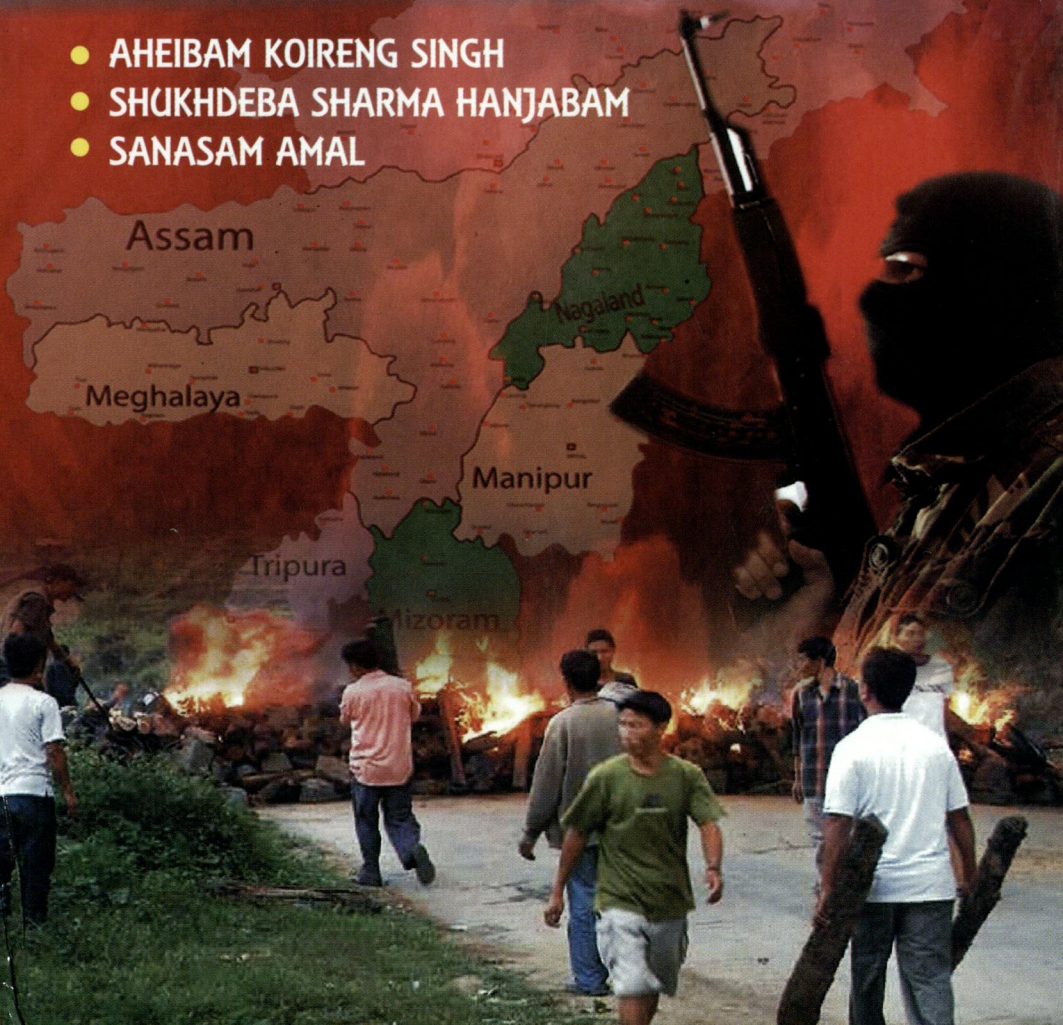




Removing The Veil

Issues In Northeast Conflict

- AHEIBAM KOIRENG SINGH
- SHUKHDEBA SHARMA HANJABAM
- SANASAM AMAL

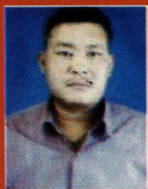


Removing The Veil

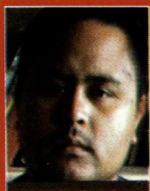
Issues In Northeast Conflict

The “Vision 2020” brought out by Ministry of DONER and NEC acknowledged that the North East being troubled by history and geo-politics remained one of the most backward regions of the country and that conflict has taken a heavy toll on economic progress and people's happiness in the region. With most of the outfits in the Northeast either already in peace talk or ceasefire with the state, it is mostly the Meitei (Manipur) led outfits which still eludes the offer for peace talks. To cite Johan Galtung (2004), all conflicts are not game to be won or lost but are often a struggle to survive, for well-being, freedom, identity to fulfill all basic human needs. Though there might be justifications and even many takers, conflicts in the Northeast can simply be not taken as 'mindless violence'. This volume attempts to delve deep into the issues concerning conflicts in Northeast that all the three authors sharing a similar area of study interests came together to bring it out. But due to the limitations and resource constraints of the authors, this time particular reference and focus is more on Manipur. In the near future, it is intended to engage in a more exhaustive and exploratory study of the conflicts in the region which would later disseminate it as subsequent published volume(s).

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Removing the Veil ISSUES IN NORTHEAST CONFLICT

by

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Shukhdeba Sharma Hanjabam
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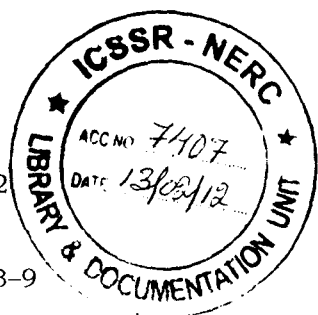
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CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT

Introduction:

Conflict and violence are inevitable aspects of human behavior and social relationships. The history of conflict can be traced back to the beginning of human history and will probably never end. It does not exist at a higher or lower levels as all conflicts are born equal and have the same right to be processed, with transcendence ('going beyond') and transformation, so that the parties can live with them. Geopolitical conflicts are not 'higher level' because statesmen and diplomats have high social status. All conflicts are not game to be won or lost, but are often a struggle to survive, for well-being, freedom, identity-all basic human needs. He describes conflict in a simple diagrammatic representation.¹

$$\text{Conflict} = \text{Attitudes(Hatred)} + \text{Behaviour(Violence)} \\ + \text{Contradiction (Issue)}$$

Conflict involves disputes over issues and interests that may lead to violence or the use of force whose legitimacy may be contested. It can be broadly understood when two or more 'parties' (individuals or group) have – or believe they have-incompatible goals, and this perception of incompatibility shapes their attitudes and behaviors toward each other. The most destructive types of conflict such as interstate and civil wars consist of a coercive, violent mode of confrontation among adversaries. Whereas conflict embraces personal loss and societal destruction, its features are not limited to physical violence. Non-violent forms of struggle are also prevalent in pursuit of different values and scarce resources.

In bringing about important social change, resorting to force is neither necessary nor inevitable. Our survival is centered on how we manage the various features of conflict.²

Table No 1: Categories of Contention

Sl.No	Particular	Explanation
1.	Arguments	These occur when parties have similar interests and goals but disagree over the means of achieving them. For Example, They agree that there should be training on their equal opportunities but disagree on how to organize it.
2.	Disputes	These are situations where the parties have incompatible interests and goals. Yet they can be framed as issues of gain or loss, they can be negotiated. (for example, a group representing people with physical disabilities demands that all public transport is fully accessible, but the government claims it will be too expensive; they the negotiated a agreement for increasing accessible routes over ten years
3.	Deep Rooted Conflict	These involve the basic needs—such as survival, security, recognition, and identity- of one or more of the parties, and the perception that these needs are threatened by the other.

Source: Simon Fisher, Dekha Ibrahim Abdi, Jawed Ludin, Richard Smith, Steve Williams, & Sue Williams, *Working with Conflict: Skills & Strategies for Action*, Zed books in Association with Responding to Conflict, 2005, p 12).

It is generally believed that conflict is negative but it has its positive side too. It helps to reveal the underlying problems that need to be addressed to keep the system of relationships dynamic and strong. An open conflict often releases considerable energy that can be channeled in many directions by trying to respond to the situation. Sometimes, peoples respond to conflict by seeking to avoid it or suppress it, or by the use of aggression or even violence against those they see as creating the problem or blocking the goals. Yet, it is possible to work with conflict in a way that enable people to address the cause and to repair the relationships that have been weakened by anger, fear or even hatred generated by conflict. It can also be embraced as a way of working proactive towards social change and other activism. The ways we respond to the conflict make the difference of whether it becomes a force for destruction or being a catalyst for constructive changes.³ The case of South Africa and many countries which have successfully transformed from the violent era to a peaceful country is a case in point.

For many centuries, it has affected the people either directly or indirectly through various ways and intensity. The mass extermination of the regime's enemy classes in the mid-1970s was marked by a million deaths; the genocide in Rwanda that cost more than a million lives. The civil war in Sudan and Congo cost more than four millions either by directly and indirectly. The ethnic cleansing of Bosnia-Herzegovina; the war in Chechnya and the civil population in Iraq as a consequence of US Invasion are worth mentioned.⁴ Coming closer to home, the Naga-Kuki clash in early 90s cost hundreds of civilian lives besides destruction of properties. According to Uppsala Conflict Data Programme, there are 36 active armed conflicts in 2008. The biggest increase occurred in Africa, from nine in 2003, seven in 2005 to 12 in 2008. While the number of conflicts continued to increase, the number of wars (i.e. conflicts with over 1,000 battle-related deaths) remained at a very low level, with only five recorded in 2008.⁵ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI-Handbook 2009) reported 16 major Armed Conflict in 15 locations around the world in 2008. Manipur is reported as one of the

ongoing armed self-determination movement in the world.⁶

Table No 2: Sources of Conflict: Level of Analysis Approach

Level		Example
GLOBAL		Geo-political Transition: North-South Divide
REGIONAL		Clientage Patterns, Cross Border Demography
STATE	Social	Weak Society; Cultural Division; Ethnic Imbalances
	Economics	Weak Economy; Poor Resource Base; Relative Deprivation
	Political	Weak Polity; Partisan Government; Regime Illegitimacy
CONFLICT PARTY		Group Mobilization; Inter- Group Dynamics
ELITE/ INDIVIDUAL		Exclusionist Policies; Factional Interest; Rapacious Leadership

Source: Responding to Conflict, 2005, p 36

Types of Conflict:

Jurgen-Axt⁷ observed that, ontologically, research into the sources and categories of conflict is usually centered on two approaches: the subjective and the objective approach. The objective approach looks for the origin of conflict in the social and political make-up and structure of the society. It considers the goals at stake can be thoroughly compatible. On the contrary, the subjective primarily focuses on the perceived incompatibility of goal and differences. The level of incompatibility is the most important variable that impact the intensity of dispute and dynamic of conflict phase. It can be categorized in terms of types of actors and adversarial action, ranging from war to non-violent struggles.⁸

Various research centers and Individuals have classified the

types of conflict in various ways. Among them, Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) types Conflict as (i) Minor; (ii) Intermediate and (iii) Major Armed Conflict. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Red Crescent Movement classified the conflict as (i) International Armed Conflict and (ii) Non-International Armed Conflict. Galtung⁹ observed three types of conflict in terms of the goals: (i) The goals of all parties have (some) legitimacy; (ii) The goals of some parties are legitimate, of other not; (iii) The goals of all parties are illegitimate. Further, He (2004) classified conflict into four types (i) Micro -Conflict within and between people; (ii) Meso-Conflicts within Societies; (iii) Micro-Conflict among States and Nations and (iv) Mega-Conflict Among Regions and Civilizations.

Stages of Conflict:

Conflict always passes through a series of phases with distinct intensity: beginning, development, and end.¹⁰ The classification of the stages of conflict is done by many research institutes and individuals but in this paper, few of them are discussed. It is not because they are the most prominent but the stages under discussion will give a general understanding of the classification. Galtung¹¹ observed that a conflict has its own life cycle; almost like something organic. It appears, reaches an emotional, even violent climax, then tapers off, disappear - and often reappear. The life cycle may be divided into three phases, (i) before violence; (ii) during violence; and (iii) after violence, separated by outbreak and cease-fire. This does not imply that violence is unavoidable, or that conflict equals to violence or destruction.

Table No 3: Overview and definitions of the conflict intensity¹²

State of Violence	Intensity Group	Level of intensity	Name of intensity	Definition
Non-Violent	Low	1	Latent Conflict	A positional difference on definable values of national meaning is considered to be a latent conflict if respective demands are articulated by one of the parties and perceived by the other as such.
		2	Manifest Conflict	A manifest conflict includes the use of measures that are located in the preliminary stage to violent force. This includes for example verbal pressure, threatening explicitly with violence, or the imposition of economic sanctions.
Violent	Medium	3	Crisis	A crisis is a tense situation in which at least one of the parties uses violent force in sporadic incidents.
		4	Severe Crisis	A conflict is considered to be a severe crisis if violent force is repeatedly used in an organized way
		5	War	A war is a type of violent conflict in which violent force is used with certain continuity in an organized and systematic way. The conflict parties exercise extensive measures, depending on the situation. The extent of destruction is massive and of long duration.

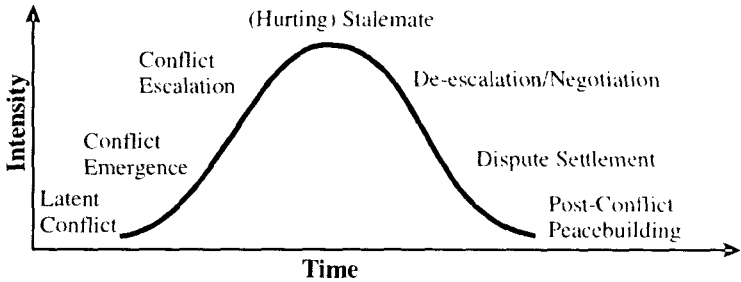


Figure No 1: Life Cycle of a Conflict: ¹³

The Conflict Early Warning System research project (cited in Jurgen Axt 2006)¹⁴, have classified the stages of conflict into six phases:

- Dispute phase, (opposing claims expressed through existing institutional processes);
- Crisis phase, (opposition use existing institutional processes, but their substitution with violence is openly threatened or expected);
- Limited violence phase, (legitimacy or usefulness of institutional processes is question, and systematic and regular use of force is considered justified);
- Massive violence phase, (regular, systematic, and unrestrained use of force; institutional processes for peaceful settlement are disabled or avoided,);
- Abatement phase, (actions leading to temporary suspension of opposition, use of violence, and expectations), and
- Settlement phase (resolution of opposing claims and establishment or re-establishment of mutually recognized institutional processes).

Theories of Conflict

Most conflict involves value difference and power disparities, whereas misperception and miscommunication plays an important role in the evolution of adversarial relationship. Even though a conflict originates from economic and other material

sources, it can be quickly expanded to identity differences with escalation. In most complex situation, a variety of issues, such as the availability of resources and basic human needs, are interrelated with each other. The sources and actors may differ according to the interest of the conflict. The sources of adversarial relationship are not limited to tangible economic interest or control over power, but also extend to values and identity differences.¹⁵

Conflict can be analyzed and understood from various disciplines-economics are focused on game-theory and decision making, psychologist explore interpersonal conflicts, sociologist takes status and class conflicts as the focal point while political science is focused on intra-national and international conflicts.¹⁶ The emerging discipline of peace and conflict studies has its own understanding of conflict. It may be a possibility of one theory explaining the conflict but in most cases, the understanding of the conflict need multiple or holistic approaches. Some of the theories that will help in understanding conflict are explained below.

Table No 4: Theories of Conflict

SI No	Theory	Key Ideas and Assumption
1	Basic Human Needs	Deep rooted Conflict is the result of the failure to satisfy human needs for identity and security
2	Rational Actor: Realistic	All actions are motivated by the quest for power dominance
3	Rational Actor: Economic	Armed Conflict are manifestations of economic processes: competition of scare resources; economic discrimination and relative deprivation; greed vs. grievance; and predatory war economics
4	Political Sociology	Political actors use conflict to mobilize a power base among identity groups or social classes. Integrating functions of conflict and role of cross-cutting ties;

Contd.....

		significance of social dislocation and economic, demographic and ecological change
5	Primordialism/ Ancient Hatred	They have never been able to get along: clash of civilization
6	Psychodynamics /Social- Psychological	Frustration- aggression; stereotype, fear of difference; communal identity and systemized victimhood, social learning and obedience to authority
7	Gender, Power and Violence	Men/Boys and Women/girls can experience conflict and violence differently, all must be taken into account to address conflict constructively and equitably- especially given the globally predominant patterns of discriminations against women or patriarchal system of male dominance; masculinity and femininity are socially constructed norms, that in many societies are constructed to assign them different social roles, including in relation to violence and conflict.
8	Systematic	Each conflict is embedded in a wide system that contributes to root causes, influences processes and dynamics for how it plays out; world systems theory; dependency theory; globalization, new wars and network wars.

Sources: Responding to Conflict, 2005, p 37¹⁷

Manifestation of Conflict:

The manifestation of the conflict is reflected in various ways and intensity. Singer points out that “the usual suspects” are to be found in: territory, ideology, dynastic legitimacy, religion, language, ethnicity, self-determination, resources, markets,

dominance, equality, and, of course, revenge. Having the interstate conflicts in the focus, Pfetsch and Rohloff have identified nine commodities that have historically proven to be the most disputed conflict issues between the states: territory (border), secession, decolonization, autonomy, system (ideology), national power, regional predominance, international power, resources and other.¹⁸ The conflict in India particularly North Eastern India is mostly confined to the issue of territory while that of Central and Northern India (Naxalite) are most over the issue of ideology.

Conflict Situation:

The essential nature of conflict situation is easily understood in terms of the difficulties involved in meeting everyone's aspiration simultaneously (cited in Jeong Ho-Won, 2008, P 5).¹⁹ The most common accepted description of a conflict situation focuses not only on incompatible ends but also on irreconcilable relationships. Goals and activities become incompatible when one's own interests are threatened by the action of others. Parties to conflict make attempt to prevent each other from achieving desired objectives, in parts, owing to perception of divergent interest. Tensions essentially emerge due to the pursuit of different outcomes or disagreement on the means to attain the same end. Thus a conflict situation is represented by perceived goal incompatibilities and attempts to control each other's choice, which generates adverse feelings and behaviors towards each other (Jeong Ho-Won, 2008,).²⁰

The contradictory claims to scarce status, power, and resources are often represented in purposeful efforts made by actors to defeat, thwart, remove, or at least neutralize their rivals (cited in Jeong Ho-Won, 2008, P. 11)²¹. Thus, conflict processes involves direct and indirect effort to undermine the adversaries' goal seeking capacity. The North Eastern India particularly Manipur has been in a conflict situation since the late 40s. On one hand, the non-state actors have stuck their demands of sovereignty of Manipur since the inception of the movement in the late 40s by Legendary Leader Hiram Irabot. On the other hand, the Government of India has so far stuck not to allow any part of India to secede. The

question of restoration of Manipur sovereignty and secession from India has generated a conflict situation which is directly and indirectly severely impacted on the society.

Conflict in North Eastern India:

The first armed self-determination movement in India's North East emerged against the forceful merger of Manipur to the Indian union. Force in the sense of overlooking the Manipur State Assembly which was an elected body of the people of Manipur under the Manipur State Constitution 1947; force in the sense of using military might to sign the merger. So it is annexation rather than merger. Legendary leader Hijam Irabot responded by an armed uprising against the merger in 1949 but it was soon crushed by the government. It was quickly followed by Naga National Council in 1956 under the leadership of Phizo for a sovereign Nagaland. The Nagas have started the non-violent opposition by declaring themselves Independence on 14 August 1947, one day ahead of Indian Independence. The All Manipur Students Union was involved in the mass awareness among the student community of Manipur about the right to self-determination since the late 1970s. The roots for the movement in Assam and Tripura are almost same. The uprising is against the illegal migrants and grabbing the land and opportunities of the natives.

As of now, PLA of Manipur is still holding on their demand for complete independence from India. UNLF which is one of the oldest among the existing insurgent groups in Manipur have proposed plebiscite for an honorable settlement of 'Manipur-India conflict'. Though the state Chief Minister, Shri Okram Ibobi Singh had acknowledged that discussion on plebiscite that has been witnessing at various places in Manipur could be a good beginning for resolving the conflict, it is still to receive any response from the GoI. On the other hand, NSCN (IM) after ten year of peace talk has agreed to a "special federal relationship". Sections of ULFA are in the process of holding talk with the government but its Military Chief Paresh Baruah is against the talk. Similar is the situation for Bodos. The CHIKIMs of Manipur have given up their demands and are now negotiating with the territory of

Manipur. If one looks at how the insurgency started in the states of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, even though the emergence of the phenomena may vary from one social dynamics to another, one still invariably finds an undercurrent of defiance of a lingering colonial force.²²

Since the uprising in Manipur, Northeast India is continuously militarized. The Armed Forces Special Powers Act 1958 was imposed, which empowers the central security forces to search, arrest and even to kill anyone on mere suspicion with impunity. The imposition is in order to suppress the movement which in turn led to massive human right violations and further alienated the people. After four decades, like a nuclear chain reaction, the law has been amended a number of times to accommodate changes in the names and the number of states. It now applies to all of Northeast India either partially or fully. By 1980s the armed forces on a more regular basis as a substitute for administration and governance. The extent of military deployment during the 1990s reveals that there was one armed force personnel for every ten civilians in some parts of the region.²³ Other than an elected chief minister and an elected state legislature, there is also a de-facto parallel structure of governance directly controlled from Delhi that manages counter-insurgency operations.²⁴ The concentration of central security forces in the valley of Manipur is such that Robinson remarks it as an occupational force rather than the defense of the country.²⁵ The GoI justification for bypassing the state/regional governments and legitimizing the monopoly of violence by the centre is based on the idea of “national security”.

The expansion of the military and related agencies has created enormous problems for civil society. While the government complains that it has no money with which to support civil institutions, it has pumped millions of rupees every year in the police and the armed forces stationed throughout the state. The security forces who are pitted in a no win situation while fighting the militants, often resort to retaliatory violence on the common people for attacks carried out against the security forces by the militants.²⁶ The air force was pressed to suppress the movement

particularly against the Mizo National Fronts, which is an exceptional case. There are innumerable combing operations and major operations as part of the counter insurgency operations in this region. Mention can be made of Operation Rhino, Operation Bazrang, and Operation Blue Bird. Operation All Clear (2004), Operation Tornado (2005), Operation Dragnet (2006) Operation Summer Storm (2009) were conducted in Manipur. These operations were remembered by the people and Human Rights bodies because of the rampant human rights violations-especially using villagers as “human shields” to prevent possible ambushes from the militants. Considering the frequent military operations particularly in the remote areas, there may be possibility of using air power to control the territory that the militant claims as liberated zones.

Dealing with Conflict:

The control of violent escalation is a main focus of conflict intervention and management, prior to seizing an opportunity for resolution. A proper policy of conflict prevention entails the constraint monitoring of potential flash points but also immediate actions to remove the conditions that facilitate the outbreak of violence. The minimalist aim of conflict prevention is at least to block a crisis from spilling into an openly violent conflict.²⁷ Dealing of conflict can do between the conflicting parties and if the consensus cannot be reach between the parties, the third party intervention is quite often considered. The forms and dealing with conflict can vary from place to place or from conflict to conflict. Reimann observed three forms of dealing with conflict, (i) Conflict Settlement; (ii) Conflict Resolution; and (iii) Conflict Transformation.²⁸ Jeong Ho-Won²⁹ categorized two ways of dealing with conflict, (i) Conflict Management; and (ii) Conflict Resolution. Dealing of Conflict can be summarized as given below

Table No 5: Dealing with Conflict(Endnotes)

SI No	Particular	Ideas
1	Conflict Settlement	It covers all conflict strategies that aim a definite end of the direct violence, without necessarily coping with the basic causes of the conflict.
2	Conflict Management	Efforts for preventing escalation of conflict or reducing the destructive nature of conflict; less concerned with structural condition.
3	Conflict Resolution	It aims toward achieving satisfying solution for all parties involved. Or Dealing with root causes; satisfactory institutional changes or new social relations often required.
4	Conflict Transformation	The central thesis of this approach is based on the fact that certain transformation capacity must be present among the parties involved. By this recognizes man the ability for mutual respect and reciprocal understanding in respect of the interest in conflict that will lead both parties toward sustainable and acceptable solution.

Source: compiled by Author from Jurgen Axt, (2006) and Jeong Ho-Won, (1999).³⁰

It's not that the government of India is not aware of the roots causes of the self-determination movement in India's North East. The government of India has tried to resolve the Naga issue since the very beginning by signing many peace accords. Similar is the case of the Mizoram, followed by Tripura. The two decades Mizo movement was the only successful peace accord in North East India. Presently, most of the ethnic based groups are either

into “informal” ceasefire with the Indian army or into peace negotiation with the Government of India at the ministerial level or/are into some forms of bargain. Once ULFA was declared illegal, Government of India invited for peace talk on many occasion without any result. But surprisingly, the resistance group of Manipur like the UNLF, PLA was not invited even once since the beginning of the armed resistance in 1949. The reason may be multiple but one reason may be the legitimate right of the people of Manipur to self-determination, which the government of India does not want to expose to the international community by initiating a peace talk.

Co-option and military operations has been the main instrument for dealing with the conflict in India particularly in Kashmir, Punjab or in the Northeast. Military operations have been the immediate response of the state. But once the insurgency lost its sting, political dialogue was promptly initiated by offering political autonomy and pumping cores of rupees. It is largely influenced by the real politik propounded by Kautilya (also called Chanakya), who helped King Chandragupta Maurya to build India’s first trans-regional empire just after Alexander’s invasion of India. Kautilya advocated Sham (conciliation), Dam (Bribe), Danda (Forces), and Bhed (Split) as the four options of statecraft to be used in effective combinations rather than as single, standards options. If the insurgent groups insist on sovereignty or adopted positions unacceptable to Delhi, military operations were resumed with renewed vigor and intelligence worked overtime to split the recalcitrant insurgent groups. Naga, Mizos, Assamese or other tribal insurgent groups have all ended up split, mostly during or after dialogue with the federal or the state governments (Bhaumik 2007).³¹ Besides militant groups, the immature decision of the GoI have created tensions between ethnic groups in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and particularly Manipur after the cease-fire incident with NSCN (IM) in 2001 (Hanjabam 2008).³²

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