

Ethnicity and Conflict Resolution in a Multi Cultural Society : Manipur Perspective

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Multi-Cultural Society and Multi-Ethnicity sharing the same space and economic source ought to invite problem and conflict. As the first and foremost importance to everyone is the individual himself/herself and then come his/her near and dear ones and so on and so forth. When there were many people living together and having different interests and also have pursuit these interests, conflict is inevitable amongst them. Some interest can be achieved and fulfilled at an individual level and some other interest required the help and cooperation of other individuals. In trying to meet and achieve these interests different groups are formed and come into existence. In many circumstances, these groups were institutionalized and become a permanent basis for making claims for that group. As there were similar groups like them who were having different interest and also trying to fulfill these interests, interest conflict ought to happen amongst them.

Before addressing the issue of conflict resolution, one must be cleared about the nature and causes of the conflict and then only one can be expected to do reasonable justice to the issue of conflict

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resolution. There is a popular remark in philosophical circle which say- many problems that has confronted by human beings were problems due to the non-clear nature of the question itself. If the question itself is not clear to the person who would give an answer, then how can a clear answer are given by the person. It is a matter of fact that even after the question is clear to the person there remains the possibility of giving either correct or incorrect answer. Therefore, before addressing our attention to the problem of ethnicity and conflict resolution in a multi-cultural society, we must first address our attention to the nature and causes of the conflict.

Trying to understand the nature and causes of the conflict, it will not be justified on our part to take all conflicts together as if they all have the same nature and causes. It will be proper and also in the fitness of things to take and consider one conflict at a time. This paper is an attempt to address ethnicity and conflict resolution in a multi-cultural society from the Manipur perspective. Even in a small state like Manipur, there were different conflicts that took place among different ethnic groups and the nature and causes may not be the same in all the conflicts. But an attempt will be made in the first place the general nature and causes of conflicts and then will come to the specific conflict that took place. Finally, possible ways of solving the conflict will be suggested.

Let us begin by defining the term conflict. Conflict has been generally defined as stemming from the existence of irreconcilable differences between several actors, or caused by structural inequality, or injustice, potentially leading to violence at a local, regional, national or international level. In many structuralist accounts conflicts have been defined as the pursuit of incompatible goals by different groups.

The structuralist approach broadly describes the social, political and economic factors that are purported to drive internal conflicts. There are different structural approaches. For instance, there is a booming quantitative literature that seeks to identify the economic, political and social determinants of civil war. Typically, these studies

are large scale data sets and sophisticated statistical variables related to social divisions (ethno-linguistic divisions, religious diversity etc.) national attributes (population size, previous war/conflict experiences) levels of economic development and the type of political system (i.e. Democracy vs autocracy, political and civil rights, democratic transition etc) and international context (cold war, geographic region, neighbours at war).

Brown's structural approach develops a more general framework of the causes of internal conflict and armed struggles identifying four main clusters of factors that can lead to violence such as structural factors which includes weak states, geography and security concerns; political factors such as discriminatory political institutions, exclusionary national ideologies, inter-group politics, and elite politics; economic factors that include discriminatory economic practices, underdevelopment, widespread economic problems due to modernization and development; and cultural and perceptual factors such as patterns of cultural discrimination and problematic group histories (Brown, 1996). Furthermore, Brown divides internal conflicts along two dimensions, elite driven and mass driven conflicts, and internally triggered or externally triggered conflicts. Other observers of the internal conflict identify five different kinds of internal conflict based on the issues in dispute such as ideological conflicts, governance and authority conflicts, racial conflicts, environmental conflicts and identity conflicts (Rupesinghe, 1992).

North East India has a complex cultural mosaic but this cultural diversities and heterogeneity is not chaotic. North East India's socio-cultural mosaic is the true picture of "unity in diversity" like a banquet of flowers or vegetables in a salad bowl where every component, while retaining its specific identity, is a part of a larger whole. They have been living happily together for the last many years sharing the same space and land. It is important to note that in spite of the fact that there is a lot of differences among the ethnic communities in terms of socio-cultural diversities there is also a feeling of "regional-

unity/identity" that often collectively asserts its cultural distinctiveness vis-a-vis the rest of the Indian nation, especially during moments of collective bargaining for resources and resource sharing. Therefore, regardless of the internal differences and external ramification of the variety of identity based conflicts affecting the region, there is also a collective unity amongst them.

Most of these antagonisms-and conflicts in the North-East India in general and Manipur in particular are focused towards the attainment of dominance, influence, power, land, cultural identity and other resources sharing. The constitutive conditions for claims-making are usually based on group identity, socio-cultural distinctiveness and socio-politico-culturally backwardness. In a post independent socio-liberal democratic India, many privileges, facilities and advantages are given on the basis of ethnic lines, language, economically backwardness etc.

The different ethnic communities are sharing the same space and land which was the only source of economy for them for centuries together, but changes in the demographic scenario have created imbalances amongst the ethnic communities. The size of the land cannot be increased whereas population is increasing day by day. In recent times, those communities who never have problem earlier and are also in good relation with their fellow ethnic groups have started competing, and which has led into causing conflict on land ownership issue. So, the issue of land ownership is one very important factor of ethnic conflicts in North East India.

Modernization and modern liberal economic has created a lot of economic imbalances among the ethnic communities.

Modern education and modernization have very strong impact on ethnic tribal communities in North East India. Broadly speaking, two groups emerge in the ethnic community. One group is known as Elite Group, and- the other group is the non-elite/mass group. The elite group is the sub-group in the ethnic community who actually controls the society. They have both economic and political power

and therefore they are very influential in the society. Among the elites there is competition and rivalry in the ethnic community and also with those elites in the other ethnic community. This elite competition and rivalry within and outside the community is one of the very important factors of conflicts and movements in North East India.