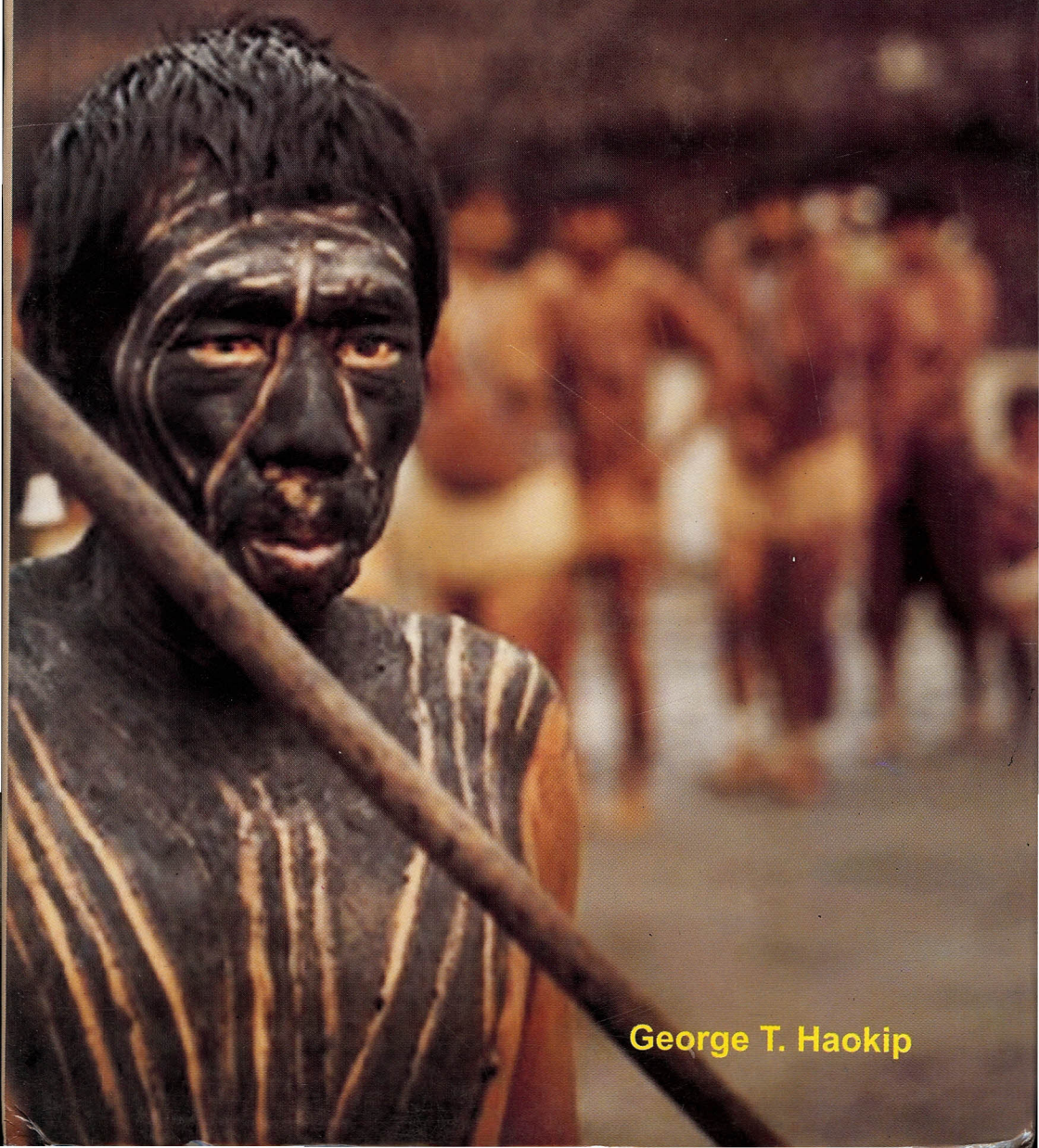


Traditional Conflict **MITIGATION**

Methods In Tribal Society



George T. Haokip

TRADITIONAL CONFLICT MITIGATION METHODS IN TRIBAL SOCIETY

by
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PREFACE

The states of the North Eastern Region have a history of human rights violation, conflicts and ethnic disharmony that has already experienced far reaching negative impacts on lives and livelihoods of the tribal populace. The recurring conflicts and human rights violation in the region has hampered development & democratic processes in these districts and also in a way poised a threat to destroy many traditional and community infrastructures including that of the traditional governance system.

Peace activists, local governments, universities and civil societies in the north eastern region have begun to realize the crucial influence the traditional governance system in resolving conflict situations. Successive ethnic conflicts have not been able to destroy these traditional systems leading to a belief that the traditional conflict resolution mechanism in each community needs to be better appreciated and any sustainable peace and development intervention must revolve around these traditional systems. Unfortunately, the inter/intra-tribes conflicts have been far from being resolved as no measures to address the root causes of these human rights violation and conflicts have been taken up.

As a leading development organization with more than two decades of presence in the region, Indo-Global Social Service Society cannot ignore the history of human rights violation and conflicts and also the potential recurrence of conflicts while carrying out its development works. Thus, it was strategically decided by the organization to commission an Action Research to understand the traditional practices and institutions in terms of their potential influence and role in local conflicts.* Hence by appreciating the traditional coping mechanism of the communities and identify possible areas for strengthening of these time-tested

practices, developmental interventions in the region will be strengthened and stakeholders informed to manage potential risks.

The study covered four major tribes and 17 sub-tribes of the North East with diverse traditions, culture and customary laws. These tribes and sub-tribes have been selected as they are primary stakeholders in the nine districts of Manipur and Assam where currently the Peoples Empowerment Action for Right to Livelihood (PEARL) project is being implemented by IGSSS.

Strategically, ways have to be found of strengthening the customary laws of the tribal. As the official inputs of the new legislation have failed miserably to achieve a viable integration of the modern with the traditional. The state recognizes their laws through various measures, but failed to integrated official inputs with the community's traditions. In other words, Fernandez and Malville opined that, the traditional has to be combined with modernity. The past cannot be kept intact and the modern cannot be considered the only alternative.¹

It is therefore, desired that understanding of context, extents and cost of conflict, the Socio-Geo-Politico and historical background of the community, their way of life-including its governance systems can be a mandatory, if peace, tranquility and normalcy are to be DAWN in the region.

Methodology of the Study

The documentation of traditional Conflict mitigation mechanism in and among the tribes of PEARL project area in Assam and Manipur aimed at a comprehensive study of the societies as it stood before and after the British ruled India and also at the advents of the new legislation developments it had undergone after Indian's independent through anthropological, sociological and historical perspectives. The documentation attempts to show the context and factors responsible for conflicts, the historical background of the tribes and their local governance, the traditional laws and practices to mitigate the conflicts within

and outside the community. It comparatively analyses the impacts and transformation of the region, by the phenomenon of modernization and subsequent evolution of democracy in the region. According to a thematic plan prepared in advance, the study that began in October 2009 was done in six parts, as follow:

1. Capacity building to the investigators/ volunteers to get a general idea of the community before beginning individual interviews. Questionnaires' were prepared and printed for investigators as prime tools, which were also handed out to selected community leaders for their feedback. The aims and objectives of the study were explained to each selected leaders for their support and cooperation.

2. The second phase focuses on secondary data collection on published and unpublished materials from different writers and from North Eastern Tribal Research Institutes and state's Tribal Research Institutes of the region.

3. The third phase based on primary data on fieldwork, collection and gathered information on historical background and the customary laws from the ethnic communities. In order to test the hypothesis of the study a representative sample of various ethnic groups within and outside the PEARL project villages were chosen to get their ideas, views and comments. Major tribes of both states are taken into consideration and their traditional differences are comparatively synthesized as far as possible to a common perspective.

4. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were used to get an overall idea of the historical background of the communities, social systems, customary laws, land relations and other aspects that conditioned the life of the villagers. Review and analyses the secondary data and comparatively studied, the findings from the local people as their knowledge and contributions are considered to be more authentic.

5. Case study and observation on tribal traditional laws and government's responses, conflicts resolutions between tribal to

non tribal and tribal to tribal, views and Comments from community leaders, laymen, social workers, Youths and women leaders, their narrative comments, suggestions are endorsed for future unfailing remedies.

The sixth part to get the authenticity of the hypothesis of the findings, the team attended and participated in the Conflict resolution meetings, which helped us to review and retrospect of traditional Mangai Systems, which was considered to be invincible relationship/ the forces that keep the people closer to one another.

Given the importance of traditional practices, mechanism of conflict mitigation and pattern being practiced by different community and its implications thereof. The study is not of academic interest but is of the concern to the local leaders and peace activist. So wishes our findings to reach the target population, who can reflect on possible cause and solutions.

Prologue

For almost half a century, the Northeast India and its people are living in a state of threats, turmoil, tensions and traumas caused by Arms Opposition Groups (AOGs), militancy and Militarization. The civil societies silently suffered and have come to realize the futilities of insurgencies and conflicts and are now increasingly getting vocal in demanding that the state of conflict and tensions must end and peace must dawn in the region.

1. Many civil organization and individuals and government agencies have come up to restore normalcy in the region, with different methods and actions. Their sincere efforts were like a mere whitewash tomb and “adding fuels to the fire” bears no sustainable amity in the region to a certain expectations, the fights continued unabated in remote hill villages. On the other hand, the mainland India considered the Region only for ethnic conflicts, terrorist and secessionist, However, one has to go beyond this simplistic, suspicious interpretation of complex phenomena and rather needs to look at its deeper Roots and Causes.

2. Conflict resolution became a popular topics and themes for Seminar, Workshops and conference in the region, more and more emphasis is given on “Conflict Resolution” than analyzing on the causes/ roots of the conflicts. The Government too wanted to solve the problem by using various methods, which ranged from militarization, imposition and enforcement of Dreaded Draconian Laws and Acts, like AFSPA/POTA and CIOs and to softer approaches of signing accords and pumping public money without political will. Thus, this humble study was conducted in order to assimilate and assemble issues related constraints and problems, which invariably are the causes of unrest and tensions in the region, and to develop intervention strategies/ mechanism.

3. The success of the peace efforts would depend on a clear understanding of the roots and causes of insurgency, militancy, terrorism and its cost. And find ways and means to build inter-intra relationship between people to people and village to village exchanges across ethnic lines, which have the potential of bringing amity, as they can unwind the stereo-type harbored by them about each other, It is crystal clear that the might of guns from the outside forces cannot subside the insurgencies movement of the region, rather the number increases and multiplied in numbers.

4. To analyze and identify the complex phenomena in the region (issues, roots and causes of the insurgencies, militarization and militancy) one has to avoid mere presumptuous *half-cooked knowledge* about the complexity phenomenon in the region. The time has come that both government and peace activists to change their lens and look at its deeper causes, contexts and cost of conflict, if, the desired peace is to be DAWN in the region. For power of Guns and Militarization with suppressive motive, racism attitude and action without ‘*political will*’ cannot sustain peace and normalcy in the region.

CONTENTS

Preface	iii
1. Contexts of Conflicts	1
2. Factors Responsible for Complexity Phenomenon in the Region <i>(The Socio-Geo-Politico Contexts of the Region)</i>	4
3. Extents of Conflict and Insurgency	12
4. Brief Historical Accounts of the Tribes	18
5. Traditional Institutions and Governance	26
6. Method Use in Conflict Management	39
7. Rites and Rituals for Conflict Mitigation	44
8. Extents of Conflict Among the Tribes	49
9. Action Initiated for Normalcy	62
10. Observation / Case Studies	68
11. Inevitable Traditional Systems	82
12. Views and Comments by Tribal Leaders	88
Appendices : <i>Social Changes (A Monographs)</i>	100

CHAPTER-I

CONTEXTS OF CONFLICTS

The North Eastern Region represents composition of multi-ethnic, culture and community with different aspirations, interest, values and incompatible goals, which invariably manifested into conflicts, uprising of insurgencies and crisis. During the past decades, violent have increased in every sphere of life in the region. All the ethnic communities living in the Region have been deeply affected and traumatized. Conflict in one aspect is a normal, natural and positive process of an individual, family and Society's relationships. However, there are conflicts that might lead to increase number of violence and crisis, Human Rights violation, failed governance and failed citizens. The contexts of conflict can be attributed to the following factors;

Change systems:

The entire Geo-Socio-Cultural, Economic and religious system of the society had undergone drastic changes after the coming up of the British rule and subsequent democratic governance. The sudden changes of land use systems with modernity, de-valued of traditional systems of governance,

disrespect of the ancient civilization and imposition of new evolution without the consent of the people has contributed a theory of revolutionary and self rules from the mainland India. The changes must have been done with the mutual understanding and consent of the people for whom it was designed. *The modern inputs becomes negative when they are superimposed on traditional with no preparation for interface between the two systems*".(Fernandez and Marville).

a. Exploitation: The Region have witnessed Geo-social, economic and political exploitation to the tribal communities which is historical and phenomenon in nature. This system is re-enforced by government functionaries who are co-opted by bureaucrat power structure through which funds for development of initiatives are delivered. The poverty of the region is a course and is a historical fact of political oppression. Given a clear observation into the economic prospective of the region one could see the reality and pathetic conditions of economic exploitations. That, the tribal population could occupy only 8% of private and public sectors establishment from the total employment guarantee of 30% reservation under Tribal reservation Act. of the Government.

b. Failed Policy, In broader, the failures of International and domestic policy of the successive government both in state and centre had been a successful factors for the unfriendly neighbors in pushing the cross border insurgency's free movement in the region and to wage war against own country

and with its own people. Growing impoverishment and militarization have further exacerbated these conditions. Thus, the basis of insurgency and conflict is not immigration or the indigenous status in themselves alone, but demoralization of traditional customary laws, land loss and the exclusive claim over the resources and identity.

c. Militarization, The imposition of dreaded Arm Forces special power acts to condone and contain insurgency movement and deployment Army senior officer and administrator from outside the region, who have little or no knowledge about the history, geography, society and its culture, are fallen short of what was expected. The discriminate harassment and ruthless torture and killing of the innocent people strengthened the determination of the insurgent. They also earned the support and sympathy of the community for the same reasons. Therefore, violation of Human rights and administrative excesses and high-handedness of the Government's sponsored Army should also be considered among the roots, sustenance and growth of insurgents' movement and conflict situation in the region.

Unlike (in) the rest of India, struggles in the North East have taken the overt form of ethnic consciousness emerging from the encounter with the dominant cultures".

The states of the North Eastern Region have a history of human rights violation, conflicts and ethnic disharmony that has already experienced far reaching negative impacts on lives and livelihoods of the tribal populace. The recurring conflicts and human rights violation in the region has hampered development & democratic processes in these districts and also in a way poised a threat to destroy many traditional and community infrastructures including that of the the traditional governance system.

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