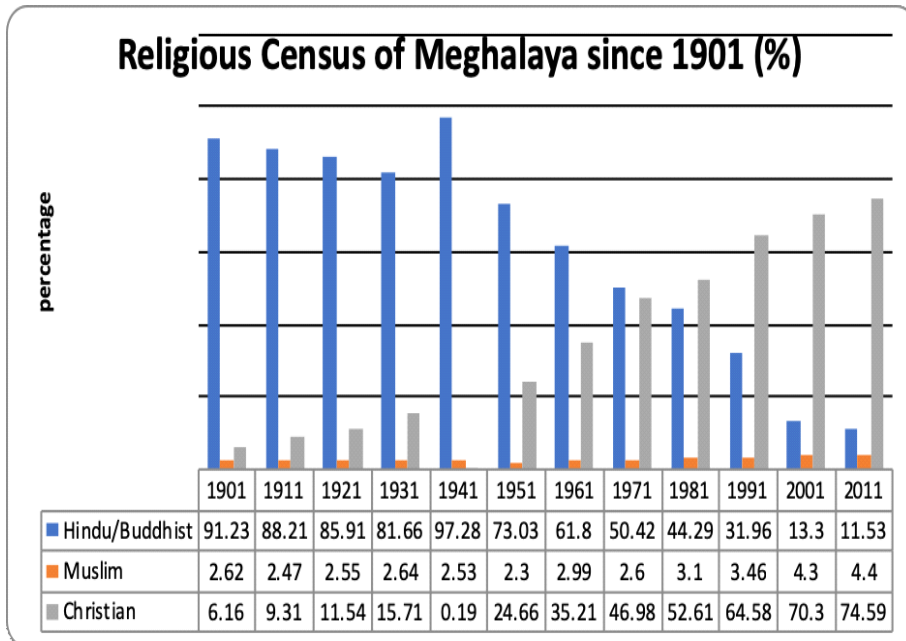
- Compiled from Census of India Reports, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Chart – 5 Nagaland



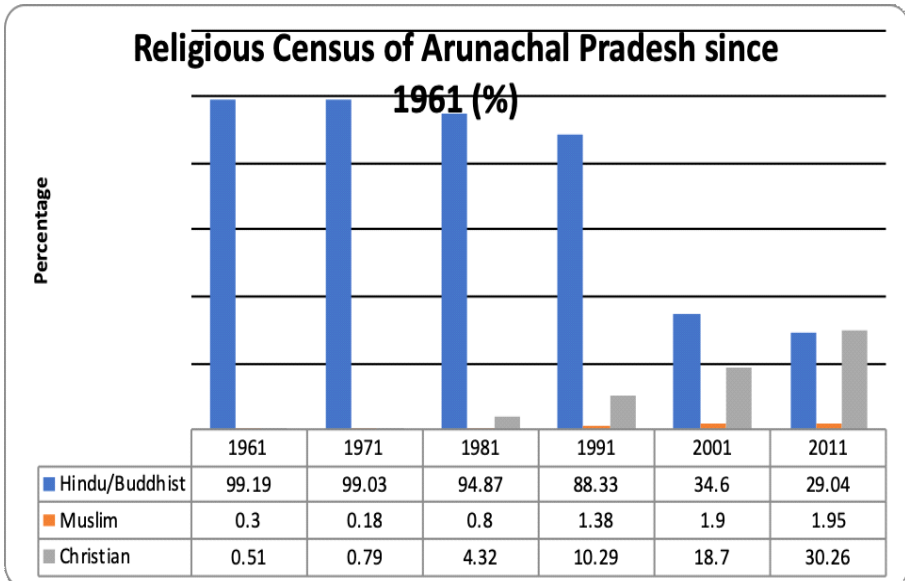
• Compiled from Census of India Reports, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Chart – 6 Meghalaya



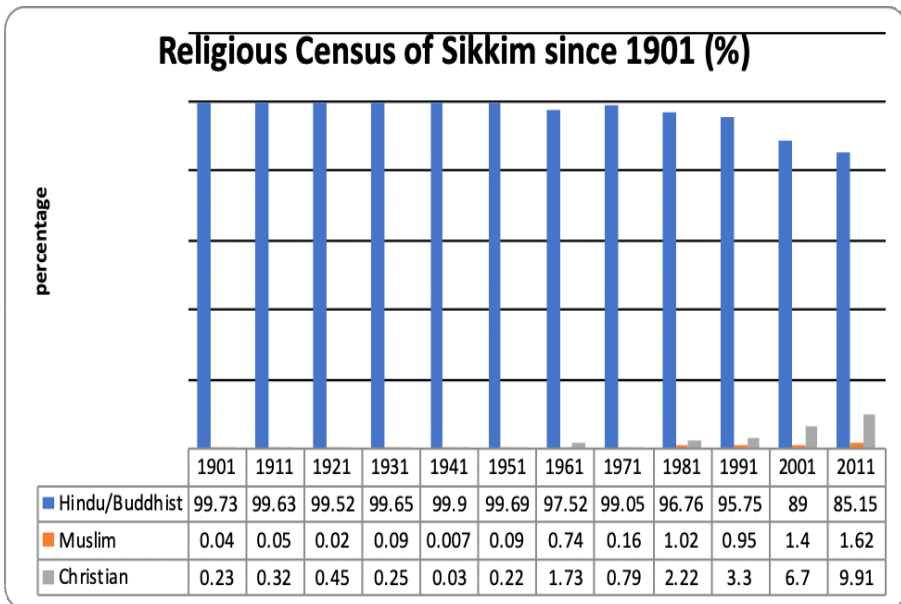
• Compiled from Census of India Reports, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Chart – 7 Arunachal Pradesh



- Compiled from Census of India Reports, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

Chart – 8 Sikkim



- Compiled from Census of India Reports, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India

In 1947, Assam along with the princely states of Tripura and Manipur remained with India, which formed the new Northeastern states of India. Curiously, Tripura and Manipur were merged with Assam in 1947 and the merger continued until 1972, when the two states were given full statehood by government of India.

Sandwiched among five nations namely China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, the Northeastern region interacts with mainland India through a narrow land corridor. The creation of Pakistan in 1947 after partition of India has altered the original geography of the region. Partition was erected in such a way that Northeastern states found themselves in a landlocked hilly territory (Radcliffe 1947). Not only Assam's access to Bay of Bengal Sea was denied but also its interaction with India was allowed either through a slim land corridor or through the limitless but expensive sky route. Previously East Pakistan and after 1971 Bangladesh monopolized access to Bay of Bengal Sea. Partition generated considerable animosity in between the Hindus and Muslims that has grown exponentially when Assamese realized that they are surrounded by hostile nations and their access to sea is curtailed by East Pakistan. This religious divide and animosity have great repercussion for India's national security.

With an intension to assuage local aspirations, Government of India from time to time carved new provinces out of Assam. By 1987, erstwhile Assam divided into seven provinces. The process of carving new province out of Assam started in 1963 with the formation of Nagaland. In 1972 three new provinces Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura were created. In 1972, Shillong became the provincial capital of Meghalaya forcing Assam to shift its capital from Shillong to Dispur. Finally, Arunachal Pradesh was created out of Assam in 1975 while Mizoram was formed in 1987 (North East Division 2017).

Continuing with the quest to provide an environment for development and growth of the region, the North Eastern Council was established an act of parliament in 1971 (The North Eastern Council Act 1971 2017). The council has been instrumental in setting in motion a new economic endeavor aimed at removing the basic handicaps that stood in the way of normal development of the Northeastern region. Sikkim was added as the eighth states into the council in 2002, thus making Northeast region as a conglomerate of eight states (The North Eastern Council (Amendment) Act 2002, 2017).

The North Eastern region is culturally and ethnically diverse having more than 200 ethnic groups which have distinct languages, dialects and socio-cultural identities. The region covers 8 % of the country's geographical area and about 4% of the national population. Almost all of its borders of about 5,484 kilometers is international border along Bangladesh (1880 km), Myanmar (1,643 km), China (1,346 km), Bhutan (516 Km) and Nepal (99 Km) (Ministry of Home Affairs 2016-17: 14).

Empirical Explanation on the rise of Islamic Extremism in Northeast

Empirically explaining, extremism in Northeast is not linked to one particular reason or factor. Multiple dynamic has played roles in the rise of Islamic extremism. Rise of Islamic extremism in the Northeast has been directly linked with the following factors:

- a) Growth of Islam in the region;

- b) Pakistan's 'India obsession' under which it recruits, train, finance and support Islamic terrorist groups against India;
- c) The reckless increase of Muslim migrants from Bangladesh;
- d) The quest of Muslims to form militant groups for self-protection and to obtain political bargain; and
- e) The inherent pursuit of fundamentalist Islamic religious group to establish an Islamic State.

Pakistan is one of the prime contributing factors in the growth and development of extremist organizations in Northeast. Failure to get Assam included in East Pakistan in 1947 remained a source of abiding resentment in that country. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in his book, 'Myths of Independence' wrote, 'It would be wrong to think that Kashmir is the only dispute that divides India and Pakistan, though undoubtedly the most significant. One at least is nearly as important as the Kashmir dispute, that of Assam and some districts of India adjacent to East Pakistan. To these Pakistan has very good claims' (Bhutto 1969: 163). Even a pro-India leader like Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in his book, *Eastern Pakistan: Its Population and Economics*, observed, 'Because Eastern Pakistan must have sufficient land for its expansion and because Assam has abundant forests and mineral resources, coal, petroleum etc., Eastern Pakistan must include Assam to be financially and economically strong' (Singh 1990: 168).

Initially, Pakistan's ISI was an ordinary organization with a professional zeal to protect country's national interest. But the inherent religious discord between India and Pakistan and the formation of Pakistan on the ground of religion slowly made the country intolerant towards India. With the passing of time, ISI became the vehicle of Pakistan's perpetual hate against India (Rath 2015: 22). Pakistan's animosity towards India did not stem from partition days or with the formation of ISI. It is rooted in the convergence lines of Hindu and Muslim civilizations from 10th century AD onwards.

Islam in India was identified with civilizational conflict that refused to honour the old civilizational and religious symbols of the Hindus and the Buddhists.⁶ From the 11th century Islam came to India in the guise of a conqueror, sword in hand that it produced a violent reaction, and the old toleration gave way to hatred and conflict (Nehru 2004: 179-80). The Muslim prosecution of Hindus was started by Mahmud of Ghazni, who made seventeen raids during the eleventh century. He took 200,000 captives and vast wealth from Thanesar. In Somnath, temple was broken and looted and 50,000 people perished' (Nehru 2004: 179-80).

After that there was a deluge of Muslim invaders who came to India, attacked, plundered and established kingdoms of various hues over the next six hundred years. Nadir Shah in 1739 denuded Delhi of its entire male population and captured all females as slaves (Nehru 2004: 373). After the Muslim rule, the Britishers were smart enough to use the Hindu-Muslim fault line to keep the two communities divided through a series of policies to rule the vast empire of India (Hunter 1920: 238). But 'it was soon after the revolt of 1857 that the two sentiments began to agitate the Muslim mind. First, the Muslims feared losing of sovereignty over India and emergence of an alien power under whose aegis the principle of majority rule was to be gradually applied. And second, the Muslims feared that the Hindu tradition of

absorbing all kinds of alien forces and doctrines would at least succeed in breaking the weakening ramparts of Indian Islam' (Aziz 1987: 1). So the 'Muslims decided to stand against the coming of a Hindu rule with the tenacity of the primitive and the sophisticated argument of the modern' (Nehru 2004: 373). History of the birth of Pakistan amply testifies the underlying philosophy of Pakistan's incurable anti-India policy (Dhar 2006: 29).

ISI researchers have understood the fact that erstwhile Assam was the only province, which never subjugated by the sword of Islamic rulers during their prolonged rule in India.⁷ Therefore, in Northeast region the agency needed a different policy to unsettle India.

The 1947 division of India and subsequent communal clashes left the Muslims of Assam high and dry. Killings and migration of both Muslims and Hindus resulted in disproportionate demographic alteration both in Assam and in East Pakistan. For the first time in half century, Assam registered a slight decline in Muslim population (Census of India 1951). The stalemate in India-Pakistan war of 1947-48 coupled with the infant stature of ISI in 1950 prompted Pakistan to pursue a low profile disguised Islamic insurgency in Northeast India.

The Naga National Council (NNC) was formed on 2 February 1946, a little over a year before India's independence, to hold the Naga people together in one platform and claim sovereignty status. Angami Zapu Phizo, the leader of NNC declared Nagaland as an independent state on 14 August 1947. The NNC organized a theatrical referendum on 16 May 1951, in which '99 per cent' supported an 'independent' Nagaland (Phizo 2017). On 22 March 1952, Phizo formed the underground Naga Federal Government and Naga Federal Army prompting India to enact the Armed Forces Special Power Act in 1958.

Gen. Ayub Khan imposed Marshal Rule in Pakistan in 1958. Major General R. Cawthorne, an Australia born British army officer, who created ISI in 1948, handed over the baton of ISI to Lt. Gen. Riaz Hussain in 1959. Gen. Ayub Khan and Lt. Gen. Hussain started supporting NNC and asked their Muslim contacts to provide tacit support to NNC (Kiessling 2017: 161). ISI's open endorsement to Northeastern extremist became vocal in 1960 when 'Pakistan had supplied weapons for the Naga fighters (Kiessling 2017: 162).'

However, since the Muslims were numerically inferior and freshly recovering from the trauma of partition, ISI advised them to remain discreet in their participation with the insurgency orchestrated by indigenous tribal groups. With Pakistan's aid, the NNC and other similar groups continued to indulge in violence. Sensing Pakistani involvement in the Northeast, India launched a massive counter-insurgency operation in 1967 (Bhaumik 2009: 17).

India responded Pakistan's clandestine support to the Islamic and indigenous extremists of Northeast by supporting East Pakistan's tallest leader Mujibur Rehman when he raised his voice against West Pakistan's unequal treatment. Although during 1971, Pakistan faced an existential crisis when Mujibur Rehman raised the banner of rebellion 'ISI never stopped offering support to the Islamic extremists through the indigenous Northeastern insurgents (Kiessling 2017: 162).

On 20 October 1970, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman while recalling the long 23 years of independence, said that ‘Whenever people of Bengal raised their voices to get their due rights, lathi-charge, bullets and jails were in store for their leaders and workers and the bogey of ‘Islam in danger’ was raised to confound the political atmosphere of the country’ (Bengali shall not be allowed 1970). Just after partition, West Pakistan’s population was 34 million, compared with 42 million in East Pakistan, or 56 percent of the total. In 1971 West Pakistan’s population had climbed to 65 million, while East Pakistan’s stood at over 70 million (Rashid 2008: 411). Growing discontent against the West Pakistan’s monopoly over every single thing made East Pakistani agitated and impatient. In December 1970, when for the first time in its history, free elections were held in Pakistan, Awami League of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman won 167 of the 169 seats allocated to East Pakistan in the National Assembly. People of East Pakistan gave him absolute mandate in favour of his six-point doctrine, which is as follows:

1. The Constitution should provide for a Federation of Pakistan in its true sense based on the Lahore Resolution, and the parliamentary form of government with supremacy of a Legislature directly elected on the basis of universal adult franchise.
2. The federal government should deal with only two subjects: Defence and Foreign Affairs, and all other residual subjects should be vested in the federating states.
3. Two separates, but freely convertible currencies for two wings should be introduced; or if this is not feasible, there should be one currency for the whole country, but effective constitutional provisions should be introduced to stop the flight of capital from East to West Pakistan. Furthermore, a separate Banking Reserve should be established and separate fiscal and monetary policy be adopted for East Pakistan.
4. The power of taxation and revenue collection should be vested in the federating units and the federal centre would have no such power. The federation would be entitled to a share in the state taxes to meet its expenditures.
5. There should be two separate accounts for the foreign exchange earnings of the two wings; the foreign exchange requirements of the federal government should be met by the two wings equally or in a ratio to be fixed; indigenous products should move free of duty between the two wings, and the constitution should empower the units to establish trade links with foreign countries.
6. East Pakistan should have a separate military or paramilitary force, and Navy headquarters should be in East Pakistan (Bhutto 2008: 78).

General Yahya Khan’s military junta and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the elected leader of West Pakistan, conspired and refused Sheikh Mujibur Rahman his genuine right to form the government. On 1 March 1971, President Yahya Khan postponed unilaterally the Dhaka National Assembly meet scheduled to be held on 3 March. On 5 March, amidst the Bangladeshi war of independence struggle, Pakistani dictator Gen. Yahya

Khan travelled to Dhaka to meet Mujibur Rehman, the leader of Awami League. Gen. Yahya tried to convince Mujib to drop the demands (Bhutto 2008: 180) and remained united with Pakistan. Annoyed with the devious motives of Gen. Yahya Khan, Mujibur Rehman upped the ante and included more demands. These demands included 1) A judicial inquiry into the loss of life caused by the military shootings since 1 March 1971; 2) The immediate withdrawal of martial law; 3) The return of troops to their barracks; and 4) The immediate transfer of power to elected representatives before the Assembly would meet. After the talk failed, the East Pakistanis then went on a rampage (Bhutto 2008: 180).

Meanwhile, wounded by the state of unpreparedness in the 1965 war, the Indian intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), prepared a detailed report in January 1971 on the military strength and constitutional crisis of Pakistan. The RAW alerted the India government that Pakistani generals might undertake a diversionary adventure in Jammu and Kashmir (Hamadour Rahman Commission Report, 1974) to deflect people's attention from their East Pakistan crises. To preempt such an attempt, India started training the Bengali guerrillas who had fled to the country from Pakistan along with their refugee brethren (Rath 2015: 53).

India's counter-action checkmated Pakistan's covert support to Islamic militants in Northeast but the check was temporary. ISI quickly resumed its support and devised fresh tactic to support Northeast militants.

Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had been observing the top-secret triangular talks between US-Pakistan-China secretly moderated by US National Security Advisor Henri Kissinger. Fearing the regional repercussion of the new alliance, she travelled to Moscow in September 1971 and sealed a twenty-year treaty with Kremlin. She reached out to US President Richard Nixon as well in November 1971, only to be browbeaten at the White House on India's role in the Pakistan's crisis. While Mrs Gandhi was away, India's military participation in the East Pakistan–West Pakistan conflict intensified. Gen. Yahya Khan decided to attack India from the western side. War ensued in Kashmir and Punjab and the Indian navy moved towards Karachi. When Mrs. Gandhi returned to New Delhi from her foreign trip, the Indian army was irretrievably involved in the conflict with Pakistan. Mrs Gandhi ordered her Parsi field marshal, Sam Manekshaw, and Sikh second-in-command, Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora, to move east over Bengal's border (Wolpert 1984: 43). Mrs Gandhi also started her own secret channel with Mujibur Rehman.

A former student of Rabindranath Tagore's Santiniketan in rural Bengal, Mrs Gandhi could speak to Rehman in Bengali, which further strengthened their personal bond and brought them closer (Niazi 1998: 187).

Gen. Yahya requested the US to restrain Mrs Gandhi and as a result, the Nixon administration sent a message through the US ambassador in New Delhi, Kenneth Keating, to her. Mrs Gandhi told the US ambassador that Yahya's problems had been self-created and 'we are not in a position to make this easier for him'. She conveyed to the US that India was being asked to allow the misdeeds of Yahya to stand unopposed and 'we are not going to allow that' (Smithed 2005: 439-99). The Indian army captured Dhaka on 5 December and on 6 December 1971, India formally recognized

Bangladesh. The Indo–Soviet treaty and the US’s war in Vietnam restrained the Americans from jumping into another theatre of war in South Asia. However, Nixon sent the nuclear-armed US aircraft carrier Enterprise from the Seventh Fleet into the Bay of Bengal, supposedly to ‘evacuate refugees.’ Mrs. Gandhi reciprocated this intimidating gesture by urging her nuclear scientists to work harder to build India’s own atomic bombs, the first of which would be exploded three years later in Rajasthan’s desert (Guha 2007: 465). On 13 December, Gen. Yahya Khan sent a message to his general, A.K.A. Niazi, to surrender before the Indian army. Niazi waited a day to search for any last options, before requesting the American consul general of Dacca, Archer Blood on 15 December, to convey his willingness to surrender to New Delhi. Blood relayed the message to New Delhi and on 16 December, Lt. Gen. Jagjit Singh Aurora flew into Dacca to accept a signed instrument of surrender (Bhutto 2007: 59-60).⁸ In a roaring voice amidst chants and slogans, the same evening, Mrs Gandhi announced in the Lok Sabha that ‘Dacca is now the free capital of a free country’. Mrs. Gandhi was admired for standing up to the bullying tactics of the US, and for so coolly planning the dismemberment of the enemy. However, Nixon went berserk and told his national security adviser that ‘The Indians are bastard [sic] anyway. Pakistan thing makes your heart sick [sic]. For them to be done so by the Indians and after we had warned the bitch’ (Schaffer 2009: 122). Bhutto reached Shimla on 28 June 1972 along with his daughter Benazir and 92 PPP/government officials. Bhutto admitted that as the victor in the war, India had all the cards in its hands (Haqqani 2003: 43). The literal translation of Bhutto’s admission could be that ‘there was no bar on India to codify a treaty on Kashmir with Pakistan’ on that victorious occasion.

However, all the cards were either squandered by Mrs. Gandhi or left unused by her officials in Shimla. When the accord was signed on 2 July, Pakistan got back its 93,000 prisoners of war and 5,000 square miles of Pakistani desert captured by Indian forces. Pakistan did ‘not compromise on Kashmir’ either (Haqqani 2003: 43). Bhutto managed to convince Mrs. Gandhi not to press for a solution on Kashmir, as that would lead to the toppling of his government by the military. The Indian delegation insisted on a clause that the two countries would settle all their differences ‘by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations’ and the UN cease-fire line in Kashmir was renamed as the ‘Line of Control’ (LoC) (Pelton 2006: 45). There was no mention of any future plebiscite in Kashmir.

Pakistan’s Overt Support and the Complexity behind Mushrooming of Islamic Militant Groups

Pakistan held India responsible for the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. To outside observers, the creation of Bangladesh pointed out the weakness of Pakistani nationhood based only on the commonality of religion. But Pakistan’s leaders interpreted it as proof of their worst fear coming true that India had succeeded in dividing Pakistan, making it all the more necessary to shore up the fissures in Pakistan with a strong military and anti-Indian Islamic ideology (The trauma of 1971: 171). Indian signatories interpreted the conversion of the cease-fire line into the LoC as the legal possession of Kashmir by India. For India, this meant that the phase of international pressure to hold a plebiscite was over and they had attained closure

over Kashmir by securing a Pakistani commitment not to try to alter the status quo by force. The Indian side could not envision the fact that Pakistan would disturb India's control over Kashmir through the use of proxy forces and try to alter the status quo. After the division, Pakistan's armed forces were ideologically so insecure that they developed a strong belief that it was only religion that could save the rest of Pakistan. After the Shimla accord, the ISI devised a policy wherein Pakistan would not alter the spirit of the Shimla, but they would still wage a war against India for its 1971 betrayal (Nair 2010: 157). The year 1971 is considered the watershed year when Pakistani leadership, military or civilian, started patronizing Islamic forces and extremist organizations to settle scores with India (Bhutto: 150-51). The ISI also started exporting militants into the Kashmir and supported rebellion in Northeast India to 'bleed India with a thousand cuts' (Burke 2007; Talbot 2004; Rashid 2008).⁹ Once the opportunity was lost in Shimla, India could not get another chance. The country remained a consistent target of periodical Pakistani terror blows primarily in Northeast and Jammu and Kashmir and also in other parts of the country.

The 1971 war between India and Pakistan, which led to the humiliating defeat of the Pakistan army, fueled a desire for revenge by Islamabad (Rashid 2008: 111). Post-1971, ISI nurtured Islamic terrorists on an industrial scale (Rashid 2008: 33).

Back in India, with an effort to pacify indigenous insurgency, on November 11, 1975, the government got a section of NNC leaders to sign the Shillong Accord, under which this section of NNC agreed to give up arms. ISI tried its best to restrain the members of NNC to sign the accord.

ISI even roped in the service of Chinese intelligence to motivate the Naga insurgents (Rammohan 2003). With Chinese help, ISI enacted a split in the rank of NNC and those who were opposed to Shillong Accord established a splinter group in the name of National Socialist Council of Nagalim in 1980 (NSCN-Isak-Muivah SATP: Undated). As late as 2000, on January 19, NSCN leader Thuingaleng Muivah went to Karachi to solicit the support of ISI (Chowdhury 2018). Considered as the 'mother of all Naga militias', the NNC became redundant within surprising short span of time (Ravi 2012). The NSCN was a militia predominantly of the Tangkhul tribe of Manipur (Ravi 2014). The group was led by Thuingaleng Muivah, who was hiding in China in 1980 (Verghese 1996). Isak Chisi Swu and S S Khaplang also supported Muivah. ISI was quick to shift its support from NNC to NSCN (Bhattacharyya 2020).

By 1979, Pakistan was heavily involved in great power fight in Afghanistan where US and erstwhile Soviet Russia fighting a proxy war. In the Afghan war, ISI was playing the role of linchpin where it was preparing mujahideen to take on the Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan embassies across the globe opened their counters to invite mujahideen to Pakistan to prepare them and send them to fight in Afghanistan. ISI trained 83,000 mujahideen in Pakistan and Afghanistan to fight against the Soviet forces who were supporting Najibullah government. A substantial number of Bangladeshi mujahideen joined the Afghan struggle (Yousuf & Adkin 2001: 105).

Cross fertilization of Mujahideen resulted in Bangladeshi mujahideen joining

hands with the Islamic extremists of Northeast India. In 1988, the NSCN divided into NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K). ISI immediately switched its support to NSCN (IM) but now onwards, it never asked its Islamic stooges to join hands with local insurgent groups (Kissling 2017: 163).

When war ended in 1989, with the withdrawal of Soviet Russia from Afghanistan, Islamic extremism in Northeast received fresh oxygen. The Afghan returned Bangladeshi mujahideen trained and indoctrinated their Islamic brethren in Northeast India about the Muslim umma and separate sovereign Muslim State. Within a couple of years Islamic insurgency raised its head independently.

In a curious turn of event, with the explicit motive to oppose the growing illegal immigration of Muslims from Bangladesh into Assam, a group of young Assamese nationalist Hindus met at the Rang Ghar in Sibsagar in Assam on 7 April 1979 and established United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA). Those who met at Sibsagar, which includes Bhimakanta Buragohain, Rajiv Rajkonwar alias Arabinda Rajkhowa, Golap Baruah alias Anup Chetia, Samiran Gogoi *alias* Pradip Gogoi, Bhadreswar Gohain and Paresh Baruah soon found themselves as pawns in the hands of ISI and Defence Forces Intelligence, Bangladesh. Within no time, ULFA solicited sanctuaries, training, finance and weapons from the very intelligence agencies it was formed to oppose (National Investigation Agency 2017).

ISI asked Muslims from the Northeastern region to join hands with ULFA. However, as the Afghan war started showing results in favor of the ISI's strategy and as militant Muslims from across the globe started to gravitate towards Pakistan, the extremist Islamic groups in Northeast of India separated themselves from ULFA to form their own exclusive Muslim extremist groups. The first among such groups was the Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA) that was formed in August 1993 (Choudhury 2014).¹⁰ While MULTA was inspired by Pakistani fundamentalist organization Jamaat-e-Islami, its financiers include ISI as well.

Once the Afghan war was finished in 1989, ISI started concentrating exclusively on India and Northeast India 'with its unending influx of illegal immigrants' became 'the backdoor' of ISI (Sinha 2000: viii). ISI's motive in Northeast includes 'Promoting fundamentalism and militancy among local Muslim youth by misleading them in the name of jihad' (Mahanta 2000).

MULTA sprang into action and at the behest of ISI collaborated with Bangladesh Islamic Manch (BIM) and Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front (ARIF) of Myanmar (Choudhury 2014; Saikia 2004: 165).

Pakistani military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq spread his expansive 'bleed India' campaign (Indian Defence Review 1989). Mention of 'Operation Topac' was first found in an Indian Defence Review, research team article, titled 'OP Topac: The Kashmir Imbroglio' published in July 1989. The story about 'Operation Topac' is shrouded in mystery. It is transpired that at a top-level meeting in President Zia's residential office in April 1988 where selected Pakistani Corps Commanders, ISI bosses, one Afghan Mujahid leader and two Kashmir Liberation Front leaders were present Zia outlined his plan. Summary of Zia's speech were leaked out and became available to India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) agents sometime in

September-October 1988. Taking cue from the old Chinese proverb ‘death by a thousand cuts’¹¹, Zia wanted to ‘bleed India through a thousand cuts.’ Zia channelized Saudi Arabian and American resources meant for Afghan war, to insurgents of all hues fighting India (Rath 2015: 1-27).

With exclusive funding from Pakistan, Islamic extremist organization started mushrooming in Northeast region of India. Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA) also known as Muslim Liberation Army was one such organization that was formed in 1994. On 6 April 2000, Assam’s Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta submitted a 16-page report detailing ISI’s activities in the province where he stated that ‘MULTA and MULFA were being guided by the ISI’ (Mahanta 2000). The group is although receiving finance from ISI; it has linkages with Bangladeshi and Rohingya militants.

Assam also witnessed the formation of a branch of Pakistan based Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) in 1998. The group was directly managed from Pakistan. Jamaat-e-Islami (JeI) also opened a separate wing in Assam in 1990 with the motive to streamline the effort of militant organization to establish Islamic rule (Saikia 2004: 172).

Although the exact year of formation of Independent Liberation Army of Assam (ILAA) is not known, it was formed during the same time when other militants groups were forming in or around 1993-94 to fight against Government of India. A scrap iron contractor Mustafa Ahmed is allegedly the leader of ILAA who floated the idea of liberating Assam for Muslim. Its members established contact with the Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami (HuJI) of Bangladesh and organized training in Arakan valley where instructors from Pakistan and Afghanistan were also invited.

The Liberation Islamic Tiger Force (LITF) was formed in November 2001 with the explicit aim to establish a separate homeland for Muslims and neutralize the leaders of Hindu organization. The Islamic Security Force of India (ISFI) was formed in 2000 in Assam. The group maintain tie with al Qaeda and the Pakistan based terror group al-Omar.

The Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam (MLTA), which is a different organization from MULTA, was formed in 1995 demanding a separate Muslim homeland in Assam. The United Social Reform Army (USRA) and Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS) also sprang up during the 1995-96 to safeguard the interests of Muslims in India (Barooah 2012). Muslim Volunteer Force (MVF) was a group of Islamic extremists directly linked with the Madrassas of Manipur. It was formed in 2001.

The Students’ Islamic Organization (SIO) was formed in 1985 in Imphal while United Reformation Protest of Assam (URPA) and People’s United Liberation Front (PULF) were formed in 1994 in Assam and Manipur respectively. The Islamic Liberation Army and Student Islamic Movement in India have also spread their tentacle in Northeastern region.

As of 2012, the central government has identified 14 Islamic terrorist outfits in Assam and five in Manipur.

Table: 1 – Islamic Extremist Organization in North East

Name of the Organization	Area of Operation	
1. Muslim Security Council of Assam	Assam	
2. United Liberation Militia of Assam		
3. Islamic Liberation Army of Assam		
4. Muslim Volunteer Force		
5. Muslim Liberation Army		
6. Muslim Security Force		
7. Islamic Sevak Sangg		
8. Islamic United Reformation Protest of India		
9. Revolutionary Muslim Commandos		
10. Muslim Tiger Force		
11. Muslim Liberation Front		
12. Muslim Liberation Tigers of Assam		
13. Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam		
14. Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam ¹²		
15. United Muslim Liberation Front of Assam (UMLFA)		
16. United Reformation Protest of Assam (URPA)		
17. United Social Reform Army (USRA)		
18. Islamic Security Force of India (ISFI)		
19. Liberation Islamic Tiger Force		
20. Islamic National Front		Manipur
21. Islamic Revolutionary Front		
22. United Islamic Liberation Army		
23. United Islamic Revolutionary Army		
24. People's United Liberation Front ¹³		
25. Students' Islamic Organization (SIO)		
26. Harkat-ul-Jehad	Pan-Northeast Operation	
27. Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM)		
28. Jamaat-e-Islami Assam Unit (JEI)		
29. Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIMI)		

Conclusion

Empirical evidence proved the fact that there is no shred of truth in the argument that Islamic extremism in Northeastern region is a result of Babri Masjid demolition or the alienation of Muslim community. Islamic extremism in Northeast has 'direct correlation with the growth of Muslim population in the region and tapping of the Islamic tapestry by Pakistan based religious bodies' and all the reasons listed above. The extremism gained momentum after the creation of Bangladesh while the signing of Shimla Accord of 1972 made Pakistan obsessive about India (Rath 2015: 10). 'ISI employed all means under its command to take revenge against India as the ISI thought that dismembering of Pakistan by creating Bangladesh was a handiwork of India'¹⁴.

Pakistan’s self-destructive policy of aiding and abating terrorism in South Asia and the use of militants as part of its strategic arsenal created base for Islamic extremism in Northeastern India. After initial bitterness Pakistan and Bangladesh, in the aftermath of creation of Bangladesh, the political environment in Bangladesh changed suddenly in favor of Pakistan. Ill feeling against Pakistan evaporated rather soon and Bangladesh’s military collaborated with the ISI allowing the Pakistani spy agency to use Dhaka to aid militants in Northeast India. Gradual expansion of Islamic forces in Bangladesh allowed cross fertilization of militants from the three countries India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to mingle in each other’s territories.

With the increase of Muslim migrants’ conflict with local indigenous population in Northeast was obvious. On the one hand while Pakistan was trying to establish new militant organization in Northeast on the other hand Bangladesh, Myanmar and China offering shelter, training centres and weapons to the Northeastern militants. Also during the decades starting from 1970s until 2000s, many ethnic groups were forming their ‘specialized militant groups for protection of their community and also to acquire political power’². ISI volunteered financial and armed support to these groups and converted them into militant organizations.

In Northeastern states 29 Islamic militant groups are wrecking havoc and despite such looming presence of such a large number of extremist groups, not even one group is banned by government of India. So far 16 extremist groups of Northeastern states are declared as ‘Unlawful Associations’ and ‘Terrorist Organizations’ under Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2015). But none of the 29 Islamic militant groups find place in the list. Followings are the list of banned groups in Northeast.

Table – 2 Banned Extremist Groups of Northeastern States

State	Banned Terrorist Organization	Listed/declared as
Assam	1. United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)	Terrorist organization and unlawful association
	2. National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)	
	3. Kamtapur Liberation Organization (KLO)	Terrorist organization
Manipur	1. People’s Liberation Army(PLA)	Terrorist organization and unlawful association
	2. United National Liberation Front(UNLF)	
	3. Peoples’ Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)	
	4. Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)	
	5. Kanglei Yaol Kanba Lup (KYKL)	
	6. Manipur Peoples’ Liberation Front (MPLF)	
	7. Revolutionary Peoples’ Front (RPF)	
	8. Coordination Committee (conglomerate of six valley base UG outfits)	
Meghalaya	1. Hynniewtre National Liberation Council (HNLC)	Unlawful association
	2. Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA)	Terrorist organization
Tripura	1. All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)	Terrorist organization and unlawful association
	2. National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT)	
Nagaland	1. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang) [NSCN/K]	Terrorist organization and unlawful association.

Emboldened by the spectacular success of al Qaeda terrorists in orchestrating 9/11 attacks in 2001, the Islamic extremist groups of Northeastern states conducted numerous bombings and attacks against Indian forces. ISI, through its network in Assam, recruited cadres from among the local Muslim youth, who were sent to camps in Pakistan for weapons and religious training (Ramana, 2002).

With the Bangladeshi state's writ weakening by the day, terrorist groups are making surprising inroads into the political space, aspiring to replace democracy with Sharia law and threaten India's security. The Burdwan blast in October 2014 exposed deep-rooted tentacles of Islamic terror threats emanating from Bangladesh. Five Indian provinces – West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram – share a 4096-kilometer border. West Bengal alone shares a 2216-kilometer border along with a common language, Bengali. The topography of the porous border, yet to be fully demarcated, with jungles, hilly terrain and a dense population, is paradise for militants. Terrorist groups like Jamaat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh, HuJI-B, Lashkar-e-Taiba, and al Qaeda affiliates operating from Bangladesh have a pan-South Asia presence and ambition. Their modus operandi involves soliciting operational support from Pakistan-based terrorist groups and international jihadi organizations (Rath 2015). They target India by using Bangladeshi migrants and local militant groups in Northeast region.

Northeast's Islamic militant solicit support from local Muslim and from migrants who are seeking shelter in the region. These groups collaborate with like minded organizations in Bangladesh, Myanmar and China. Other than that Islamist association of the region solicit support from groups like al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) and Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) also known as Islamic State (Rath, 2014). Since 2001 many Indian including youths from Northeast region have been enticed to jihad in the trenches of Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan and in Afghanistan where they were introduced to al Qaeda and Taliban dogma. Before such relationships could fully develop, bin Laden was captured and killed in Pakistan in May 2011. Soon afterward, IS – carved out of al Qaeda by disgruntled and impatient jihadists – started recruiting Indian Muslims. Painstakingly, al Qaeda refocused attention on India, opening a branch in the name of Jamâ'at Qâ'idat al-Jihâd fi Shihb al-Qârrah al-Hindiyah or AQIS in September 2014.

Al Qaeda chief Ayaman al Zawahiri claimed that it took two years of hard work, precisely after the appointment of Shinwari as Al Qaeda chief in Pakistan, to establish Jamaat Qaidat al-Jihad. India's National Investigation Agency busted al Jihad's activities in rural West Bengal in October 2014, and classified documents indicated that Indian Mujahedeen terrorists mulled ties with Al Qaeda and Taliban to attack India.

Every Indian thinks more about Kashmir and terrorism in other parts of India. But they conveniently ignore North Eastern region with the perilous pretext that it is others problem. The growing Islamic extremism coupled with the diminishing Hindu population in the region is a recipe for future disaster. On 3 August 2015, Government of India, fielded R.N Ravi, one of India's scholarly former police officers, to sign a 263-worded four paragraphs historic framework agreement with Isak Chishi Swu, Chairman of National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and Th. Muivah, General

Secretary of NSCN. The agreement was intended to resolve decades old vexed Naga problem and signed in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at New Delhi. A veteran of North East affairs, R.N. Ravi, who worked years in the region during his tenure at the Intelligence Bureau, was appointed as Centre's interlocutor for talks with Naga groups, including the NSCN on 29 August 2014. The government's endeavor was to cater the aspirations of Naga populations and refrain them from the influence of foreign intelligence. The peace talk continued with great caution and both sides refrained from criticizing each other in public. Not until July 2020, when suddenly everything gone haywire. Th. Muivah suddenly developed distrust with R.N. Ravi. Early in July 2020, Muivah reached New Delhi to complain against Ravi's alleged mismanagement of peace talk. Muivah camped in New Delhi for the entire part of July-August and met the Home Minister and other officials to convey his displeasure with R.N. Ravi and sought his removal as centre's interlocutor.

It is essential that Modi government must adopt a two-prong policy. Firstly, the government must pre-empt and counteract against the terrorists by profiling existing and potential militants, creating a dedicated national anti-terror workforce, integrating inputs from academic in policymaking and ensuring fair and fast judicial scrutiny. Secondly, government may endeavor to work on social sites by checking Wahhabi indoctrination, removing Muslim ghettoization, stopping illegal immigration, modernizing madrassa education, device a refugee policy and immediately deny voting to the illegal migrants.

Notes

¹ The Nidhanpur Copper plate Grant, consisting of seven copper plates with a seal was discovered in 1912 in the village of Nidhanpur of Pancakhanda Pargana of Sylhet now in Bangladesh by a peasant. The peasant sold the plates to different persons but fortunately Padmanath Bhattacharya recovered the first, second, third, sixth, seventh and one more which may be either the fourth or the fifth and discussed in various journals. Finally, he edited the inscription in the Kamarupasaranavali; Bhattacharya, P. N. E.I., Vol. XII, No. 13; Vol. XIX, No. 19; Vol. XIX, No. 40; K.S., pp. 1-43.

² kiraTa kachhaari khaachi gaaro miri; yavana ka~Nka govaala; asama maluka dhobaa ye turuka; kubaacha mlechchha chaNdaala, The Bhagavata of Sankaradeva, original copy in Asamese language.

³ Prithvi Chauhan, the Chauhan ruler of Delhi defeated Mohammad Ghori twice during 12th century only to pardon the Muslim ruler on both the occasion. When Ghori won during the third time, he immediately killed Prithvi Chauhan. Mainland India had the tendency of surrendering before the Islamic rulers despite their superior strength and battle preparedness. Emphasize mine.

⁴ The British Raj began with the idea of the Presidencies as the centres of government. Until 1834, when a General Legislative Council was formed, each Presidency under its Governor and Council was empowered to enact a code of so-called 'Regulations' for its government. Therefore, any territory or province that was added by conquest or treaty to a presidency came under the existing regulations of the corresponding presidency. However, in the case of provinces that were acquired but were not annexed

to any of the three Presidencies, their official staff could be provided as the Governor-General pleased, and was not governed by the existing regulations of the Bengal, Madras, or Bombay Presidencies. Such provinces became known as 'Non-Regulation Provinces' and up to 1833 no provision for a legislative power existed in such places.

⁵ The minister clarified that 'Bangladeshi nationals having entered the country without valid travel documents. Since entry of such Bangladeshi nationals into the country is clandestine and surreptitious, it is not possible to have accurate data of such Bangladeshi nationals living in the various parts of the country'. Bharti Jain, Two Crore Bangladeshi Immigrants Illegally Staying in India, Centre Informs Rajya Sabha, Times of India, 17 November 2016.

⁶ 'His very tongue which, on account of his ignorance advocates the denial of God or professes multiple deities, is in its very nature 'Muslim' ... The man who denies God is called Kafir because he conceals by his disbelief what is inherent in his nature and embalmed in his own soul. His whole body functions in obedience to that instinct... Reality becomes estranged from him and he in the dark". Abu Ala Maududi, 'Towards Understanding Islam', retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20010406002608/http://www.geocities.com/alummah2000/MeaningOfIslam.html>.

⁷ The Battle of Saraighat was fought in 1671 between the Mughal Empire (led by Kachwaha king Raja Ram Singh I) and the Ahom kingdom (led by Lachit Borphukan) on the Brahmaputra River at Saraighat, now in Guwahati. The battle lasted one full day and Lachit could not be thwarted this time. The huge Mughal army succumbed to defeat against a small contingent led by Lachit Barphukan. The best tribute to the Assamese General came from Raja Ram Singh himself, who wrote: "Every Assamese soldier is an expert in rowing boats, shooting arrows, digging trenches and in welding cannons and guns. I have not seen such specimen of versatility in any other part of India... Glory to the Commander... One single individual leads all the forces. Even I, Ram Singh, was not able to find any loophole and an opportunity in his game plan to outdo him." The Battle of Saraighat was the final battle in the last major attempt by the Mughals to extend their empire into Assam. NCERT, North East India: People, History and Culture, New Delhi: 2017, pp-23-24.

⁸ Benazir Bhutto said, 'Not only was East Pakistan gone, but the Indian army had captured 5,000 square miles of our land in the West'.

⁹ Afghanistan as Pakistan's terrorist centre is widely documented.

¹⁰ Quoting Intelligence Bureau sources Ratnadip Choudhury wrote that the MULTA was formed in 1993.

¹¹ Lingchi means 'death by a thousand cuts'. The term *lingchi* first appeared in a line in Chapter 28 of the classical philosophical text Xunzi, an ancient Chinese collection of philosophical writings attributed to Xun Kuang, a 3rd century BC philosopher usually associated with the Confucian tradition. The line originally described the difficulty in travelling in a horse-drawn carriage on mountainous terrain. Later on, it was used to describe the prolonging of a person's agony when the person is being killed.

¹² Upto No. 14 is identified by Ministry of Home Affairs.

¹³ No.20 to No.24 is identified by Ministry of Home Affairs.

¹⁴ Emphasize mine.

¹⁵ Emphasize mine.

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