

A MITTAL PUBLICATION

Violence and Identity in North-East India

Naga-Kuki Conflict

SR TOHRING



THE AUTHOR

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Dedicated to

My loving parents SR Tourngam and PY Shanglun and
to all the innocents who have lost their lives in the
Kuki-Naga clashes

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INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity, as we know it today, emerged after the Second World War, though the term ethnicity existed prior to the II World War. Soon, the study on the ethnicity gained momentum, particularly since the 1960s. Dennes L.Thompson says: "the term ethnicity has replaced the terms like Nationality, National grouping and Minority."¹ In India, there are many ethnic entities; some have launched ethnic movements with an armed wing, while others launched ethnic movements which do not involve armed clashes. Of course, there are also ethnic entities with no movements. In ethnic movements with or without arms the North-East region of India is one of the most conspicuous regions. Yet "rarely do North-Eastern issues make it to the front page, quite unlike the treatment given by the national press to similar unrests in other parts of the country. Verily, the region is geographically and even otherwise at the periphery of the National consciousness."² As a result of this apathy, the knowledge about North-East region is poor among the population of the rest of the country. This is one reason why the ethnic movements like that of the Nagas is least known, despite, it being christened as the longest movement. The ethnic clashes in North-East after India's independence are, at times, worse than any of the bloody clashes in the rest of the country in terms of brutality, heavy toll on innocent human lives, properties, and span of conflicts but mostly they went unnoticed. This apathy could be seen in Naga-Kuki violent ethnic conflict which will be discussed in the main chapters. Pranay Sharma complains in a newspaper in regard to indifference on Naga-Kuki violent conflict.

"The spate of killings of innocent Kukis and Nagas by insurgents in Manipur reveals the absence of a comprehensive government policy for the regions and shows how removed the North-East is from the National Consciousness. Since last October, when ethnic clashes between Kukis and Nagas first broke out, over 1,000 people have been killed, but precious little had been done by the Union Government to bring the situation under control. Neither has the opposition exerted pressure on the center to tackle the turmoil in

the North-East meaningfully. Observers feel that this lack of attention shows that the region is not one of the nation's top priorities. The centre's responses to problems in the North-East has been characterized by knee-jerk reactions and short-term solutions though 47 years have passed since independence, no effort has been made to evolve a policy that would take care of the special need of the region. The problems of the North-East are not merely political but also cultural, social, linguistic and economic in nature."³

The North-East region has seven states connected to the 'mainstream' India in a long 14 km and 30 km wide neck and share international boundaries with China, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. Historically, pockets of Assam were known to some 'mainstream' rulers of India and later on, erstwhile princely states like Manipur came to have some link with 'mainstream' India which was prior to the advent of the British rule. However, the rest of the areas were unknown areas and were occupied by various tribes like the Nagas. With the advent of British rule, this situation came to be altered. The treaty of Yandabo in 1826 between British rulers and Burma, besides others, is remarkable as it paved the way for the British rulers to conquer some (approx. 1/3) of the tribes' areas, and to claim the rest of unconquered areas as theirs, though their administration did not extend over to these unconquered areas. Furthermore, princely state like Manipur also came to be under the influence of the colonialists.

When India got Independence, it inherited the areas enclosed by colonial boundaries. In the North-East, the princely kingdoms and the ethnic entities were persuaded to join the Indian Union by signing 'instrument of accession'. However, many of them refused to sign it. Nevertheless, gradually all of them were persuaded by fair or foul means to sign it; the Mizos joined Indian Union voluntarily as it was perceived a sort of social compulsion during that period. The Khasis signed the 'instrument of accession' although there was opposition from within. In the case of the Nagas, they refused to join the Indian Union, thus, 'Hydari agreement' was signed on 26th June, 1947. Till date, this agreement remains a bone of contention between the Indian government and the Nagas. The Princely states like Tripura and Manipur signed the 'instrument of accession' in 1949. Thus, by 1949, the North-East region came to be considered as a part of the Indian Union, which completed India's inheritance of colonial boundaries in North-East. However, today, most of ethnic entities including those in princely states question the 'instrument of accession'.

Today, many ethnic entities in the North-East have launched movements against the Government of India. These movements could be classified, keeping in mind the Indian Constitution, into three types: constitutional, non-constitutional, and a mixture of the two. The demands of these movements' fall under the following categories: (a) Sovereignty; (b) Autonomy within the framework of the nation-state of India and (c) ethnic rights, recognition, preservation and promotion, etc. The method they adopt to achieve these goals are violent or non violent or both, which consequently means non-constitutional or constitutional or both.

Most of the ethnic groups in North-East India consider the Indian rule as the same as British colonialism. Therefore, ethnic movements, many of them, are aimed to free themselves from Indian colonialism. The ethnic groups like the Nagas claim that, they never signed any agreement to be part of Indian Union, and therefore, it is an 'imposed government'. Secondly, for those ethnic entities regarded as the ones who agreed to be part of Indian Union, question over the signing of the 'instrument of accession' to the Indian union. They considered that it was done by forceful and fraudulent means. Further, there are also ethnic entities that went unnoticed during the signing of the 'instrument of accession', and have launched movements for realizing the aforementioned goals.

Some of the ethnic movements in the North-East India began their activities during colonial era, while others did so on the eve of India's independence, or after India independence. Today, many of these movements in North-East are labeled as 'insurgencies' which means 'rising in revolt against an established civil authority'.⁴ it is incumbent for us to understand the significance of the term 'insurgency' while referring to the various political movements that took place during the British period and which are taking place ever since India's independence. The question before us is: whether the leaders of these movements call themselves insurgents...we may surmise how they would call themselves: freedom fighters, patriots, liberators, or defenders of their nation, faith and culture...All of them did not regard themselves as 'insurgents'. They all talked about their country, nation, identity, faith and culture in the sense of being a Naga, a Manipuri, or a Mizo. An attempt to preserve one's identity does not necessarily mean that he is an insurgent nor does an attempt to preserve one's independence, from the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) point of view, amounts to insurgency. It therefore depends on how the concerned parties look at the problem."⁵

The major movements in the North-East till date are:

1. The Nagas movement;
2. The Assamese movement;
3. The Bodos movement;
4. The Damasas movement;
5. The Karbis movement;
6. The Meeteis movement;
7. The Kukis movement;
8. The Hmars movement; and
9. The Khasis movement.

There are several other movements but the preceding ones mentioned are some of the major movements. Since years, these movements in North-East forge alliances to fight jointly against the Indian government to achieve their goals. In recent years, alliances and unity have become prominent features for the ethnic movements in North-East India. According to B. Pakem, on 22 May, 1990 Indo-Burma Revolutionary Front of the NSCN (K), ULFA, and UNLF was formed. In late 1993, the United Liberation Front of the Seven Sisters (ULFSS) was formed under the leadership of the NSCN-IM, and on November 30, 1994 Self-Defense United Front of South-East Himalaya Region (SDUFSEHR) with 23 representatives was formed under the leadership of NSCN-IM.⁶ In 1994, The North-East Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Forum was established after the International Year of Indigenous Peoples in 1993. It was reported in a newspaper: "Extraneous agencies seem to be working in tandem with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland to forge alliance between all the secessionist and separatist ethnic movements through the apparently innocuous mobilization of "indigenous peoples" in the North-East. A common feature that has been discerned is the plea for right to self-determination for all indigenous and tribal people. The inspiration evidently having come from the U.N draft declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People."⁷

The U.N. defines the indigenous peoples as descendants of people who inhabited the present territory of a country, wholly or partially, at a time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived from other parts of the world, overcame them, by conquest, settlement, or other means, and reduced to non-dominant or colonial condition. The U.N. seeks to provide right to self-determination to the indigenous people so as to enable them to determine their own

political status and institutions. India along with some other countries including the USA is opposed to this, as this right will legitimize secession, encourage terrorism and lead to disintegration of States⁸ For the North-East, "the North-east Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Forum in its convention at Guwahati in September, 1994 welcomed the U.N. draft declaration, including their right to self determination."⁹ At the 12th session of the United Nations Working Group of Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) in Geneva, held from July 25 to 29, 1994 five prominent tribal leaders of India, authorized to present their case by the various tribal organizations in the country, said that the right of self-determination was now considered a fundamental human right without which no other human rights could be enjoyed.¹⁰

Before we go deep into the study, I would like to introduce the Nagas and the Kukis. The Nagas are found both in India and Myanmar. In Myanmar, they are settled in Sagaing division and Kachin state and in India, according to the List of Schedule Tribes of India, they are in the states of Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Mizoram. In these states except Manipur, they are recognized as 'Any Naga tribes'. In the state of Manipur, according to *Tribes In Manipur At A Glance*,¹¹ all the tribes could be divided into Naga Group of tribes, Chin-Kuki-Mizo Groups of tribes and Intermediate Group of tribes. However, in reality most of the tribes of the intermediate group are Nagas. Therefore, in Manipur, there are nineteen (19) Naga tribes. According to Naga Hoho, the total geographical areas occupied by the Nagas is 1,00,000 sq.km.¹² This total geographical area of the Nagas includes the areas of Nagas in India and Myanmar. In India, according to Wetshokhrolo Lasuh, Naga-inhabited states in India are: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland. There are eight districts within Nagaland state, viz., Phek, Mokokchung, Kohima, Tuesang, Wokha, Mon, Zunheboto, and Dimapur. In Manipur, Naga-inhabited districts are: Tamenglong, Senapati, Chandel, and Ukhrul. In Arunachal Pradesh, Naga-inhabited districts are Chanflang and Tirap. In Assam, Naga-inhabited districts are Haflong and Diphu.¹³ These areas are the claim of Nagas for sovereignty. The total population of the Nagas in both countries is estimated as 3.5 millions.

The Naga tribes both in India and Myanmar are:

- | | | |
|---------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Anal | 2. Angami | 3. Ao |
| 4. Chakhesang | 5. Chang | 6. Cheril |
| 7. Chirri | 8. Chiru | 9. Chothe |

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| 10. Hemi | 11. Hewa | 12. Htangan |
| 13. Inpui | 14. Konyak | 15. Khiamnungam |
| 16. Kharam Khaklak/Hkaklak | 17. Koireng | 18. Kayo |
| 19. Khaklak/Hkaklak | 20. Kengu | 21. Lamkang |
| 22. Liangmai | 23. Laihe | 24. Lainung |
| 25. Lotha | 26. Maram | 27. Mao |
| 28. Maring | 29. Moyon | 30. Monsang |
| 31. Macharay/Makury/Makhori | 32. Malang | 33. Nokho/Noko |
| 34. Nokte | 35. Nolang | 36. Namshik |
| 37. Pakang | 38. Phellongri | 39. Phom |
| 40. Phochuri | 41. Phango | 42. Phankem |
| 43. Pangmi | 44. Pangu | 45. Para |
| 46. Poumai | 47. Rangpan | 48. Rasit |
| 49. Rekho | 50. Rengma | 51. Rongmei |
| 52. Sangtam | 53. Saplo | 54. Shangphuri |
| 55. Singpho | 56. Sira | 57. Somi |
| 58. Sumi | 59. Tarao | 60. Tangkhul |
| 61. Thangal | 62. Tangsa | 63. Tikhir |
| 64. Wanchao | 65. Yimchunger | 66. Zeme. ¹⁴ |

Thus, the total number of Naga tribes is sixty-six (66). However, besides, the above mentioned Naga tribes, there are many unrecognized Naga tribes, which are not listed above. Out of these sixty-six (66) Naga tribes listed above, there are about thirty-six (36) Naga tribes in India:

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Anal | 2. Angami | 3. Ao |
| 4. Chakhesang | 5. Chang | 6. Chiru |
| 7. Chothe | 8. Hewa | 9. Inpui |
| 10. Khiamnungam | 11. Konyak | 12. Koireng |
| 13. Lamkang | 14. Liangmai | 15. Lotha |
| 16. Maram | 17. Mao | 18. Maring |
| 19. Moyon | 20. Monsang | 21. Phom |
| 22. Phochuri | 23. Poumai | 24. Rengma |
| 25. Rongmei | 26. Sangtam | 27. Singpho |
| 28. Sumi | 29. Tarao | 30. Tangkhul |
| 31. Thangal | 32. Tangsa | 33. Tikhir |

of the Nagas" and the ban on NSCN was lifted on 26th November, 2002.

The Kukis are found in three countries namely Bangladesh, Myanmar, and India. In Bangladesh, the Kukis are settled in the Chittagong Hill tracts. In Myanmar, the Kukis are found in Sagaing division and Kachin state. In India, according to the Indian Government list of Schedule Tribes; they are in the states of Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura. According to P.S. Haokip, the total population of the Kukis in two countries i.e., India and Bangladesh is approximately 17.5 lakhs. In the List of Scheduled Tribes, the Government of India recognized the Kukis in different states of North-East India namely, Tripura, Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, except Manipur as 'Any Kuki tribe'. In the state of Manipur, they are recognized under two heads, namely, 'Thadou tribe' and 'Any Kuki Tribe'.

In the state of Manipur, the Kukis are found in all the nine districts but their population more concentrated in the five Hill Districts. They form the second largest population in all the Hill districts. In Nagaland, they are found in three out of eight districts viz., Kohima District, Dimapur District, and Phek District. In Assam, Kukis are concentrated in Karbi Anglong District and North Cachar Hills District. There are Kukis in Tripura and Mizoram too.

In the state of Assam, 'Any Kuki Tribe' includes: Biate, Biete, Changsan, Chongloi, Donggel, Gamalkhou, Gangte, Guite, Hanneng, Haokip, Haupit, Haolai, Hengna, Hongsungh, Hrangkhwal, Rangkhoh, Jongbe, Khawchung, Khawathlang, Khothalong, Khelma, Kholhou, Kipgen, Kuki, Lenthang, Lhangum, Lhougum, Lhoujem, Lhouvum, Lupheng, Mangjei, Misao, Rieng, Sairhem, Selnam, Singson, Sitlhou, Sukte, Thadu, Thangngeu, Uibuh, and Vaiphel.¹⁷

In the state of Mizoram 'Any Kuki tribe (s)' includes: Biate or Biete, Changsan, Chengloi, Dounghel, Gamalkhou, Gangte, Guite, Hanneng, Haokip or Haupit, Haolai, Hengna, Hongsungh, Hrangkhwal or Rangkhoh, Jongbe, Khawchung, Khawathlang, Khothalong, Khelma, Kholhou, Eipgen, Kuki, Lenthang, Lhangum, Lhoujem, Lhouvum, Lupheng, Mangjel, Missao, Rieng, Sairhem, Selnam, Singson, Sitlhou, Sukte, Thadao, Thangeu, Uibuh, and Vaiphei.¹⁸

In Meghalaya, 'Any Kuki Tribe' includes: Biate, Biete, Chongloi, Changsan, Dounghel, Gamalkhou, Gangte, Guite, Hanneng, Haokip, Haupit, Haolai, Hengna, Hongsungh, Hrangkhwal, Rangkhoh, Jongbe, Khawchung, Khawathlang, Khothalong, Khelma, Kholhou, Kipgen, Kuki, Lenthang, Lhangum, Lhoujem, Lhouvum, Lupheng, Mangjel,

Misao, Riang, Sairhem, Selnam, Singson, Sitlhou, Sukte, Thado, Thangngeu, Uibuh, and Vaiphei.¹⁹

In Tripura, 'Any Kuki Tribe' includes the following sub-tribes: Balte, Belalhut, Chhalya, Fun, Hajango, Jangtei, Khareng, Khepong, Kunte, Laifang, Lentei, Mizel, Namte, Paitu, Paite, Rangchan, Rangkhole, and Thangluya.²⁰

In Nagaland, it is mentioned as 'Any Kuki Tribe'. This includes all the clans of Kuki. In Manipur 'Thadou Tribe' includes clans like Thadou, Haokip, Kipgen, etc.; and 'Any Kuki tribes' of Manipur includes sub-tribes/clans like Lunkim, Lenthang, Thangeo, Changsang, Thangum, Khulhlu, Gumhlu, Khumthang, Hlanghau, Lupheng, Mate, Lungdim, Chongthu, Doungei, Haolei, Taothang, Dimgel, Chongloi, and Hangsin, etc.

The Kukis are indigenous peoples of North-East India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. In India, they have civil organizations since the British rule to represent the interests of their people. Since late 1980s, Kukis armed wings have appeared. The demands of these armed wings range from statehood within the framework of the nation state of India to sovereignty. Some of the Kuki militants have signed ceasefire agreement with the government of India. The detailed discussions on these will be found in the main chapters.

The focus of this work is on the Nagas' and the Kukis' ethnic identities and their mutual relations. I have looked into their ethnic identities and war and peace relations with a historical perspective. The area covered by this work includes the India's North-Eastern states; particularly Manipur, Nagaland, and Assam, where these ethnic identities are settled.

This book has six main chapters. The first chapter is on the *Ethnic Identities*. The analysis in this chapter begins with definitions of ethnic identity and the discussion goes on to the various approaches to the ethnic identity, viz., Primordialist/Essentialist, Instrumentalist, and Constructivist. It is done in order to understand approaches to ethnic identity in general and put the case study in the appropriate theoretical frameworks. I have also discussed how the ethnic identities of the Nagas and the Kukis came into being, which were relatively unknown to them, and to the outside world. Today, the Nagas and the Kukis have established separate ethnic entities.

The second chapter is on the *Ethnic Movements*. In this chapter, I have discussed underground or armed wings as well as civil organizations. All the organizations whether armed or civil stand for

ethnies and their interests. The difference between civil organizations and armed wings is that the former used non-violent methods to achieve their goals and are considered legitimate while the latter are regarded as illegitimate as they follow violent path and their goals are generally unconstitutional. As a result of this, the government of India and the armed wings entered peace talks which are still going on.

The third chapter is on the *Historical Background, Political, Religious and Socio-Economic Relations, 1826-1990*. This chapter is about various aspects of their relationships, particularly, political, religious, and economic. The discourses in this chapter begin with their origins, migration, British colonial policy, and the role of native rulers. With this background, this study examines the relationship between the Nagas and the Kukis. The two ethnic groups' relationship is looked at from two different angles i.e., the perspectives of violence and the peace.

The fourth chapter is on *Ethnic Conflict of 1990s*. This chapter is about the Naga-Kuki violent conflict that took place in 1992 and went on for a decade. This study explores various definitions of the terms like 'ethnic cleansing', 'genocide', 'communal clash', and 'ethnic conflict' as employed for the Naga-Kuki conflict by various intellectuals. I have also looked into different views on the violent ethnic conflict including the concerned ethnic groups and the government. This chapter is also a detailed discussion on some of the causes of the violent ethnic conflict of the Nagas and the Kukis. In it, I traced the past relations to the issues that sparked the violence between them in 1992, in Manipur state. The causes encompass not only the relationship of two ethnic groups, but also the role of the government and its agencies, and the condition of Manipur state, that led to the outburst of Naga-Kuki violent conflict.

The fifth chapter is on *The Changing Nature, 1956s*. In this chapter, I have analysed how the conflict spread to other areas and why it spread to other areas. I have also narrated some of the incidents of violence that took place during the Naga-Kuki conflict to show the severity, brutality, and barbarism of the violent conflict between the Nagas and the Kukis. Furthermore, I have selected some incidents to show how human rights were violated by those who were sent to quell the violence and protect the civilians.

The sixth chapter is on *The Process of Transformation and Restoration of Normalcy*. This chapter is a discussion on the peace process during and after the conflict for the restoration of normalcy

between these two ethnies viz., the Nagas and the Kukis. I have discussed the role of the Government of India, different non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Churches, and various individuals, etc. I mentioned how the violence between these two communities has now come to an end. For this, there are many, who are still working on confidence building measures between the two groups and trying to bring about peace in the region.

Sources

The sources for this study include the primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include both unpublished and published sources. Furthermore, I conducted interviews, held discussions with knowledgeable individuals, and collected the written views from the leaders, and those who have vast knowledge about them. Secondary sources on the relations between the Nagas and the Kukis are limited but most of the available sources, which were within my reach, have been explored. However, the most important question deals with the historical interpretation of these sources. In this context, I have tried my best to apply the relevant historical methods to constitute balanced and contextualised readings of my sources.

NOTES

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5. *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.
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18. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

ABBREVIATIONS

AIPP	Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact
ATSUM	All Tribal Students' Union Manipur
ANSAM	All Naga Students' Association Manipur
ABCC	Angami Baptist Council of Churches
AMCO	All Manipur Christian Organization
CBCNEI	Council of Baptist Churches in North-East India
CHIKIM	Chin-Kuki-Mizo
CK RF	Chin-Kuki Revolutionary Force
CRN	Committee for the Restoration of Normalcy
FNG	Federal Government of Nagaland
GPRN	Government of the People's Republic of Nagaland
GWM	Good Will Mission
HPC (D)	Hmar People Council (Democracy)
KBA	Kuki Baptist Association
KCA	Kuki Christian Association
KBC	Kuki Baptist Convention
KSO	Kuki Student Organization
KCO	Kuki Christian Organization
KPFHR	Kuki People Forum for Human Rights
KNA	Kuki National Assembly
KNAD	Kuki National Assembly Democratic
KIM	Kuki Inpi Manipur
KTU	Kuki Tribal Union
KUC	Kuki Union Committee
KNO	Kuki National Organization
KNA	Kuki National Army
KNF	Kuki National Front

KCF	Kuki Commando Force
KFC	Kuki Federal Council
KFC	Kuki Front Council
KDF	Kuki Defence Force
KIA	Kuki Independent Army
KNF	Kuki National Front
KNF-P	Kuki National Front – President
KNF-MC	Kuki National Front—Military Council
KRA	Kuki Revolutionary Army
KNC	Kuki National Council
KNANEI	Kuki National Assembly North-East India
MBC	Manipur Baptist Convention
MNF	Mizo National Front
NHDTG	Naga Hills District Tribal Council
NNC	Naga National Council
NNC-A	Naga Nationalist Council-Adino
NEITPF	North-East Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Forum
NSCN	National Socialist Council of Nagaland
NSCN-IM	National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Issak Muivah
NBCC	Nagaland Baptist Church Council
NSCN-K	National Socialist Council of Nagaland – Kaplang
NNL	Naga National League
NPMHR	Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights
NSF	Naga Students Federation
NECCC	North-East Congress Coordination Committee
TTC	Thadou Tribe Council
UKLF	United Kuki Liberation Front
UNC	United Naga Council
UNPO	Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization
UNWGIP	United Nations Working Group of Indigenous Populations
VVD	Volunteer for Village Development

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The term ethnicity has replaced the terms like Nationality, National grouping and Minority. In India, there are many ethnic entities; some have launched ethnic movements with an armed wing, while others launched ethnic movements which do not involve armed clashes. The ethnic clashes in North-East after India's Independence are, at times, worse than any of the bloody clashes in the rest of the country in terms of brutality, heavy toll on innocent human lives, properties, and span of conflicts but mostly they went unnoticed.

Kukis are indigenous peoples of North-East India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. In India, they have civil organization since the British rule represent the interest of their people. The focus of the book is on the Nagas' and the Kukis' ethnic identities and their mutual relation of North-East India. The detailed discussion on these will be found in the main chapters. The book contains:

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The Nagas and the Kukis are two distinct ethnic groups who have been co-existing for centuries in the North-East India and Myanmar. The two ethnic communities have launched armed movements. In 1992, these ethnies with arm wings came into violent clash which they had never witnessed in earlier times. This conflict went on for nearly a decade. Thousands were killed; hundreds have been left orphans, widows and widowers. Properties worth millions have been damaged during this violence. Till date the damage due to this conflict is irreparable. However, the two communities have restored their normal relations. In short, this book contains discussions on ethnic identity, ethnic movement, ethnic conflict and peace process of the Nagas and the Kukis.

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