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# ETHNIC CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF NORTH-EAST REGION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MANIPUR AND TRIPURA

GADADHARA MOHAPATRA

*The North-Eastern Region (NER) of India is endowed with huge untapped natural resources and is recognised as the eastern gateway for the country's 'Look /Act East Policy'. However, the region has experienced a number of conflicts based on ethnicity. It is also witnessing a series of insurgencies and is alienated from the economic resurgence that the rest of the country is experiencing. Studies on North-East India largely reflect on the nature of ethnic tensions and conflicts in the region, most of them being empirical, historical and descriptive in nature. The limitations of historical, cultural and political explanations, compel one to look into the political economy of the region to seek answers for the persistence of growth of ethnic movements in the region after Independence. The crisis of India's North-East has largely centred on the questions of identity, governance and development. Economy and governance rather than ethnicity should be the basis for future policy in the region. This article seeks to analyse the socio-political roots of ethnic conflicts and development dynamics there. It resituates the theoretical debate on identity, tribe and ethnicity within this context. The article provides a comprehensive understanding of the concept of ethnicity and patterns of ethnic conflict in the context of North-East India. Further, it presents case studies of ethnic conflict dynamics in the less studied but important states of Manipur and Tripura in North-East India.*

## INTRODUCTION

PATTERNS OF ethnic conflicts are broadly defined by social scientists under three different approaches: primordialism, instrumentalism, and constructivism. While the primordialist approach suggests that conflicts between ethnic groups happen because of people's unchanging essential



characteristics, instrumentalists view ethnicity and race as instrumental identities which community or political leaders make use of to serve specific interests and purposes. The constructivists disapprove the primordialist approach and argue that conflicts between two ethnic groups are not an eternal condition and that conflicts shift and mutate over time as identities are constructed and re-constructed (Fearon and Laitin, 2000: 849; Kipgen, 2013:26). Contesting such primordialist views, anthropologists have paid particular attention to the social construction of ethnic difference and the process of 'ethnic othering' related to political mobilisation along ethnic lines (Eriksen, 2002). Numerous case studies also suggest that economic disparity, competition over scarce resources, lack of opportunity, and exclusion from income generation are key causes of protracted sub-national conflicts. Researchers have argued convincingly that armed insurgencies more easily find recruits among disadvantaged youth, and that marginalised groups in society often mobilise along ethnic identities (Kolas, 2015:4). In the literature on conflict studies, causes of 'ethnic war' can be broadly divided into material-based arguments (strategic issues, resources), non-material based explanations (ethnic fear), and elite-manipulation (i.e. the role of charismatic leaders (Toft, 2003: 5-10, cited in Kolas, 2015:4). Ethnic conflicts have also been analysed in terms of a security dilemma which assumes that mutual fears and suspicions toward other groups is a key explanatory factor for the outbreak and escalation of violence. The emotional aspects of ethnic conflict suggest that the motivation to participate in or support ethnic violence is 'inherent in human nature' (Petersen 2002:1). The impact of ethnic conflict can be analytically examined in relation to four dimensions of development such as: (i) politics: specifically, issues related to unity, stability, legitimacy, political participation, and human rights; (ii) economics: items related to per capita GNP, strategies of development, basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, nutrition, education, etc.); (iii) socio-cultural, questions relating to community and identity, tolerance and inter-ethnic cooperation; and (iv) psychological, in particular, features such as mental health, a sense of wellbeing, self-esteem and security and self-respect (Premdas, 1992:20).

The view of North-East India as a site of ethnic conflict has become the standard frame employed by researchers, commonly used also among local analysts. As such, 'It seems that the selective struggle with the state, claim of national identity by an ethnic community and its politics of difference have to be filled with events of violence (Biswas and Suklabaidya, 2008: 246). Development funds are "taxed" by extremists and siphoned off by local politicians, who force the village leaders to sign. There is corruption in the Army as well as the government. There is no monitoring or inspection.



The records say that the ethnic communities are self-sufficient in food, and all roads are surfaced. The government officials blame the extremists for extorting 20 per cent of all funds, but actually they take the money for themselves (Kolas, 2015:7). Conflicts in North-East India are fuelled by the state's failure to provide security, ensure transparency, and accountability in public life, and address the significant economic disparities, especially those between urban and peripheral areas (Hasan, 2007: 2-4 cited in Kolas, 2015). Hasan further argued that although ethnicity is certainly a mobilising and legitimising factor, conflicts are not so much about inherent differences between social groups as about the absence of an effective (institutional and cultural) medium to regulate relationships and moderate contestations (Hasan, 2007: 19).

Karlsson points out how thinking of the North-East region, through existing categories might not always be enough. While referring to the very influential work of James Scott, Karlsson goes on to discuss ethnicity and the state in North-East India from the vantage point of James Scott's recent book (2009) *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. He argues that although Scott's notion of Zomia opens up new ways of thinking about North-East India, one still ends up thinking of the hills from the perspective of the valley and in so doing misses aspects of the hill societies and ways of being in the world that cannot be reduced to a state-effect. If one looks more closely at these other aspects, more persistent forms of identification and a sense of belonging might come to the fore. Rather than just trying to escape from the state, people in the hills also hope for another, different, state (Meenaxi and Andrea, 2013: 194).

Studies on ethnic movements in North-East India show that the first step of these movements is to assert the identity around certain social problems and the next step is to concretise the identity by forming an ethnic association. The third step is to claim for a separate administrative arrangement, so that the group concerned can preserve its cultural heritage and language, etc. The final step is to demand a separate administrative unit comprising the areas where the ethno-cultural group forms a majority (Singh, 1982). Indian anthropologist B.K. Roy Burman refers to proto-national and sub-national movements among tribal communities in India. Proto-national movements emerge when tribes experience a transformation from 'tribalism' to 'nationalism'; it is a search for identity at a higher level of integration. In contrast, sub-national movements are responses to deepening disparities brought about by the ongoing process of development (Roy Burman, 1971, 1979). Scholars investigating the issues of ethnic formation among the various hill people of North-East India generally outline three stages of ethnic formation—the dormant, calmed, and active ethnicity (Pakem,

1990:116). Dormant ethnicity is always out there. As the sociologists would say it is a given or constant. This is all the more true in the context of North-East India. North-East India experienced the formation of more tribal states than Central India and has also experienced stronger militant struggles. As North-East India shares international borders, such militancy makes the region more politically sensitive. The Government of India has, therefore, tried to appease the agitated tribes by allowing the formation of more ethnic states in this region. Much of the North-Eastern India's history is conditioned by this interaction in which the three steps of defending their livelihood, protecting their identity and propounding a sub-nationalism specific to a cultural and ethnic group merge into one (Datta, 1990: 36-39).

#### *Understanding Ethnicity*

'Ethnicity' is derived from the ancient Greek word *ethnos*, which refers to a range of situations where there is a sense of collectivity of humans that live and act together. The notion is often translated today as 'people' or 'nation' (Jenkins, 1997:9). Its use in contemporary sociology and in popular perception is relatively common. None of the founding fathers of classical sociology and social anthropology, with partial exception of Max Weber, granted ethnicity much importance. Weber in one of his important contributions, namely, *Economy and Society*, regards an ethnic group to be a group whose members share a belief that they have a common ancestor, or to put it differently, 'they are of common descent'. Weber states that 'Ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the potential community, no matter how artificially organised that inspires the belief in common ethnicity' (Weber, 1968: 389).

In a broad sense, as already mentioned above, three approaches to understanding of ethnicity can be considered, namely, primordialist, instrumentalist, and constructivist. The primordialist approach recognises biology as the fundamental for establishing ethnic identity. Primordialists argue that kinship bonds and cultural attachments would always reign supreme and govern social and political actions. Geertz extends this argument that 'the crystallisation of a direct conflict between primordial and civil sentiments—this 'longing not to belong to any other group', gives rise to the problem variously called tribalism, parochialism, communalism, and so on, a more ominous and deeply threatening quality than most of the other, also very serious and intractable, problem the new states face (Geertz, 1973:261). The instrumentalist approach becomes popular in sociological and political science writings in the late 1960s and early '70s. Names of Fredrik Barth and Paul Brass are commonly associated with popularising this position in social science. It argues that people can change membership and



move from one group identity to another. The change can take place either because of circumstances, or as Paul Brass states, because of manipulation by political elites. He regarded ethnicity as a product of political myths, created and manipulated by cultural elites in their pursuit of advantages and power. The cultural forms, values and practices of ethnic groups become resources for elites in competition for political power and economic advantage. They become symbols and referents for the identification of members of group, which are called up in order to ease the creation of political identity (Brass, 1985). Fredrik Barth, on the other hand, is always convinced that the focus for the investigation of ethnicity should be the ethnic boundary that defines the group, adopting the definition that ethnicity is social organisation of cultural differences. Barth (1969) in his symposium 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries', regarded ascription and self-ascription critical to the process of establishing the group boundaries. Finally, the constructivist model of ethnicity is located in the interpretive paradigm based on post-modernism. In this interpretation emphasis has shifted to negotiation of multiple subjects over group boundaries and identity.

Ashutosh Varshney (2014) presents a schematic presentation on the relationship between civic life and ethnic conflict (Fig. 1). He interpreted the term 'ethnic' in two different ways: in the narrower construal of the term, 'ethnic' groups mean 'racial' or 'linguistic' groups. For the second definition of the term he refers to Horowitz, who argues, all conflicts based on ascriptive group identities—race, language, religion, tribe, or caste—can be called ethnic (Varshney 2014: 135). Ethnicity is simply the set to which, religion, race, language, and sect belong as a subset. In any ethnically plural society that allows free expression of political demands, some ethnic conflict is more or less inevitable, but it may not necessarily lead to violence (Varshney 2014: 136). When there are different ethnic groups that are free to organise, there are likely to be conflicts over resources, identity, patronage, and policies. If ethnic protest takes an institutionalised form, it is conflict, not violence. Ethnic peace should, for all practical purposes, be conceptualised as an institutionalised channelling and resolution to ethnic demands and conflicts: as an absence of violence, not as an absence of conflict. The best way to understand the relationship between civic life and violence is via geological analogy. If the civic edifice is inter-ethnic and associational, there is a good chance it can absorb ethnic earthquakes that register quite high on the Richter scale (a partition, desecration of a holy place); if it is inter-ethnic and quotidian, earthquakes of smaller intensity can bring the edifice down. But if engagement is only intra-ethnic, not inter-ethnic, small tremors can unleash torrents of violence. A multi-ethnic society with few connections across ethnic boundaries can be very vulnerable to ethnic disorders and



violence (Varshney 2014: 152).

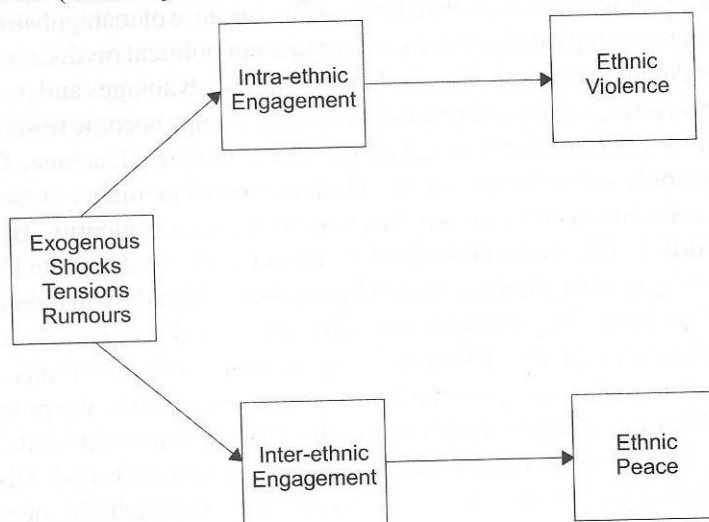


FIG. 1: CIVIC LIFE AND ETHNIC CONFLICT

SOURCE: Adapted from Ashutosh Varshney (2014: 151).

#### *Ethnic Identities in North-East India*

North-Eastern Region (NER) of India comprises eight states, namely, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. In terms of ethnic groups, the region is identified as the home of Mongoloid people. These groups of people are mostly categorised as Scheduled Tribes (STs) by the Constitution. NER India is inhabited by the people belonging to diverse races, religions, cultures and languages (Das 1987; Datta Ray, 1979). While the people of Assam and Tripura live mainly in the valleys, most people in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Meghalaya dwell in the hilly areas. Hinduism has made inroads into Assam, Manipur and Tripura, but a substantial number of Muslims are also there in these three states. Majority of the people in Mizoram and Nagaland and over 83.3 per cent in Meghalaya are Christians. In Arunachal Pradesh, in addition to the Buddhists, there are several tribes who follow their own animistic faiths. Racially, majority of the people in the NER belong to Mongoloid race and speak Tibeto-Burman languages (Srikanth 200: 60). There are over 420 languages/dialects in the region. Apart from the developed languages such as Assamese, Bengali and Manipuri, which are included under the Eighth Schedule of Indian Constitution, there are several dialects at different stages of development spoken by different tribal groups. Many of them do not have scripts of their

own and use Roman or Devnagari scripts (Miri, 1982). While mainland Indian states were reorganised along linguistic lines based on the report of the States Reorganisation Commission constituted in 1953 and which reported in 1955, North-East India was reorganised on ethnic lines. Thus, it is a general notion that Mizoram state belongs to the Mizos, Nagaland to the Nagas, Manipur to the Meiteis, and Meghalaya to the Khasi, Jaintia and Garos. These ethnic states were created after decades of struggle for political autonomy and the creation of such ethnic states have sharpened the divisions (Haokip, 2012: 84).

Most parts of NER, by and large, do not share a common history with the rest of the country. Though the indigenous people are not very poor in the region, there is a deep sense of alienation among them from the rest of the 'mainstream' India (Roy Burman, 2009). In order to assuage their feelings and undo the trajectory of colonial history, the Government of India on the recommendations of Gopinath Bordoloi sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly, brought about the erstwhile 'Excluded Areas, in certain areas of tribal concentration in Assam and Tripura within the ambit of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Later with the separation of Meghalaya from Assam, all the three Scheduled Areas were retained intact. For administering the Scheduled Areas, Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) were created which became functional from 1952. By the notification of the Governor, autonomous regions with separate Regional Councils have also been set up. There are two ADCs in Assam: North Cachar Hills District and Karbi Anglong District; three in Meghalaya: Khasi Hills District, Jaintia Hills District and Garo Hills District; one in Tripura: Tripura Hills District and three in Mizoram: the Chakma District, Mara District and the Lai District. There are six ADCs in Manipur but they are not within the ambit of the Sixth Schedule (Roy Burman, 1998). With the promulgation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution, the position of the ADCs has become considerable diluted (Roy Burman, 1998). Roy Burman further states, as compared to the provisions of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment which ensures election for the Panchayats within six months of the date of their dissolution, the ADCs have to depend on the decision of the Governor.

#### *Patterns of Ethnic Conflicts in the NER*

The long fostering conflicts in the NER have evoked different types of studies: economic policy studies such as the High Power Commission Report on 'Transforming the Northeast' led by S.P. Shukla, Member, Planning Commission (GoI, 1997); security-centric studies such as the one by the former Lt. General Nanavatty (Nanavatty, 2013); and several academic and journalistic studies (Subramanian, 2016: 2). Marcus Franke (2004) has rightly noted that war was an essential aspect of imperial expansion in India

and that the North-East was no exception to the emergence of a 'garrison state' that survived the Transfer of Power in 1947. The massive deployment of military and parliamentary forces and the use of the colonial-repressive legislation, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (AFSPA), have aggravated security challenges in the region. There exists a number of official reports and academic studies pertaining to the nature and causes of the conflicts and strategies and methods to be adopted to resolve them. *The North-Eastern Region (NER) Vision 2020* (GoI, 2008) is among the latest documents. However, the security-centric approach dominating official thinking has led to 'conflict management' not 'conflict resolution' (*ibid.*, 3).

The NER, 'a beautiful but truly depressing corner of India' (Lintner, 2012: 182) has become so to say a market for weapons of all kinds. The illegal economy of insurgents affects economic development in the region. Kidnapping for ransom, looting banks, siphoning off government development funds; and smuggling arms and narcotics from Myanmar continue. In Manipur, shopkeepers pay off several insurgent groups. In Tripura too, a similar situation is said to prevail. Corruption, failure of governance and a parallel economy driven by insurgents affects the local economy. Terrorism, drugs and arms trafficking, money laundering, cross-border migration and ethnic conflicts have devastated the social fabric. Indigenous people who are exempted from government taxes share off their income with militants (Bhattacharyya, 2011; Subramanian, 2016: 170). Therefore, protection of identities is central to ethnic groups across India. While many trends have promoted the 'idea of India', others have encouraged segmentation. Willingness to recognise and accept plurality and complexity are essential to prevent further segmentation in the NER (Prabhakara, 2012: 253-77).

Ethnic conflicts are manifested in varying degrees and intensities. The consequences are often seen in the economic deprivation of some groups of people. In the context of NER, tribals have lost their land to the immigrants and to the commercial forces. The loss of these resources affects their culture, economy and identity that are built around them. That explains why most ethnic conflicts have been for scarce resources, especially land. It is the case with the Naga-Kuki conflict in Manipur (Fernandes and Bharali, 2002:52-55), the Mizo-Bru conflict in Mizoram (Lianzela 2002: 243-44), the Bodo-Santhal (Roy 1995: 94-95) and Dimasa-Hmar tension in Assam, and the Tripura tribal demand for a homeland from the 1970s. According to Bijukumar (2013), social exclusion, in most cases leads to identity assertion which in turn causes conflict, and even violence. In the case of NER, the people have got very many reasons to feel alienated and under crisis. The region is geographically isolated from the mainland



and has more than hundred tribes and sub-tribes. The ethnic diversity, the dominance of one tribe over the other, intermingling of the indigenous people with the immigrants and the deprivation to the region by the Centre cause a sense of dissatisfaction and identity crisis among the populace. Due to the large number of immigration, the indigenous people lost their land, which is actually part of their culture and life. According to Barpujari (1998: 90), “a sense of neglect and deprivation had created a crisis of identity or identity consciousness amongst different ethnic groups of the Valley of the Brahmaputra”. The broad racial, cultural and ethnic differences between mainland India and its North-East and the tenuous geographical link (the ‘chicken neck’ Siliguri Corridor) contributed to a sense of alienation, deprivation and a feeling of ‘otherness’ that subsequently gave rise to violent separatism (Kojiam, 2010). When people feel that they are a potential victim they retaliate. When people feel that others are a threat to their existence they fight for their survival even to the extent of ethnic cleansing. The anxiety behind is ‘they will kill us if we do not kill them first’. Therefore, a threat to group identities acted as a major cause for ethnic violence (Kreidie and Monroe, 2002). It is commonly believed that offence is the best defense. Conflict occurs when a group feels that they are vulnerable and if they do not act first, they will be at the receiving end. In most of the cases, fear psychosis is the immediate cause of violence, though not the root cause.

#### *Development Dynamics in NER*

NER is endowed with many natural resources, but the endowments have not translated into economic growth and development. There exists a wide gap between the expectation and achievement among its predominantly Mongoloid ethnicities, and the alienation of the fringe from the core has intensified. Instead of investing in the region’s infrastructure and allowing the market forces to do the rest, the country’s federal government pumped huge quantum of funds to sustain the region’s economy. *The Vision 2020* document for NER, prepared by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (M-DoNER) and the North-East Council, states: “At independence North-Eastern Region was among the most prosperous region of India. Sixty years on, the region as a whole and the states that comprise it, are lagging far behind the rest of the country in most important parameters of growth. The purpose of this *Vision Document* is to return the North-Eastern Region to the position of national economic eminence it had till a few decades ago; to so fashion the development process that growth springs from and spreads out to the grassroots; and to ensure that the Region plays the arrow-head role it must play in the vanguard of the country’s Look East Policy” (The North-East Vision 2020 cited in Bhaumik 2009: 321). The North-East Vision 2020 identified three critical non-economic

requirements that will condition the region's economic performance such as: (i) law and order, especially internal security, (ii) good governance, including governance at the grassroots through institutions of local self-government, and (iii) diplomatic initiatives with the neighbourhood of the North-East (Bhaumik, 2009: 232).

*The North-East Vision 2020* outlined six interdependent components of strategy for encompassing inclusive development of the region to meet the challenge of realising the vision: (i) empowerment of the people through inclusive governance and participatory development through grassroots planning; (ii) creation of development opportunities for a majority of the people living in villages through rural development initiatives; (iii) developing the manufacturing and service sectors with comparative advantage; (iv) capacity development of people and institutions; (v) creating a hospitable investment climate; and (vi) significant investment by both public and private sectors. Maximising self governance is critical to establishing peace and development and the latter contributes to improved governance. Peace will bring in development dividends and vice versa. Development requires infrastructure and capacity development. Similarly, connectivity can check insurgency. All these can be done only when there is an appropriate environment for which responsive administration is necessary (North-East Vision 2020: 34).

The High-Level Commission appointed by the Prime Minister in its report submitted in 1997 (India, 1997) has stated that there are four basic deficits confronting the North-East and these are: (i) a basic needs deficit; (ii) an infrastructural deficit; (iii) a resource deficit, and, (iv) a two-way deficit of understanding with the rest of the country which compounds the others. Another deficit is added to this is the governance deficit. The NER has so far depended exclusively on the Centre for development funding. A more rapid pace of the growth would generate larger internal resources. This could perhaps be enlarged through the additionality of private investment, Indian and foreign, within a well-defined framework (Sukla Committee, 1997: 3).

Despite several efforts made by the Government of India and allocating 10 per cent of the total budgets of ministries/departments for projects/schemes of development in the NER, including Sikkim, the region still lags behind on many fronts (Sailo, 2016). Income poverty has also increased in five of the eight states at a time when the rest of the country has seen significant reduction in poverty levels for the period 2004-05 to 2009-10. Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim are the only two states which show per capita income that is higher than the national average (Table 1).

The high levels of unemployment and the lack of prospects of employment as evident from Table 2, forces the unemployed youth



vulnerable to taking up arms and joining insurgent groups (Sailo, 2016). Further, unemployment along with increasing inequality could continue to provide stimulus for social unrest. Studies projects that between 2011 and 2021, the region will have only 2.6 million jobs against a supply of 17 million people looking for jobs (India Chamber of Commerce, 2013:11).

The crisis of NER has largely centred around the questions of identity, governance and development (Bhaumik, 2009: 261). In an article "*Horizontal Inequalities: A Neglected Dimension of Development*", Steward (2001: 2) argues that conflicts which look like clashes between different cultures very often have their origin in "severe inequalities between culturally defined groups". Steward calls them horizontal inequalities. She predicts that given "inequalities in resource access and outcomes, coinciding with cultural differences, culture can become a powerful mobilising agent that can lead to a range of political disturbances". This could be applicable in the context of ethnic tension and conflicts in NER (Zehol, 2008: 64).

#### *The Case of Manipur*

Manipur has emerged as a conflict zone with different communities competing and contesting to carve out exclusive political and geographical space through ethnic mobilisation. This can be zeroed down to three dominant ethnic groups, i.e. the *Naga*, the *Kuki* and the *Meitei* forming what is called as an 'ethnic triangle'. In the literature on conflict and poverty studies, ethnic conflicts have been broadly classified into three types: (i) Intra-ethnic conflict: i.e. within an ethnic group, such as that between the Kuki and Hmar in 1960 and that between the Thadou Kuki and Paite Zomi in 1997 to 1998, within the generic ethnic group commonly known as the Chin-Kuki. The issue of nomenclature was the basis of these conflicts; (ii) Inter-ethnic conflict: Here, the conflict is between two or more ethnic groups, such as that between Naga and Kuki tribes in 1992 and subsequently between the Meitei and the Pangal in the valley in 1993; and (iii) State versus people in which conflict is directed against the state (Kumar *et al.* 2011:28). The elites of the respective communities play a significant role in terms of perceiving an imagined future and highlighting the present challenges. The conflicts can be of 'vertical' or 'horizontal' type; the former refers to the ongoing conflict between the nation-state and the ethnic groups, and the latter to the conflict amongst various insurgent groups with different ethnic affiliations. The vertical conflict is the most important one in determining all other forms of conflict which may be regarded as the byproducts. Both these types are amply illustrated in the literature.

The pattern of ethnic formation in Manipur was made more complicated by government directives. Under the Indian Constitution Scheduled Tribes Order 1950, as variously amended, there were at first only umbrella terms



TABLE 1: POPULATION, POVERTY LINE, AND PER CAPITA INCOME IN NER

State	Population (in '000)	Poverty Line (Tendulkar Methodology) per cent of persons		Per Capita Income (in Rs.)#	
		2011	2004-5	2009-10	2009-10
All India	1,210,193	37.2	29.8	46,492	60,972
Arunachal Pradesh	1,383	31.4	25.9	51,405	62,213
Assam	31,169	34.4	37.9	27,197	33,633
Manipur	2,722	37.9	47.1	27,332	32,284
Meghalaya	2,964	16.1	17.1	43,555	56,643
Mizoram	1,091	15.4	21.1	45,982	48,591 (2010-11)
Nagaland	1,981	8.8	20.9	45,353 (2008-09)	56,116
Sikkim	608	30.9	13.1	68,731	81,159 (2010-11)
Tripura	3,671	40	17.4	35,799	50,750

# At current price

SOURCE: Laldinkima Sailo (2016), "The Ultimate Challenge of Development", p.87, in Subir Bhaumik (ed.), *The Agartala Doctrine*, New Delhi: OUP.

for the hill people such as 'Any Kuki or Naga Tribe', 'any Lushai Tribe'. This grouping was reclassified along tribal lines in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Lists Modification Order of 1956. Under the modification, the three umbrella terms were subdivided into 29 different named tribes: Aimol, Anal, Angami, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Kabui, Kacha Naga, Koirao, Koirang, Kom, Lamgang, Mao, Maram, Maring, Lushai tribes, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Purum, Ralte, Sema, Simte, Sukte, Tangkhul, Thadou, Vaiphei and Zou (Singh, 2004). In the last few decades, the broad labels of 'Naga' and 'Kuki' have become the loci of ethnic re-alignment and re-grouping (Pakem, 1990). Tribes such as the Anal, Monsang, Chothe and Chiru, once designated as 'Kuki', have now obtained official recognition as Naga tribes. Among the Kukis there have been movements to distinguish the 'old' from the 'new' migrants with the numerically stronger Thadou attempting to establish their cultural dominance. In fact, since the creation of the 'Schedule' of recognised tribes there has been considerable flux in nomenclature, tribal group formation and self-identification. There are many

TABLE 2: UNEMPLOYMENT IN NER

<i>State</i>	<i>Estimated Employment in the Public and Private Sectors (in '000), 2007-08</i>	<i>Total Employment (in '000), 2005</i>
All India	27,549	100,904
Arunachal Pradesh	N/A	110
Assam	1,173	2,208
Manipur	80	236
Meghalaya	82.6	242
Mizoram	40.8	107
Nagaland	76	175
Sikkim	N/A	68
Tripura	160	386

SOURCE: Laldinkima Sailo (2016), "The Ultimate Challenge of Development", p.88-89 in Subir Bhaumik (ed.), *The Agartala Doctrine*, New Delhi: OUP

cases of tiny ethnicities associating themselves with one or the other of the major groups, or demanding changes in nomenclature and recognition of their separate status on the basis of language and other traits. The Meiteis, whose royal chronicles date their ascendancy in the valley to the 1st Century A.D., are themselves an amalgamation of Indo-Aryan and Mongoloid or Tibeto-Burman peoples, having assimilated numerous tribal populations into their fold over time (MHDR, 2005: 223). Many militant groups operate in the state of Manipur. Apart from demanding secession and attacking government facilities, these groups indulge in damaging or killing innocent civilians and government personnel and resort to collection or extortion of money in the name of taxes, dictate codes of behaviour and arbitrate in personal disputes. Table 3 indicates the details of insurgency-related killings in the state from 2001 to 2016 (See Table 3). Others try to cleanse society by fighting corruption and social evils. Thus, violence has become a way of life in Manipur (Subramanian, 2016:50). Other social issues such as job reservations for Scheduled Tribes and the lop-sided development between the hills and the valleys led to distrust and enmity between the communities in the state. The government unveiled a surrender-cum-rehabilitation policy in 1996 with grants and benefits to those who surrendered. Those who surrendered were absorbed in government service including police. Since the cash initiatives were meagre, the former militants formed Ex-militants Development Association. They were compelled to join counter-insurgency forces against their will (Subramanian, 2016: 51). The worst victims in the

ethnic clashes and militancy are the women. When the male members of the family are either killed or join the militancy, the responsibilities fall on the women members.

TABLE 3: INSURGENCY RELATED KILLINGS IN MANIPUR 2001-2016

<i>Year</i>	<i>Civilians</i>	<i>Security Force Personnel</i>	<i>Militants</i>	<i>Total</i>
2001	70	25	161	256
2002	36	53	101	190
2003	27	23	148	198
2004	40	41	127	208
2005	138	50	143	331
2006	107	37	141	285
2007	150	40	218	408
2008	131	13	341	485
2009	77	18	321	416
2010	26	8	104	138
2011	25	10	30	65
2012	25	12	73	110
2013	21	6	28	55
2014	20	10	24	54
2015	17	24	53	94
2016	9	8	6	23

SOURCE: South Asia Terrorist Portal-Insurgency-Related Killings in Manipur:www.satp.org  
\* Data till July 17, 2016.

The AFSPA has been described as a 'truly nasty and terrifying legislation' (Prabhakara, 2012: 228). The designation of the state as a 'disturbed area' under the AFSPA in 1980s has meant, in effect, that the state is subject to an undeclared emergency circumscribing not only the liberties of the citizens but even limiting the freedom of the state government. AFSPA was applied to the whole of Assam (then including Naga Hills, Lushai Hills and Meghalaya) and Manipur. During that time, the Naga Hills and the Ukhrul district in Manipur were designated as disturbed area under the AFSPA. The whole of Manipur was designated a disturbed area in September 1980. The Act remained in force till 2004 when the government was forced to lift it in a small area of the Imphal municipality in the wake of the fake encounter killing of Thangjam Manorama by the Assam Rifles



(AR) and the protest that followed. The AFSPA has been characterised as a 'national security tyranny (SAHRDC, 1995; Subramanian, 2016) since it violates both the Indian Constitution and the international conventions and instruments. Researchers working on Manipur have brought out the vastly unequal development and economic disparity between the hills and the valley of the state. The hill economy is essentially one of subsistence, agrarian in nature. In essence, the economic backwardness of the hill people is a case of poverty within poverty (Kamkhenthang, 2000). The poverty of the hill people is reflected in several forms—high levels of illiteracy, ill health, unemployment and failure of commerce and overall development (Kamei, 2000). Development in Manipur is closely related to the ongoing conflicts and social tensions in the state. In his report on the NER, S.P. Shukla said: "It would be simplistic to believe that development by itself can end insurgency and restore tranquility. Yet it constitutes a most important element in that task and an effective entry point for dealing with complex problems of historical neglect, rapid transition and social change. The extraordinary ethno-geographic and bio-geographic diversity of the region precludes uniform solutions as different communities are at varying stages of growth (MSDR, 2005:222).

#### *The Case of Tripura*

Tripura is a land-locked State, surrounded by Bangladesh on its north, south and west (THDR, 2007: 3). Twipra (Tripura) as the indigenous tribes people of the state call it, means 'land besides water'. India's partition in 1947 turned a trickle into a tide (Bhaumik, 2016: 8). Bengali people had been constantly moving into Hill Tipperah (Tripura) from the neighbouring plains of East Bengal for a century before the Partition. They were often encouraged by the Kings who ruled the 'land beside water'. The Kings wanted the tribes people to pick up settled wet rice cultivation from the hardy East Bengal farmers because that would augment the royal revenues. The economy of Tripura at the time of Independence was agriculture and forest-based, with no manufacturing base (THDR, 2007:4-5). It is still characterised by high rate of poverty, low per-capita income, low capital formation, inadequate infrastructure facilities, geographical isolation and communication bottleneck, inadequate exploitation and use of forest and mineral resources, low progress in industrial field and high un-employment problem (*Economic Review of Tripura, 2012-13:11*). The Partition of India in 1947 was a defining event in the history of Tripura, and had an enduring effect on the process of social and economic development in the State. The massive immigration of non-tribal people from East Bengal into Tripura after 1947 changed the demography of the princely state and the ethnic conflict generated by the demographic transformation intensified during

1970s to the 1990s. Further, the loss of direct geographical contact with India affected the state's economic growth despite availability of natural resources (Subramanian, 2016: 98). About 31 per cent of the total population of the state, are indigenous tribal people belonging to 19 sub-tribes with their own cultural identity, namely: Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Lusai, Mog, Garo, Kuki, Chaimal, Uchai, Halam, Khasia, Bhutia, Munda, Orang, Lepcha, Santal, Bhil and Noatia. The decline of tribal population took place during the period from 1864 to 2001 (Vohra, 2011: 34). A sharper decline was during 1941-71 from 50.09 to 28.95 per cent. Though the state's population grew 20 times from 1901 to 2001, the availability of cultivable land remained static with much of it passing into the hands of the migrant Bengalis both legally and illegally. The demographic and rehabilitation issues are the major cause of the conflict in the state (Subramanian, 2016: 90). The insurgency in the state originated from tribal resistance to loss of land to the immigrant Bengali non-tribal people (Subramanian, 2016: 14). The year 1967 is significant as it marked the advent of ethnicity-driven tribal politics in Tripura. Certain sections of the indigenous tribes grew frustrated over Communist's failure to prevent Bengali influx and got agitated at the Congress' aggressive championing of the Bengali refugee cause. In this year of 1967, the Tripura Upjati Juba Samity (TUJS) was founded with the slogan '*Kachak koofoor chung chia, buni tola tangalia*' (We are neither white nor red but we are for the tribal cause). The TUJS tried to outradicalise the Communists in the tribal areas, even as the armed group Sengrak (Clenched Fist), surfaced in North Tripura to drive out Bengali settlers who were encroaching on their lands. The Communists were caught in a tricky situation, i.e. growing Congress support among the Bengali refugees and the strong challenge from the TUJS and tribal militant groups like the Sengrak in tribal areas (Bhattacharya, 1998; Bhaumik, 2016: 12).

Tripura has been at the receiving end of successive bouts of tribal insurgencies since the CPI(M)-led Left Front first came to power in 1978 (Bhaumik, 2016: 21). The jubilation of its massive victory in 1978 state Assembly polls was swept away by the rising curve of ethnic violence that culminated in the June 1980 riots. Caught between the tribal parties and the '*Amra Bengali*' (We are Bengalis), the Left did not decline on its commitment of tribal autonomy but went ahead with the creation of the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous Council, under the Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution. This covers two-thirds of the state's land area for a tribal population that is less than one-thirds of the state's population. However, the ethnic riots intensified tribal alienation, sending more recruits to the underground Tripura National Volunteers (TNV), which attacked on the security forces and the Bengali settlers. In a month before the 1988



state Assembly elections, the TNV killed more than 100 Bengali settlers, leading to strident demands for deployment of army units. However, the idea of bringing the state under the Disturbed Areas Act was ruled out on the ground that it would alienate the tribals further and the then Chief Minister of Tripura recommended to deploy army to control the situation. Two tribal separatist groups named as All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) and National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) had emerged within a few years of the TNV's return to normal life. Both unleashed a wave of killings and kidnappings, mainly targeting Bengali settlers as well as attacking the tribal activists of the Left parties. The violent campaign peaked ahead of the 2009 Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous Council (TTADC) polls which, the Left Front lost to the new tribal party named as Indigenous Peoples Front of Tripura (IPFT). The IPFT, backed by the banned National Liberation Front of Tripura, bagged 18 of the 28 seats. The TTADC 2000 debacle convinced the Left Front leadership that there was no point relying on party elements who promised to fight political rivals by selective patronage of some insurgents to counter others (Bhaumik, 2016: 22). The death of the then Health Minister, Bimal Sinha, the main advocate of this line within the CPI(M), led to a change in the counter-insurgency strategy followed by Government of Tripura and the ruling Marxists. Manik Sarkar reposed his trust in the state police and administration in combating insurgency in the state (Bhaumik, 2016: 22).

During 2003-06, the Director General of Police, G.M. Srivastava and Major (now Colonel) Govind Srikumar, in tandem managed to launch attacks on NLFT and ATTF bases just across the border. Rebels who came to surrender were not allowed to do so as it was in the past. The sharp drop in insurgency-related action and the brilliant performance of the Left after the TTADC debacle in 2000 points to the success of this covert campaign. Table 4 indicates a clear decline in insurgency-related fatalities over the years that witnessed the peak in the annals of counter-insurgency in India (Bhaumik, 2016: 24-25).

Though the tribal-nontribal conflict in the state has been passive since then, the state government finds it still required to retain the operation of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in a majority of the police stations in the tribal areas of the state and continue deployment of the Assam Rifles (AR) under the army and the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs). In the 1970s, the Gumti Dam in Tripura submerged large tracts of arable land in the Raima Valley and displaced the local tribal population, leading to unrest (Vagholikar and Das, 2003: 1). The Gumti Power Project in Tripura with upgraded installed capacity of 15 megawatts has submerged about 45,000 hectares and displaced about 9,000 tribal families. There have

been suggestions to analyse if it would now make economic and political sense to decommission the dam, and resettle about 30,000 landless tribal families in the state on the rich silt-laden reservoir bed. This could make Tripura self-sufficient in grain, help ethnic reconciliation and ecological restoration, and would send a message across the region that water resource development will not take place at the cost of legitimate human and tribal interests (World Bank 2007: 63). The decommissioning of the Gumti hydel project would lead to the availability of hugely fertile lands and it can be gainfully redistributed amongst the tribal peasantry, especially the landless ones who have not benefitted from rubber cultivation.

#### CONCLUSION

To conclude, ethnic conflict is actually a dispute over genuine social, political and economic issues, or historical grievances, and ethnicity is used as a means of social mobilisation. Review of studies and evidences suggests that reduction of ethnic tension and conflicts must be achieved through a reduction of 'horizontal inequalities'. As Steward (2001:31) states "Development policy ought to include policies to monitor and correct such horizontal inequalities". Another way suggested for reducing ethnic conflicts is "verticalisation" of the decision-making process. The concept verticalisation may not necessary mean decentralisation or distancing power from the Centre. It involves bringing the decision-making process either to the people or the people to this process not merely as observers but as equal and active participants (Zehol, 2008: 65). The NER in general and Manipur, in particular, have been in the throes of a violent conflict in recent times. Development in Manipur is closely related to the ongoing conflicts and social tensions in the state. Hence, an understanding of the relationship between ethnic demands, economic development and development planning in Manipur is crucial. An objective and inclusive economic development policy for Manipur is necessary at this critical juncture (MSDR, 2005). On the other hand, people in the State of Tripura have also suffered from the effects of insurgency and associated violence in the past. As Government of Tripura has consolidated the stabilisation process through 2015, Tripura emerged as the most peaceful State in the entire NER in terms of decline of insurgency-related fatalities. Tripura has succeeded in eradicating insurgency from its soil through sustained Police-led operations, backed by a multidimensional approach that aggressively promoted developmental work to counter the psychological hold of militants. These initiatives have included infrastructure development, wage employment programme including MGNREGA, the provision of basic services for people in affected areas, and opportunities for surrendered militants to return to the mainstream.



TABLE 4: MILITANCY-RELATED FATALITIES IN TRIPURA: 2001-08

<i>Year</i>	<i>Civilians</i>	<i>Security Force Personnel</i>	<i>Militants</i>	<i>Total</i>
2001	237	36	30	303
2002	150	46	22	218
2003	207	39	50	296
2004	67	46	51	164
2005	28	11	21	60
2006	14	14	22	50
2007	14	6	19	39
2008	7	4	17	28
2009	9	1	1	11
2010	0	2	1	3
2011	1	0	0	1
2012	0	0	2	2
2013	0	0	0	0
2014	2	2	0	4
2015	0	0	0	0
2016*	0	0	0	0

SOURCE: South Asia Terrorist Portal: Insurgency-Related Killings in Tripura: [www.satp.org](http://www.satp.org)

\*Data till July 17, 2016.

The counter-insurgency, development and democratic governance in Tripura is an exemplary model of a holistic response that other states can replicate.

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