

Ethnic Conflict in North-East India: Causes and Consequences

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Abstract: Ethnic conflict is a recurring phenomenon. North East India has been occupying a unique position in Indian Politics. This multi ethnic society comprises the state of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and the Himalayan state of Sikkim. North-East India, the entire region is an area which is a house of many internal strife and conflicts. North east India is home to large number of ethnic groups who came from different directions at different historical times. These groups belong to different racial stocks, speak different languages and have varied social-cultural traditions. However the alienation of ethnic people in different socio- economic and political sphere led to the emergence of ethnic assertion and ethnic conflict in northern region. The region's history is full of ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts till the beginning of the 21 century. The ethnic conflicts in Northeast India started in 1950 when the ethnic identity movements were launched. Sometimes, by tribal communities and sometimes by non-tribal one the issue of religion, language 'Sons of the Soil' and foreign nationals, ethnic separatism, migration, etc.



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Introduction

Ethnic conflict is a recurring phenomenon. North East India has been occupying a unique position in Indian Politics. This multi ethnic society comprises the state of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and the Himalayan state of Sikkim. North-East India, the entire region is an area which is a house of many internal strife and conflicts. North east India is home to large number of ethnic groups who came from different directions at different historical times. These groups belong to different racial stocks, speak different languages and have varied social-cultural traditions. However the alienation of ethnic people in different socio- economic and political sphere led to the emergence of ethnic assertion and ethnic conflict in northern region. The region's history is full of ethnic and inter-ethnic conflicts till the beginning of the 21 century. The ethnic conflicts in Northeast India started in 1950 when the ethnic identity movements were launched. Sometimes, by tribal communities and sometimes by non-tribal one the issue of religion, language 'Sons of the Soil' and foreign nationals, ethnic separatism, migration, etc.

Methodology:

This paper is based on secondary sources such as Published book, journals, reports, articles, newspapers and online sources. In this paper descriptive and analytical method has been employed.

Objectives

- 1) To highlight the basic issues of ethnic violence,
- 2) To analyse the reasons behind the conflicts and its outcomes
- 3) To provide some road map's to solution.

Historical reasons for the conflict:

The historical connections among the traditional tribes in the Northeast are largely of Tibeto-Burman/Mongoloid stock and closer to Southeast Asia than to South Asia. It is ethnically, linguistically and culturally very distinct from the other states of India. Though cultural and ethnic diversity per say are not causes for conflict, but one of the major problem areas is that the Northeast is territorially organized in such a manner that ethnic and cultural specificities were ignored during the process of delineation of state boundaries in the 1950s, giving rise to discontentment and assertion of one's identity. Whereas, the colonial rulers took nearly a century to annex the entire region, and administered the hills as a loose 'frontier area', with the result, that large parts of the northeastern hill areas never came in touch with the principle of a central administration before.

Hence, their allegiance to the newly formed Indian nation-state was lacking from the beginning – accentuated by the creation of East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh) – which meant the loss of a major chunk of the physical connection between mainland India and Northeast India. Interestingly, 99 percent of the Northeast's boundaries is international and only one percent is domestic boundary.

Ethnic Conflict and its Impact:

1. Displacement, Segregation and Further Issues Generated:

Ethnic, communal or sectarian violence for whatever reason, results in displacement of population, and locational distribution become more and more **segregated**. People from conflict zone of mixed population at the time of displacement chose to move towards their kinship or similar groups (in terms of religion, cast, creed, race etc) and a whole region gradually becomes clusters of several groups of different communities. It, instead of reducing tension finally leads to further intensification of various groups for many social and economic matters (Sparber, 2008). Moreover, experiences suggest that women suffer more due to ethnic conflict when human rights violation, civic problems and other dimensions of social problems make their life miserable. Stiftung (2011) highlighted various issues of women under ethnic conflict in Nagaland and Assam.

2. Problem of Food Security and Other Administrative Issues:

It becomes difficult to identify or locate and reach PDS supply to the targeted groups/people. Even if it is possible, the cost of supply escalates. Sometimes, the dealers become reluctant to supply because of the fear of theft, looting as well as rising cost that they cannot charge from the poor people. Rather many of them prefer to reduce off- take or (after off-take if there is compulsion) they sell the material either in open market or sometimes smuggle through the porous border. In the newly settled area it becomes difficult to supply immediately due to the population mismatch. Therefore, the outcome is a transitory food and nutritional insecurity especially in the backward areas and poorer are the extreme sufferer.

3. Labour Problem and Social and Economic Activity Pattern:

In the conflict hit areas, shortage of specialized labour owing to sudden outmigration, leads to loss of some economic activities, even the unskilled agricultural work and thus production is adversely affected. Also, escalation of wage is observed. Similarly, in the newly relocated areas, a rise in labour supply leads to temporary unemployment for the non availability of specialised jobs and force them to work on a reduced wage for their survival. In some extreme situation, even many new settlers may have to take the path of unethical and anti-social engagements.

4. Changing Occupational Pattern:

With shortage of labour in one zone and surplus labour in another zone it leads to changing resource use including the occupational pattern of the people. It affects the land and labour productivity substantially and generates other socio-economic problems (Kondylis, 2008).

5. Housing, Sanitation and Other Civic Problem as well as Health:

In the newly settled area, the migrants forced to stay in the cheap and poorer condition (even in temporary sheds for shelter) that leads to the emergence of new slum areas in towns. Also, because of the lack of various civic amenities, it creates various health problems as observed in India and various parts of North-East.

6. Rising Cost of Security:

Ethnic conflict leads to increase in engagement of more security forces at the cost of development funds and thus hamper planned development activities, which requires quick action. A delay in settling the problem increase cost by several times and society become unsustainable, as the sense of love for the birthplace is lost and no bondage is developed concretely for a long time (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005).

7. Investment Risk and Industrial progress:

Sense of insecurity leads to low investment by the potential investors which is an essential factor other than the availability of material, labour, technology and infrastructure for the development of industries. So, the employment generation and other developmental process are affected. Though, too many experts the insecurity, threat and tension arises out of non-development, it is actually a chicken-egg problem and a mixed strategy is the ultimate solution with restraint and promotion of social and economic activities. Mixing of various social groups through speedy action is one of them (Easterly and Levine, 1997).

Conclusion:

In NEI, social exclusion and ethnicity reinforce each other in many contexts. The prevailing exclusionary tendencies show that most of the institutional means of accommodation such as granting autonomy to particular ethnic groups in a particular region and even the formation of separate state for some communities would not yield desired results. The exclusionary tendencies created by both the state and the dominant community lead to the ethnic assertion of specific ethnic communities. However, such exclusionary practices cannot be tackled by mobilization of ethnic communities and identity politics but 'recognizing' the specificities and material needs of community through the mechanism of the state. The state needs to adopt more conciliatory path and bring the alienated sections into the mainstream.

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