

Chapter 2

INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN NORTH EAST INDIA

India as a whole has about 4,635 communities comprising 2,000 to 3,000 caste groups, about 60,000 of synonyms of titles and sub-groups and near about 40,000 endogenous divisions (Singh 1992: 14-15). These ethnic groups are formed on the basis of religion (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Jain, Buddhist, etc.), sect (Nirankari, Namdhari and Amritdhari Sikhs, Shia and Sunni Muslims, Vaishnavite, Lingayat and Shaivite Hindus, etc.), language (Assamese, Bengali, Manipuri, Hindu, etc.), race (Mongoloid, Caucasoid, Negrito, etc.), caste (scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, etc.), tribe (Naga, Mizo, Bodo, Mishing, Deori, Karbi, etc.) and others groups based on national minority, national origin, common historical experience, boundary, region, sub-culture, symbols, tradition, creed, rituals, dress, diet, or some combination of these factors which may form an ethnic group or identity (Hutnik 1991; Rastogi 1986, 1993). These identities based on religion, race, tribe, language etc characterizes the demographic pattern of Northeast India.

Northeast India has 4,55,87,982 inhabitants as per the Census 2011. The communities of India listed by the 'People of India' project in 1990 are 5,633 including 635 tribal groups, out of which as many as 213 tribal groups and surprisingly, 400 different dialects are found in Northeast India. Besides, many non-tribal groups are living particularly in plain areas and the ethnic groups are formed in terms of religion, caste, sects, language, etc. (Shivananda 2011:13-14).

According to the Census 2011, 45587982 persons inhabit Northeast India, out of which as much as 31169272 people (68.37%) are living in Assam, constituting mostly the non-tribal population. Sikkim is the less populated state with 607688 persons followed by Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura and Nagaland. But the largest geographical area is covered by the hills where maximum tribal population lives. If it is distributed statewide, Arunachal Pradesh covers the highest land (83,743 sq. km.) followed by Assam (78,438 sq. km.), and Sikkim covers the lowest of the land size (7096 sq.km.) Density of population is the least in Arunachal Pradesh and the highest in Assam figuratively 17 and 397 respectively. Literacy rate is the highest in Mizoram (91.58%), and followed by Tripura (87.75%) and the lowest literacy rate is 66.95% in Arunachal Pradesh.

The population of this region depicts a mixture of varied stocks and races like the Monkhemer of Austro-Asiatic origins, the Indo-Chin, Indo-Mongoloids, the Tibeto-Burman and the Indo-Burmese groups. This diversity refers to polyphony of ethnicism. All the eight states of Northeastern region have their own distinctive cultures and ethnic costumes. The people of this region have preserved their beautiful ethnic primitiveness (Sangma 2006:07). These ethnic groups do not live in distinct territories, and so their demands for ethnic “homelands” have led to generalized violence not only between indigenous groups and those they consider “outsiders”, but also between different indigenous groups, such as the Mizos and the Brus (or Reangs) in Mizoram and the Rabhas and the Garos along the Assam-Meghalaya state border (IDMC Report 2011).

Ethnic pluralism is one of the basic characteristics of Northeast India, comprising variety of life styles, cultures, religions, languages, beliefs and traditions. One of the most significant features of the North Eastern region is its diverse *tribal* segments. Of the total of 213 tribal groups and sub-groups in the region, 101 tribal groups and sub-groups are found in Arunachal Pradesh, 23 in Assam, 28 in Manipur, 14 in Meghalaya, 5 in Mizoram, 20 in Nagaland, 4 in Sikkim and 18 in Tripura (Singh 1992). All these tribes belonging to this region can be found in the hills as well as the plains. The hill tribes include, Rengma, Lalung, Montai, Zemi, Liangmei, Rongmei, Kuki, Thadou, Hmar, Dimasa, Karbi, Baite, Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Angami, Sema, Ao, Konyak, Lotha, Chingman, Mosang, Mishmi, Nisi, Akas, Apatani, Miji, Sherdukpen, Khawas, Adi, Hill Miri, Sulung, Tagin, Monpa, Memba, Khemba, Nokte, Wanchoo, Tangsa, Tangkhul, Halam, Chaw, Langrong, Sokte, Ratte, Paite, Mizo, Lakher, Rieng, Chakma, Musasing, Aslong, Khalisa, Komd, Lowang, Moira, Moite, Morieng, Hojai, Phadag, etc. while the plain tribes are Bodos, Mishing, Deori, Sonowal, Rabha, Mech, Kachari, Lalung, Tripuri, Khamti, Phakial, Aitonia, Turung, Cachar Barman, etc. The tribal people constitute majority in Mizoram (94.40%), Meghalaya (86.10%), Nagaland (86.50%), and Arunachal Pradesh (68.80%) and contribute a significant proportion to the population in Tripura (31.80%), Manipur (35.10%) and Assam (12.40%) (Census of India 2011).

Basically, the tribes of North-East India belong to Mongoloid type, popularly the Indo-Mongoloids, who entered this region through north, north-east and south-east directions at different times. They are characterized by yellow, yellow-brown

skin and black, flat, wavy, coarse head hairs, broad face and less hair on face and body. Indo-Mongoloids speaking languages of Sino-Tibetan group have been divided into two major branches; viz., (i) Tibeto-Burman and (ii) Siamese-Chinese. From their original homeland in the North-East China, the Tibeto-Burman speakers at one time migrated towards south, somewhere, in the north Burma and diversified into same groups which separately entered North-East India. The North Assam group of language is spoken mostly by the Arunachal tribes; namely, Aka, Monpa, Nishi, Sherdukpen, Apatani, Adi, Mishimi, Nocte, Wanchoo, Tangsa, etc. Another subgroup of Indo-Mongoloids called Assam-Burmese group includes three groups; namely, Bodos, Nagas and Kuki-Chins. The term *Bodo* denotes a large number of ethnic groups, such as Garo, Rabha, Kachari, Koch, Mech, Karbi, Hajong, Lalung, etc. Moreover, Mizo-Kukis of Mizoram and Meiteis of Manipur are also included in this category. The Naga groups in the eastern part of Assam (now Nagaland); namely, Ao, Angami, Sema, Konyak, Lhota, Rengma, Phom, Chang and others belong to Indo-Mongloid type. The anthropologists have attempted to study physical features of the tribes but their race has not yet been decided. They have many heterogeneous elements in the sense that nose pattern varies from one group to another. The last subgroup of North-Assam elements is the Kuki-Chins. The Thado Kuki and Purum Kuki are located in the southern part of Assam and other Kuki-Chin tribes are in Manipur, viz., Aimol, Hmar, Paite, Thado, Vaiphei, etc. The original inhabitants of Tripura called the Tripuri belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family of languages; namely, Riangs, Maghs and Chakmas who migrated from Mizoram and Burma once upon a time (Barpujari 1990; Gait 1926). According to Anthropologists, it has been found that the Tibeto-Barman linguistic group of Northeast India migrated from the bank of the Huwang-hu and Yangsikiang rivers of North West China. They moved towards south Burma and one branch of them again moved to the West Himalayan region. Finally, they changed their direction towards south and group by group entered into Northeastern region. In course of time they came to be known as Rabha, Kachari, Garo, Tiwa, etc. (Barpujari 1990; Gait 1926).

Almost all the religions practiced in India can be found among the people inhabiting Northeast India. Among them the most prominent religious groups found in Northeast India are Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Buddhist. Hinduism and Islam are

mostly practiced in the valleys and plain areas. Christianity and Buddhism are mostly practiced in the hilly areas of Northeast.

The above mentioned diversities pertaining to race and ethnicity, religion and language are often found to be preparing a platform for staging the horrible drama of ethnic conflict and/or violence. The Northeast India is one of the conflict-prone regions of the world where high levels of inter-ethnic conflicts could be seen. It is a tribal majority region but the tribal areas have basically non-productive land in the hills. To the contrary, the non-tribal population is mostly concentrated in the plains, especially of Assam, Tripura and some parts of Manipur. Broadly, the people of Northeastern region can be divided into three groups, viz., the hill tribes, the plain tribes and the non-tribals. The co-existence of multi-ethnic, linguistic, cultural groups and the issues of immigration are responsible for instability in political, social, economic, ethnic spheres and communal tensions in the Northeastern region. If it is arranged in descending order on the basis of quantities of conflicts that occurred in the Northeastern states, then, Assam is found to be the place with the highest number of conflicts followed by Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. On the contrary, Sikkim is the only state in Northeast India where conflict seldom occurs (H.Shivananda, 2011:16; Veena Bhasin, 2002:04). The conflicts in the states of the region are being taken up for discussion.

INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICT IN ASSAM

Assam is one of the most conflict-prone states in India as well as in the Northeastern region. Assam is the state where highest numbers of ethnic conflicts have occurred. The tribes in Assam can be divided into two groups; namely, the plain tribes and the hill tribes. The plain tribes include ethnic groups like Bodo, Deori, Mishng, Tiwa, Rabha, Mech, Sonowal and other Kachari tribes, and the hills tribes include Dimasa, Karbi, Kuki, Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Hajong Hmar and a few of Naga tribes. Contrarily, the non-tribal communities are living in plain areas, namely- Koch, Kalita, Ahom, Chutiya, Adivasi, Muslims, etc. Among these ethnic groups more than 12 inter-ethnic conflicts have occurred in the last few decades. The major conflicts that occurred in Assam are the conflict between Assamese-Bengali speaking people in 1970s, anti-foreigners' movement during 1979-85, Assamese-Naga conflict since 1979, Bodo-Muslim conflict in 1993, 2008 and 2012, Bodo-Adivasi conflict in 1996,

1998 and 2014. Khasi-Pnar and Karbi conflict in 2003, Karbi-Kuki conflict in 2003-04, Karbi-Dimasa conflict in 2005, Bihari-Adivasi conflict in 2005, Dimasa-Hmar conflict in 2009, and Khasi-Nepali conflict in 2010. A brief review of these conflicts are given below:

1. Conflict between Assamese and Bengali speaking people

The ethnic violence/conflicts in Assam that began largely in the 1970s reached a flashpoint of linguistic and cultural regionalism in the conflict between the Assamese and the Bengali speaking communities. The language conflict is the oldest issue covering a long period in Assam; it has been existing since 19th century. During the years 1961 and 1972, the language problems were in the worst phase at every place in Assam. In 1836 Bengali language became the medium of instruction in education and the court language till 1871. This generated strong resentment among the Assamese people, particularly students. The first public meeting held on 26 March 1960 at Barpeta by the masses including students who raised the demand for Assamese as the state language. After that several Assamese and non-Assamese groups held meetings to demand as well as to oppose the introduction of Assamese language as the state language. The Khasis, Mizos, Garos and Karbis also demonstrated their dissatisfaction against the imposition of Assamese language as the state language and raised the demand for separate hill state. During this agitation, many students were killed in police firing in different districts of Assam, particularly in Hailakandi district where 11 students were killed in June 1961. The strikes, processions, public meeting and 'hartals' continued till 1972, sometime by the Assamese students and sometime by the non-Assamese students. From the session 1972-73 all the colleges of Assam decided in pursuance of the Academic Council's resolution to introduce Assamese as the medium of instruction at the pre-University level. But again the Bengali students strongly opposed the decision and as a consequence, several burnings and violence took place in different parts of Assam. Finally, the Government of India had to send army to control the situation. Besides, language had emerged as one of the major issues between the non-tribal Assamese and the tribal Assamese also (Meeta Deka 1996).

2. Anti-foreigners movement 1979-85 Conflict between the Assamese and the Bangladeshi Immigrants

(i) This movement is popularly known as ‘people’s movement rather than student movement. The movement initially started as anti-outsiders’ movement which was later converted into the anti-foreigners movement and especially the target was the Bengali Muslims who came from Bangladesh. The uninterrupted immigration led to immediate movement against the outsiders. In 1978, 7,500 foreigners were detected only in Mongaldai parliamentary constituency. In 1979, several lacs of ‘foreigners’ were identified from the electoral rolls of Assam. And, finally, the anti-outsiders movement consolidated by the All Assam Student Union (AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) took a huge shape. Thousands of Bangladeshi Muslims and several Assamese people were killed in this agitation (Asgar Ali Engineer 1991). The six years long movement reached the last stage on 15 August, 1985 when the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in his Independence Day addressed to the Nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort at Delhi declared the Assam Accord (Meeta Deka 1996).

(ii) The anti-foreigners’ movement is the ever biggest movement that broke out in the state of Assam. Again, after a gap of 27 years, in 2012 the anti-foreigners’ movement started in Assam as an aftermath of the BTAD violence. Several electronic and print media published that it is the ‘**Second Phase**’ of anti-foreigners’ movement and still it has not come to an end. Therefore, it is a matter of great concern why, at certain intervals, the issue of illegal Bangladeshi or anti-foreigners’ movement has appeared with a grim face in Assam. The movement erupted particularly after 28th August 2012 when AAMSU called Assam bandh and hundreds of AAMSU supporters came to national highway with different types of weapons and attacked police, media personnels and general people. As an aftermath of this incident, 55 different protest rallies, human chain, and strike against the illegal infiltration from Bangladesh and demands to deport them, update of NRC etc. started in full swing. Till 6 November 2012 about 150 democratic movements have taken place in 100 places including district headquarters and sub-divisional headquarters; namely, Amingaon, Amguri, Bojali, Barhampur, Barangabari, Baihata, Borpeta, Bihali, Barama, Bijni, Biswanath Chariali, Bongaigaon, Batradua, Bokakhat, Borpathar, Borpeta Road, Baksa, Bokajan, Chirang, Chaigaon, Chaolkhuwa, Choraibahi,

Chabua, Dhekiajuli, Dhing, Diphu, Dhubri, Digboi, Dimoria, Dumduma, Dhakuwakhana, Dudhnoi, Dibrugarh, Dorangamel, Duliajan, Dhemaji, Dimow, Dergaon, Guwahati, Gohpur, Geleki, Ghahigaon, Golaghat, Hajo, Hatichung, Helem, Jagiroad, Jorhat, Junai, Kokrajhar, Kumarikata, Khowang, Kohora, Kampur, Kolaiguri, Kothiatoli, Kharupetia, Kamalpur, Koliabor, Lakhimpur, Mongaldoi, Merapani, Mirza, Moran, Moharipara, Margherita, Morigaon, Majuli, Namti, Narayanpur, Nalbari, Nagaon, Oriyagaon, Pavo, Pathori, Rongapara, Roha, Rajgarh, Rongia, Silapathar, Sarupathar, Sonari, Sibsagar, Sipajhar, Sarupeta, Sarbhug, Sonitpur, Samoguri, Tongla, Tamulpur, Titabor, Tezpur, Teok, Tihu, Tinsukia, Uriamghat, Udalguri and other six states of Northeast India. And more than 60 organizations have carried out this movement. These organizations include All Assam Students Union (AASU), Assam Jatiyotabadi Juba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), Joutha Sangrami Mancha, Assam Sangrami Mancha, Assam Jatiyotabadi Sangram Parishad, Khilongia Musolman Jatiya Mahasobha, Goriya-Moriya Deshi Jatiyo Parishad, Sankhalaghu Parishad, Anuhushito Jati Suraksha Aru Jagoran Samiti, Nepali Sahitya Parishad, Jestha Nagarik Sanmilon, Mukti Jujaru Sanmilon, Rajasthani Yubak Sangha, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, Tiwa Students Union, Tai Ahom Students Union, Adibashi Students Union, Nikhil Bodo Students Union, Karbi Students Union, Tea Tribe Students Union, Assam Gana Parishad (AGP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), All Rabha Students Union, All Bodo Students Union, All Koch Rajbongshi Students Union, Assam Miya Parishad, Akhil Bharatiya Bidyarthi Parishad, Sasetan Oikya Mancha, etc.

In Assam, immigrant communities can be divided into two types; viz., illegal and legal. The illegal immigrants have been defined in Assam Accord as those who infiltrated illegally after 24 December, 1971. According to the source of Amiya Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati, Assam, the number of legal foreigners in Assam upto 1991, was 685,101; illegal foreigners were 12,98,754 and the grand total is 19,83,855 people. Another data published in *Dainik Agradoot* (Monday, 8 October 2012) is that there are 36,323 foreigners illegally settled in every district of Assam: 10,574 persons in Nagaon; 1227 in Dhubri; 2066 in Nalbari; 2288 in Jorhat; 1883 in Sibsagar; 1394 in Dibrugarh; 1214 in Darang; 1325 in Karimganj; 2558 in Morigaon; 1123 in Tinsukia; 3130 in Karbi Anglong; 574 in Goalpara; 921 in Kokrajhar; 668 in Barpeta; 899 in Guwahati; 732 in Kamrup; 900 in

Sonitpur; 803 in Lakhimpur; 8 in North Cachar Hills; 758 in Cachar; 165 in Golaghat; 515 in Bongaigaon; 754 in Dhemaji; 5 in Hailakandi and 248 in Udalguri. C. K. Sharma (2009) stated that the issue of immigrants especially of the Bangladeshis, is one of the most conscientious political issues in Assam. To control this problem the government had formed 36 Foreigners Tribunals and 2.37 lacs cases are laying against the doubtful citizens. From 2005, only 2,867 cases have been detected and 1,564 cases are registered. On the other hand, there are 4.65 lac illegal foreigners in Assam, according to the government information. Besides, the growth of Muslim population in Assam has risen from 24.68% in 1951 to 28.42% in 1991. As per 1991 census, four districts (Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta and Hailakandi) have become Muslim majority districts. Three more districts (Nagaon, Morigaon and Karimganj) would become Muslim majority districts very soon. Legal foreigners are illegally settled in every district of Assam. There are 10,574 persons in Nagaon; 1227 in Dhubri; 2066 in Nalbari; 2288 in Jorhat; 1883 in Sibsagar; 1394 in Dibrugarh; 1214 in Darang; 1325 in Karimganj; 2558 in Morigaon; 1123 in Tinsukia; 3130 in Karbi Anglong; 574 in Goalpara; 921 in Kokrajhar; 668 in Barpeta; 899 in Guwahati; 732 in Kamrup; 900 in Sonitpur; 803 in Lakhimpur; 8 in Dima Hasao; 758 in Cachar; 165 in Golaghat; 515 in Bongaigaon; 754 in Dhemaji; 5 in Hailakandi and 248 in Udalguri (Dainik Agradoot, 8 October, 2012:1,8).

3. The Assamese - Naga Conflict on Border Issue

The border conflict is long standing dispute between the Nagas and Assamese people. Sectors A, B, C and D that are reserve forests under the Bengal Forest Act 1878 were free from any encroachment till 1947. Till then only forest villagers were allowed for tree plantation and their maintenance. Four forest villages, Merapani, Soundangpathar, Kasomari and Amguri were established in Doyang Reserved Forests in 1905 and a few more lately at Uriamghat in Rengma Reserved Forest and at M.V. Chungajan in Numbor South. No other settlement has been recorded till 1947. As a result of the Naga peace talks, some militants of the hill state surrendered before the Central Government which accorded them permission to set up villages in Diphu, Nambor South and Rengma reserve forests. Some major incidents have taken place in Golaghat district between 1979 and 2014. The major conflicts are discussed below (Jeyaseelam 2008).

- (i) *The Chungajan Carnage* took place on 5th January 1979 in which 54 villagers were killed and 39 injured, 467 huts were burnt down and about 23,500 persons who were displaced took shelter in 13 relief camps (Jeyaseelam 2008).
- (ii) *Armed Conflict of Merapani* (4-6 June 1985): In this bloody armed conflict 96 villages and 7,607 families were affected in the disturbances in the Merapani area. Besides, schools, temples, mosques, office buildings, quarters, rice mill, oil depot, shops, bridges and vehicles were destroyed and damaged. 28 police personnel and 13 civilians lost their lives in different parts of the Golaghat district (Jeyaseelam 2008).
- (iii) *The Massacre of Rajapukhuri* took place on 7th April 1989 at Rajapukhuri village under Sarupathar Police Station in Sector-B of the Dhansiri Sub-division in the Golaghat district. Tension was built up in the area as Hokai Sema demanded withdrawal of the Muslim families from the villages. According to official records, the death toll was 25. Besides, 15 persons were injured and 178 houses were burnt down (Jeyaseelam 2008).
- (iv) *The Naga Violence of 'B' Sector* (Uriamghat) took place again on 12th July 2014 in 16 villages under "B" forest sector of Dhansiri Sub-division. The villages affected were Jahaji Gaon, Kamalpur, Kempur, Majgaon, No. 1 Chainpur, No. 2 Chainpur, No. 1 Chetia Gaon, No. 2 Chetia Gaon, No. 2 Bilgaon, No. 2 Santipur, No. 3 Santipur, Rajapukhuri, Rani Pukhuri, Ratanpur, Roman Basti and Chukanjan. 726 houses were burnt down by Nagas. 11 persons killed in the conflict were Ajay Urang, Africa Tappo, Zoko Tirky, Jiten Khalkho, Misa Akka, Antony Kerketa, Nister Minj, Dil Ram Kujur, Beerbal Munda, Robet Kasso and Gulu Ghatuwal. Besides, 8 persons were injured, out of whom 3 were seriously injured in the 16 affected villages. Babu Minj, Carlos Lakra, Lucas Kandulas, Nisefarosh Dungdung and Pawan Hasda were injured and Rupesh Garh, Prodeep Garh and Arun Chandra Ghatuwar were seriously injured (Dhansiri Sub-divisional Office 2014).

4. The Bodo-Muslim Conflict

Bodos are one of the major aboriginal tribes of Assam. After India's Independence, the tribal groups have gradually separated from Assam and formed separate states. Like other tribes in erstwhile Assam, the Bodo also felt relatively deprived from the so-called dominant Assamese community. The deprivation by the Assamese and non-implementation of the Assam Land Revenue Regulation, 1886 led to the demand for a separate Bodoland State. Two accords were signed in 1993 and 2003 between the Union Government, the Assam Government and the Bodo representatives. The 2003 Accord led to the creation of an autonomous self governing body known as Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) within the State of Assam to provide constitutional protection under the Sixth Schedule to the autonomous body; to fulfill economic, educational and linguistic aspirations and the preservation of land-rights, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos and to speed up the infrastructural development in the BTC area. The Bodo inhabited districts of Chirang, Baksa, Kokrajhar and Udalguri have been brought under the BTC. But it failed to bring peace in the BTAD areas. So far, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (pro-talks and Daimary faction) is active in BTAD. In the area there are present other insurgency groups such as Adivasi Cobra Force, Kamtapuri Liberation Organisation (KLO), Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam, All Adivasi National Liberation Army, Adivasi Cobra Military of Assam, Birsa Commando Force, Santhal Liberation Tigers and Adivasi People's Army and many others (ACHR 2012:8).. The conflict took place through the following sequences (ACHR 2012:8):

- (i) In October 1993, first inter-ethnic conflict emerged between the Bodos and the Muslims in Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts of Assam. As a consequence, 100 persons were killed and about 18,000 persons were displaced.
- (ii) In August 2008 another ethnic conflict erupted between the Bodos and the Muslims in Darang and Udalguri districts of Assam where about 100 persons were killed and more than 2 lac persons were displaced. In May 1996, the Bodo-Muslim conflict occurred in Bongaigaon district. In this conflict 200 persons were killed and about 2, 62,682 persons were displaced.
- (iii) In 2012 a fresh conflict occurred between these two ethnic groups. The violent conflict broke out in Assam as a consequence of a minor event that took a

devastating shape all of a sudden and it took a heavy toll of lives in both the communities. The spark of violence that took the shape of a huge fire and is still burning Assam started from a minor incident. The Muslims allegedly occupied a plot of forest land at Bedlangmari under Nayekgaon-Balaghat Tribal Block and erected an Idgah Phalak (Signboard). As the land allegedly is a forest land, the Forest Department of the State Government issued an eviction notice and dismantled the signboard. The Muslims suspected the Bodoland Territorial Council to be behind the eviction drive. On 29 May 2012, the All Bodoland Minority Students Union (ABMSU) called a Kokrajhar Bandh to protest against the eviction. The protest turned violent and the ABMSU activists attacked a police team led by H.K. Nath, Additional Superintendent of Police. Four persons were injured. And on July 19th 2012, two Muslim youth leaders were killed by Bodo militants. In connection with this killing again on July 20, 2012 four Bodo militant group members were killed by a Muslim group. Finally, on 21st July 2012, ethnic violence started in Kokrajhar district. About 106 persons lost their lives in both the communities. From 21st July 2012 to 8th August 2012, 87 persons were killed in four districts of BTAD areas (Amar Asom, vol. 6, No.111, 9 August 2012). Again on 13th August 2012 two workers were killed in Chirang district; on 22 August 2012 two persons were killed in Kokrajhar-Dhubri border areas; again, fresh violence erupted and five persons were killed on 25th August 2012 in Chirang district; on 26th August 2012 one person was killed in Dhubri district; 28th August 2012 one person was killed during AAMSU protest march. In connection with the BTAD conflict, two persons were killed in Mumbai during the protest march on 11th August 2012. And till 20th August 2012, 6 Northeastern persons were killed outside Assam and Northeast (Amar Asom, vol. 6, No. 122, 21August, 2012). The issues of land rights, loss of identity, migration, are the causes of ethnic violence in the BTAD. The tribals are losing their land due to the problem of immigration. For example the villages in Bijni Tribal Block under Chirang district; namely, Sonaikola, No.2 Darranga, Bispani, No.1 Dakhinmakra, Oxiguri, No. 2 Dongsiapara, Laokriguri, Amraguri, Bhaoraguri, No.1 Bagidara, No. 2 Bagidara, Barlimari, No.1 Garabdara, No.1 Betbari, No.2 Betbari, Bagargaon, Alengmari, Deodhari (Alukhunda), Majrabari, No.1 Donsiapar, Fwrmaishali/Koraishali, No.3 DakhinMakra, Jhar Bispani etc have been

violated of their land rights by the Muslim community. The decadal growth rate of Kokrajhar district regarding the migration is more than that of the Assam state. During 1971-1991, the decadal growth rate of population in Kokrajhar district was 76.75% against 53.25% in Assam. Due to such migration or illegal immigration, massive land alienation took place in BTAD and the Chapter X of the Assam Land Revenue Regulation, 1886 that prohibits sale and transfer of tribal lands to non-tribals was violated (ACHR 2012).

5. The Bodo-Adivasi Conflict

The Bodo-Adivasi conflict occurred in 1996 displaced about 42,214 families with 2,02,684 persons. Bodo is the largest tribal group in Assam and mostly scattered in the northern bank of Brahmaputra and the Adivasi is the descendents of tea labourers brought by the Britishers during 19th century. The Bodo people felt that the Adivasis were planning to chase Bodos from Adivasi inhabited areas. During this period in April 1996, three Bodo ladies were killed in an Adivasi locality under Gossaigaon Sub-division. Due to this incident many Bodos gathered and beat up a few Adivasi persons in Gossaigaon town. After few days some villages from both ethnic groups involved in violent activities. Finally, the Bodo militant group came forward and started burning down many Adivasi houses and killed many Adivasi persons (Narzary 2006:57-62).

- (i) Again in 1998, the second phase of the conflict took place between the two communities. In this conflict, 48,556 families with 3,14,342 persons were displaced and many persons (Narzary 2006:57-62).
- (ii) Then in December 2014, another conflict erupted between them. In this conflict, more than 75 people were killed most of whom were children and women. Among these dead persons, only two persons belonged to Bodo community and the rest were all Adivasis. The Songbijit section of the NDFB militant group was involved in this violence (Vijaita Singh 2014).

6. The Khasi-Pnar and Karbi Conflict

The Khasi-Pnar and Karbi conflict occurred in 2003. In this conflict, 400 Khasi-Pnar families were displaced from Block I and II due to life-threats given by Karbi militants in KarbiAnglong district. In response to this threat, the Khasi Students

Union (KSU) announced that Karbi people would not be allowed to stay in Shillong. In December 2003 violence took place where one Karbi student was killed and three others were assaulted by 'offenders'. Further, on November 26, 2003, three Karbi labourers were shot dead in Youngkul village of Jaintia district. The issue of this conflict was to get Block-I and II included in the Jaintia Hills district by some social and political organizations of Meghalaya state. Historically, Pnar living in Block- I and II were a part of the Khyrim state, which fell into Mikir Hills portion of united Mikir and Jaintia Hills district of Assam till 1972. But with the creation of Meghalaya, where Mikir Hills had opted out of Meghalaya, then the Block- I and II remained within Mikir Hills (Phukan 2004:102-105).

7. The Karbi-Kuki Conflict

The Karbi-Kuki conflict took place in 2003-04 in KarbiAnlong district of Assam. 11,000 persons were displaced and 98 persons were killed. The United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) and Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) were involved in the killings of people from both the communities. On 18th January 2004, members of a Karbi armed group swooped on the Basamili village in the Singhasan Hill area under KarbiAnlong district and started firing indiscriminately, killing 3 Kuki persons, injuring 3 others and setting ablaze 14 houses. On 19th March 2004, 4 Kuki villagers were gunned down and 10 houses were torched at Hong Bong village in KarbiAnlong district (Jeyaseelam 2008:58-59).

On the contrary, on 24th March 2004, suspected members of the Kuki armed groups allegedly massacred 28 Karbi villagers. 22 Karbis were cut down in three villages. The rebels then attacked Jarigaon Terang village under Manja police outpost killing 6 Karbis and more than 50 houses were burnt down (Jeyaseelam 2008:58-59).

Again, on 27 March 2004, Kuki armed groups attacked the Karbi villages in Deopani area under Bokajan police station and burnt down about 50 houses and 4 persons were killed and 3 others injured. On 4th July 2004, one Karbi person was killed and 3 more were injured in Upper Deopani area under Bokajan Police Station. On 13th September 2005, 8 Karbis were killed by Kuki armed group in the Thekerajan area under Diphu Police Station (Jeyaseelam 2008:58-59).

There are several causes related to this conflict. Some major ones are: firstly, the Kuki speaking persons under Hamren and Diphu Sub-division were 2,914 in 1961 and their number increased to 21,883 in 1991 census. Presently, the total Kuki population is expected to be increase 35,000 in Karbi Anglong district. This rapid increase of Kuki population made the Karbis aware of the huge immigration into this district. Secondly, the Kuki Students Organization (KSO), Diphu Diocesan Youth Commission (DDYC) and United Christian Youth Forum (UCYF) have organized several cultural and religious programmes to communicate with different Kuki villages of Karbi Anglong district. And, finally, there was the emergence of Karbi and Kuki insurgency groups, Kuki National Assembly (KNA) and the Kuki Regional Council (KRC) with a hope that they would enable them to preserve their identity. As a consequence, the feeling of fear of ‘the other tribe’ has led to conflict situations (Jeyaseelam 2008:58-59).

8. The Karbi-Dimasha Conflict

This conflict between the Karbis and the Dimasas in the KarbiAnglong district broke out on 26th September 2005 as a result of abduction and killing of three Dimasa rickshaw pullers in a Karbi village. Till 6th November 2005, 43,819 persons from 17,980 families were displaced, 1014 houses were burnt down and 90 persons were killed: 76 Karbi, 11 Dimasa, 1 Bodo, 1 Bengali and 1 Nepali. The Karbi-Dimasa conflict was led by two armed groups- United Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) and Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) and both groups were under a ceasefire in 2002 and 2003 respectively. But one of the designated camps of DHD is in the Dhansiri Reserve Forest under the Karbi Anglong district. And the UPDS was demanding to remove the designated camp of the UPDS from Karbi Anglong district. There are 450 armed cadres of the two militant groups roaming freely and this factor is responsible for ethnic violence. After ceasefire the armed groups were openly collecting taxes from people. On 26th September 2005, three Dimasa rickshaw pullers were killed by the Karbi armed groups due to non-payment of taxes (ACHR 2005: 9-23).

9. The Dimasa-Naga(Hmar) conflict

The Dimasa-Naga conflict emerged in Cachar and Dima Hasao district of Assam in March-May 2009 where 11,737 persons were displaced. The Hmars and Dimasas have been living together in these areas for several decades. The conflict was

led by two rebel groups: namely, NSCN (I-M) and DHD. The NSCN-IM instigated and prorogated the Hmars and as a result, three important members of the Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) were abducted by cadres of NSCN (I-M) which was an earlier ally of Dimasa. There are two main causes of conflict between Hmar and Dimasa; viz., (i) the NSCN (I-M) had demanded greater tax on the extortion booty collected by the both the rebel groups (NSCN-IM and HPC-D) from the Dimasa inhabited areas and (ii) another reason for the bitterness is the DHD's claim over Dimapur as their ancient capital which was under the areas of 'Dimaraji'. The first act of violence took place on March 3, 2003, when Dimasa militants kidnapped three Hmar farmers. Again, on March 5, 2003, armed Dimasas attacked two Hmar villages in North Cachar Hills district where 800 Hmars fled their homes and moved to Lakhipur, a place of Assam-Manipur border. Again on 26th March, Dimasa insurgency group started fresh attack on some Hmar villages and ordered the Hmar community to leave North Cachar Hills district. These attacks and counter-attacks led to the massacre. Besides the claim of 'homeland', there are some other issues related to this conflict: the problem of land alienation—a pattern of change from tribal community ownership of land from *jhum* cultivation to private ownership for settled agriculture and another cause had religious dimension, i.e., the Hmars are mostly Christians and the Dimasas are Hindus.

10. The Khasi-Nepali Conflict (Assam-Meghalaya Border)

The Khasi-Nepali conflict in a village Lampi, situated on Assam-Meghalaya border. The village is claimed by both the states. The conflict has existed since the time of Meghalaya's separation from Assam in 1972. On May 2010, when Assam border police gunned down four Khasis, the Khasis in turn started violence against Nepali community. In Badapani village (near Shillong), one 70-year old Nepali individual was burnt alive. After this incident the Government of Meghalaya set up a police post in Lampi that is a few hundred metres away from the out-post of Assam police battalion. The Nepali people say that they have been living in the village for more than two generations. When they occupied the village, there were no Khasi people; it was a dense forest and it was a good place for their cattle. But the situation has become complex in the present time due to the involvement of both the governments. On the one hand, the Government of Assam started road construction to Lampi and, on the other hand, the Government of Meghalaya also linked the village to

a highway that goes to Shillong. Besides, the Khasis of Lampi have no administrative connection with Assam. Even they do not send their children to the schools run by the Assam Government. The sense of 'other' between the communities has reached even to the playground. Now, both the communities play with different coloured balls in different parts of the field. Insecure existence prevails in the communities and the Nepalese have started patrolling their neighborhoods at night under the banner of VDP (Dinesh Wagle 2010).

INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN MANIPUR

Like Assam, the state of Manipur also has the existence of both tribal and non-tribal ethnic groups. The Meitei is the dominant ethnic group in Manipur living in the Valley area. 57% of the populations belongs to Meitei and 7% of the population is Meitei-Muslim, called the Meitei-Pangal. Contrarily, the tribes are living in the hilly region, particularly in the districts of Senapati, Churachandpur, Ukhrul, Chandel and Tamenglong. The Naga population comprises the ethnic groups like Tangkhul, Zemi, Liangmei, Rongmei, Mao, Maram, Poumai, Maring, Anal, Lamkang, Monsang, Mayon, Thangal, Chothe, Tarao, Chiru, Angami and Sema (Jeyaseelam 2008: 115-116).

Besides Nagas, the Chin-Kuki-Mizo tribes are also living in Manipur. They are Kom, Purum, Gangte, Paite, Simte, Thadou, Vaiphei, Sukte, Hmar, Zou, Ralte and other Mizo Lushai tribes. But some Kuki scholars claim that the Anal, Aimol, Baite, Chiru, Chonghang, Chothe, Doungels, Guite, Gangte, Hmar, Haokip, Kom, Kolhen, Kipgen, Lhungdim, Lamkang, Lunkim, Changsan, Lenthang, Thangneo, Lhangum, Lhanghal, Milhem, Muzon-Monshang, Mate, Maring, Paite, Simte, Sithou, Lhouvum, Singsit, Touthang, Tarao, Vaiphei and Zou (Jeyaseelam, Lazar 2008:146-147). The inter-ethnic conflicts in Manipur that have occurred in the last two decades are the Naga-Kuki conflict in 1992-2000, Meitei-Pangal conflict in 1993, Kuki-Tamil conflict in 1995, the Zome-Kuki conflict in 1997-98 and Meitei-Naga conflict in 2001. These are discussed here.

1. The Naga-Kuki Conflict (1992-2000)

The Naga-Kuki conflict which broke out in the early part of 1992 in Moreh under the Chandel district of Manipur continued till 2000 because of involvement of

insurgency groups of both the Naga and Kuki communities. As a consequence of this conflict, 5724 houses were destroyed, 15,000 persons were displaced and 1000 persons were killed. The Naga and Kuki are the two major tribal groups in hill areas of Manipur and the Kuki-Chin migrated to this region over a long period of three centuries. Such immigration leads to demographic imbalance, competition, clashes of interests and animosity over the sharing of land and resources. According to the United Naga Council (UNC) and other Naga organization, the demand for creation of a separate revenue district for the Kukis as their homeland and the constitution of Sadar Hill Autonomous District under the North East Reorganization Act of 1971 by the Kukis has been the root cause of the Naga-Kuki conflict (Phukan 2004:157-159).

2. The Meitei-Pangal Conflict

Meitei-Pangal conflict started in May 1993. The Pangals who are the Meitei-Muslim had been living with Meitei in valley areas. They have migrated to the state of Manipur from other parts of the Indian Union. Over the years they have gradually assimilated with Meitei society and adopted Manipuri culture. The cause of conflict was related to religion but the fact is that it was not a communal riot. The riot took place due to the development of some anti-minority feeling as a result of Meitei revivalism. And, inter-ethnic tension emerged between the two communities (The Sangai Express 2015).

3. The Kuki-Tamil Violence

The Kuki-Tamil conflict erupted in Moreh in 1995. There are about 17, 000 Tamils in Moreh. They are mainly World War II refugees who entered Manipur from Burma. The conflict between the Kukis and the Tamils started when the Kuki National Army (KNA) kidnapped a Tamil boy suspected to be a Naga informer. And to rescue the boy about 500 Tamils marched to a Kuki village. This resulted in the burning of some Kuki houses. Retaliation by the KNA resulted in more casualties.

4. The Zomi-Kuki Conflict in 1997-98

The Zomi-Kuki conflict took place in 1997 in Churachandpur district of Manipur. Due to this conflict many persons of both the communities were affected. 552 persons had to lose their lives, 39 were missing, 263 were injured, 37,120 persons were displaced and 6626 houses were burnt down. In Churachandpur district about 13

different small tribal groups are living together but some of them preferred to come under the broad identity based ethnic groups like Zomi and Kuki in Churachandpur district. This ethnic conflict occurred between the Paite-Zomis and Thadou-Kukis due to this identity issue. Zous, Simtes, Vaipheis, Paites and Tai-Chin tribes identify themselves as Zomi people while Thadou speaking group spurns it and maintains the Kuki as their identity. It accused the Kuki National Front (KNF) of applying force to induce the Zomi tribe to accept the Kuki identity. On the contrary, Kuki Student Organization blamed the Paite-Zomis for torturing their people in Churachandpur and its adjacent areas where Paites dominated. The Kukis considered it as the outcome of disregarding the right and liberty of other tribes by the Paites since 1996. But the immediate cause of the conflict was the killing of 10 Paites and inflicting 5 others with bullet injuries by KNF at Saikul village on 24th June 1997. Later, the conflict was led by the two insurgency groups – KNF and ZRA (Phukan 2004:164-166).

5. The Meitei-Naga Conflict

The Meitei-Naga conflict occurred on 18th June 2001 in Manipur. The Nagas resented that the Meitei always discriminated against them and the development schemes were only centered in and around the Imphal valley areas. On the other hand, the Meitei opined that Manipur belonged to all ethnic groups and they did not recognize any one ethnic group like Naga, Kuki or Meitei. The Naga's desire of integration with greater 'Nagalim' and the Meiteis' determination to preserve the territorial integrity of Manipur are the causes of conflict between these ethnic groups. Besides, the emergence of ethnic identity assertion on both communities also makes the situation precarious. The conflict started when the central government extended the ceasefire to Naga insurgency group, NSCN (IM), yet they could move all over the Naga inhabited territories. In case of Manipur, about one-third of the state's population belongs to Naga and other tribal groups and they were allowed to move in the state. The Meitei people who are in majority in the valley areas felt threatened. It resulted in a conflict, deaths and arsoning (M. Dominic Maring 2008:115-32).

THE DIMASA-NAGA (ZEMI) CONFLICT IN NAGALAND

In Nagaland, the Nagas are the dominant ethnic group comprising sub-groups like Angami, Ao, Chakhesang, Chang, Khamniungan, Konyak, Liangmei, Rongmei, Zemi etc. The Kukis and other ethnic groups are also living in Nagaland. The ethnic

conflict in Nagaland is an ongoing process, particularly with the neighbouring states of Assam and Manipur on the issues related to border and territory (H. Sivananda 2011: 13-16). For example, the Naga-Kuki conflict in 1993, the Dimasa-Naga conflict in 2009 (re-occurred in 2009) and the Assamese-Naga conflict is long standing border issue between the two states as discussed above. The Naga-Kuki conflict started in 1993 in Manipur and later it spread to Nagaland.

The Dimasa-Naga conflict has also existed since long time. It re-erupted in March 2009 spreading over the whole northern region of Assam. On 19 May 2009, 10 suspected NSCN cadres kidnapped 14 Dimasa persons and gunned them down near Mahur town in North Cachar Hills district. In this conflict, 66 lives were lost from both the communities, 21 were injured, more than 500 houses were burnt down and 11,487 persons were displaced (H.Shivananda 2011:17).

INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN MEGHALAYA

Khasi, Jaintia and Garos are the three major tribes in Meghalaya. The Hajong, Chakma, Kuki, Rabha, Koch, Rajbanshi, Mech, Kacharies, Dalu, Bangali, Muslim, Marwari, Bihari and Nepali are also living in Meghalaya. There are few inter-ethnic conflicts that occurred in this state and mostly the conflicts have occurred in Assam-Meghalaya border areas such as the conflict between the Khasi-Nepali (2010) in Lampi village, the Khasi-Pnar and Karbi (2003) in adjacent areas of KarbiAnglong as mentioned earlier and the Garo-Rabha conflict (2011). Besides, the Khasi-Bengali Conflict also took place in Shillong in 1980s (Lazar 2008:253; Talukdar 2005).

1. The Khasi-Garo Conflict

The Khasi-Garo conflict is related to administrative issues. The conflict started in September 2005. Meghalaya is basically the habitat of three major tribes; viz., Garo, Jaintia and Khasi. The Garo being less educated were granted 40% reservations in education and jobs since they were less educated at that time. But now the Khasi-Jaintia alliance feels betrayed and it has become the bone of contention. The Garos feel neglected and demand a separate Garo State. The militant groups have further aggravated the conflict. The Khasi-Garo conflict started when the Khasi Students Union (KSU) and other Khasi organizations launched a movement demanding bifurcation of the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) headquartered in

Tura (Garo Hills). It gives rise to a major controversy involving the Khasi-Garo tribes as the latter has threatened to demand a separate state. The Achik National Volunteers Conference (ANVC) has been fighting for a homeland called Achik-land and the Garo National Council has been fighting for a separate Garo state. Meghalaya is caught in a never ending political crisis over the issue of bifurcation of the MBOSE. The issue has already been converted into a larger conflict between the two ethnic groups. It took an ugly turn on September 30, 2005, when 9 persons were killed and the police had to open fire on two Garo students unions' rallies in the two district headquarters towns of Tura and Williamnagar in the Garo hills (Talukdar 2005).

Now, the Garo-Khasi tension revolves around two major issues: (i) Reservation Policy and (ii) the Greater Garo Land (GGL).

(i) Reservation Policy: According to the reservation policy of 1971, 40% of government jobs and seats in educational institutions are reserved for the Garos and 40% for the Khasis. But the 40% quota of Khasi includes sub-tribes like Wars, Pnars, Bhoi, Marams and Lingams. 5% is for other tribes and the rest 15% is for non-tribes. These divisions of reservation for tribes have to be a strong reason of discontentment among the developed and the less developed communities (Lazar 2008:211-12).

Besides, the issues of discrimination and disparity between the Khasi and Garos have often been raised and these have led to the demand for a separate Garo state within Meghalaya. Furthermore, the Khasis emphasize that the reservation policy should be reviewed and emphasis should be given to the distribution of the reservations proportionate to the population of the tribes, i.e.- Khasi and Garo at the ratio of 60:30 respectively. Moreover the Khasis claim that since the Garos do not have requisite qualification, they are not eligible for certain posts. Consequently the posts lie vacant until qualified Garos are found. On the other hand, the Jaintias are also not satisfied with the reservation policy. They are also raising demand for a separate quota for their ethnic group (Lazar 2008:212).

(ii) GGL: the demand for a Greater Garo Land has been raised by a few Garo people under the banner of A'chik National Volunteers Council (ANVC), a militant group. This demand has given air to the ethnic identity sentiment of the Garos for fulfilling the dream of a GGL that includes a vast area of the Khasi land. ANVC has identified 49 villages of the West Khasi Hills having a Garo population of 36,124 and

they claim that these areas should be included in the GGL area. Moreover, 76 villages of Kamrup and 195 villages of Goalpara district having a Garo population of 23,625 and 62,228 respectively are also claimed by ANVC for inclusion in the GGL (Lazar Jeyaseelam 2008:214). The ANVC was formed on 20th December 1995 with the vision of forming a separate Garoland Autonomous State. But the desire to have a separate state is much older than this date (Lazar 2008:215).

The Garos are further dissatisfied due to the reason that all the major government offices are situated in Shillong. They also point out that there is an unequal distribution of educational facilities. In terms of geological, physiographic, ecological and climatic aspects, the state of Meghalaya is diverse in character. Since Shillong is the capital of the state, most of the government offices and educational institutions are established there. Only the Meghalaya Board of Secondary Education is located in West Garo Hills. The Khasis are more advanced than the Garos and so the people of Shillong realized the need for the decentralization of education. It has resulted in aggravating a social gap between the Khasis and the Garos (Lazar 2008:251-252). The inhabitants of Tura also wish to have the winter session of the State Assembly in Tura. Although Meghalaya is having a vibrant Church that has established various institutions throughout the state, it has not played any active role in reducing the tension between the Garos and the Khasis. It has rather limited its activities to the spiritual and educational spheres only (Lazar 2008:253).

2. The Garo-Rabha Conflict

The Garo-Rabha conflict broke out in 2011 in Assam-Meghalaya border areas. The present research study attempts to understand the characteristics, causes and impacts of the Garo-Rabha conflict.

THE TRIBAL-BENGALI CONFLICT IN TRIPURA

Tripura is a small state in Northeast India covering 10497.69 kms of land. Once, Tripura was a princely state until it joined Indian Union to exercise the Instrument of Accession on 15th October 1949. Manikya Kings ruled the state having 19 different tribal groups and large portion of Bengali population. Before partition, Tripura was divided into two regions, namely, plains of Chaklaroshnabad and Hill Tippera. Later, plain had gone to Pakistan and hill parts joined India. There are more than 3 million

persons, out of whom the immigrants comprise about 70% and due to this immigration the indigenous people have become minority with about 30%. Since 1980, Tripura has witnessed conflicts between the tribal and non-tribal Bengalis. The conflict was started against the immigrants who came to Tripura after 1949. The principal causes of the conflict between tribals and Bengalis are (i) immigration of Bengali people from erstwhile East Pakistan between 1947 and 1971, (ii) tribal land alienation by non-tribals and (iii) displacement of tribal people by the hydroelectric project on Gumti River. All these factors finally led to the conflict on 5th June 1980 at Mandai where 3,15,000 persons were affected and 1,439 persons were dead (Gautam Chakma 2005:150-153; K. Debbarma 2005: 143-145). Besides, about 5000 Bengalis died, hundreds of persons were kidnapped, and many persons were missing. Huge economic damage occurred during the last 20 years. According to the US Committee for Refugees estimated that during the period between 1995 and 2000, more than 200,000 persons were displaced in Tripura (S.Bhaumik 2012:09).

THE MIZO-REANG CONFLICT IN MIZORAM

Mizoram is situated in the southern part of Northeast India. Mizo or Lushai is the major tribe in the state. The other tribes living in Mizoram are Chakma, Lakher, Pawi, Hmar and Reang. From the religious point of view, the Mizo, Lakher, Pawi and Hmar are Christians, the Chakmas are Buddhist and the Reangs are Hindu.

The Mizo-Reang conflict occurred in 1997. In Mizoram the Reang is known as Bru who are living in the state of Mizoram, Tripura and Assam. The Mizo-Reang tension emerged when the Bru National Union was formed in early 1990s and in 1997 the Brus were organized to demand an Autonomous District Council within Mizoram. On the other hand, the Mizo Students Federation (MZF) strongly opposed their demand. In October 1997, 10 Reangs were killed by the MZF. Due to this killing the Reangs crossed over to the state of Tripura. The situation became more complex after the murder of a Mizo forest warden by the Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF). The BNLF was formed in 1994 with the aim of providing protection to and development of Reangs. The BRU leaders said that Reangs were forced to adopt Mizo names and language. They also said that about 20,000 Reang were deleted from the Electoral Rolls. In this conflict about 40,000 Reangs were displaced in several relief

camps in Tripura. More than 500 persons died in relief camps due to epidemic in 1998 (K.C. Saha 2000:93-100).

THE ARUNACHALESE- CHAKMAS CONFLICT IN ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Inter-ethnic conflict in Arunachal Pradesh is quite old or intense, although it is an abode of about 100 tribal groups. Some major groups are Monpa, Nishi, Tagin, Hills Miri, Apatani, Galo, Adi, Padam, Pasi, Minyong, Bokar, Milong, Khamti, Chakma, Singpho, Tangsa, Nocte, Wanchoo, Lare, Pugo, Abor, Dafla, Mishing, Konyak, Mishmi, Lisu, Khamba, Miji, Sherdukpen, Lispha, Chug, Sulung, Tai-Aiton, Tai-Phake, Khamyang, Turung etc. (WikiMedia, accessed on 28 December 2013 at 17:32).

The Arunachalese and Chakma conflict started in 1994 in Arunachal Pradesh. Chakmas were an immigrant community in Arunachal. In 1964 about 30,000 Chakma and Hajongs migrated to India in the wake of their displacement caused by the construction of Kaptai hydel project in Chittagong Hill Tracts in East Pakistan and were rehabilitated in Arunachal Pradesh by Government of India. They were living in Diyum and Bordumsa in Changlang and Choukham areas of Lohit and Kokila areas in Papum Pare district of Arunachal Pradesh. After three decades of peaceful co-existence, situation suddenly changed when on August 1, 1994, the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union (AAPSU) issued "Quit Arunachal" notices to the Chakma, Hajong, Tibetans, Nepalis and Bangladeshis to leave the state by September 30, 1994. The situation becomes more problematic on September 15, 1994, when hundreds of Chakmas ransacked the daily market of Bordumsa and assaulted the indigenous people. And, conflict began on September 20, 1994, when the local tribals burnt down about 50 houses in Borkhati village. As per the Government (Arunachal) information, the Chakmas had made bunkers and other fortifications and accumulated arms to protect their settlements in the Vijaynagar, Miao and Diyum revenue circles of Changlang. Besides, the Chakma youths had taken arms training in Myanmar and had acquired sophisticated weapons like AK-47 rifles. It was realized by the political observers that an explosive situation was building up in Arunachal (Susmita Sengupta 2005).

After having discussed various inter-ethnic conflicts in the region, the causes and types of conflicts will be analyzed here.

ISSUES RELATED TO CONFLICT

Conflict can be of various types. The Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIICR) has developed a dynamic model of conflicts that incorporates five stages; namely, (i) Latent conflict, (ii) Manifest conflict, (iii) Crisis, (iv) Severe crisis and (v) War. But all the conflicts may be classified into two broad categories: violent and non-violent conflict. The first two stages, i.e, latent and manifest conflicts are of non-violent nature while the other three stages- crisis, severe crisis and war-take recourse to violent measures (Heinz-Jurgen Axt, 2006:05). The Institute also puts forward three broad issues of conflict. These issues are **territory and border issues, ethnic identity and Government power and conflict over resources** (Heinz-Jurgen Axt, 2006:05). In addition to these, one may take into account the issue of cultural difference as an important cause of conflict in human society. Notably, all the above mentioned issues that are almost universally acclaimed to be responsible for instigating conflict could be visualized in the context of ethnic conflicts that have taken place in the Northeastern region of India. The issues like cultural differences, resources, power, territory or border disputes are being discussed here as those are responsible for the outbreak of conflicts in Northeast:

Cultural difference and Ethnicity Related Issues

Culture is a source of shared symbols pertaining to a community or ethnic group for making sense of the world. It constitutes collective identity in a more benign way and offers symbolic resources for setting the parameters of group boundaries, and within them for effecting political organization and mobilization. When culture is “enlisted” in this way by members of social groups it most often manifests itself in the guise of ‘ethnicity’ and the social groups thus constituted out of it are labeled as ethnic groups. Since culture and ethnicity are often regarded to be synonymous concepts, cross-cultural conflicts are basically viewed as ethnic conflicts. Nevertheless, there lies some differences between culture and ethnicity. For instance, since culture serves to shape peoples’ basic perceptions of their world, it often appears to individuals as a totally “natural” phenomenon and operates cognitively well below the level of individual consciousness. On the contrary, ethnicity when experienced by individuals usually invokes or accompanies highly conscious perceptions of

difference and distinction. Ethnicity appears to be a constructed phenomenon to an outside observer (Sheffer 2003).

Moreover, ethnicity as the “cultural content” of ethnic groups is a resource usually mobilized by individuals and groups for serving political purposes. Ethnicity utilizes some objectified pieces of culture for political usage. These objectified bits are then often projected or performed on public domains like festivals, rituals, remembrance days or marches/processions. Regarding ethnic group identities, the cultural markers matter less than a specific group’s ability to differentiate their group from the other. Sometimes, this difference or self/other binary is aggravated to such an extent that there arises conflict or violence between two or more ethnic groups. The Nazi Holocaust, where numerous Jews were mercilessly killed by Adolf Hitler and his comrades is an intense example of cultural/racial or ethnic hatred. Culture establishes a link between individual and collective identities, but at the same time it defines socio-political boundaries between social or ethnic groups (Dominick Lacapra 1996). Cultural difference is one of the major causes of ethnic unrest in culturally plural societies like that of the Northeast. Cultural difference often aggravates the notion of ‘other’ in the mind of people sharing diverse cultural background. It alienates one cultural group from the other and it may often results in generating hostility or antipathy among diverse ethnic groups sharing a common habitat. 13.79% conflicts are occurred due to the cultural differences among the ethnic groups in Northeast India. The following are the examples of such conflicts are as follows:

1. Assamese-Bengali conflict,
2. Zomi-Kuki conflict,
3. Kuki-Tamil conflict and
4. Meitei-Pangal conflict.

In the Indian social context, one may note the fact that the Northeastern communities are reluctant to be part of the ‘mainstream’ Indian society. The Northeastern region of India is basically the abode of tribes and communities of Mongolian origin and therefore they are having their specific tribal cultures that are greatly different from the rest of Indian culture. Burning examples are the Naga community’s reluctance to be a part of the Indian Union after the departure of the British. Udayan Misra, in his article ‘The Naga National Question’ (1978), had

highlighted that the Naga National Council (NNC) has consistently maintained that the Naga constitute a separate and independent nation. According to NNC, except for a century of the British rule, the Nagas had never been subjugated and ruled by other people and had never been part of what today constitutes the “Indian Union”. *“You are only people who have ever conquered us and when you (British) go, we should be as we are”*—*The Naga Club* (Jeyaseelan 2008).

ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) had also been struggling since a long time with the Indian Government in order to materialize the dream of attaining separate nationhood for Assam – a homeland of diverse tribes and ethnic groups having their specific cultures, needs and problems that are very different from the rest of the Indian Union.

Territory or Border Disputes

The issue of space as a basis of ethnic conflict is very important as frequent ethnic unrests in a multi-ethnic society are caused by feud regarding space, territory or borders. The issue of a ‘greater homeland’ consisting only of people belonging to one ethnic community and the exclusion of other communities is a recurring cause of ethnic violence that takes a heavy toll of human life and property. Territory or border disputes are often seen to be long lasting and very often they take violent forms shedding immense blood. The most horrible instances of border dispute are India-Pakistan and India-Bangladesh conflicts at the international level. Within India, border dispute is very frequent in the Northeastern region. For instance, the Assam-Nagaland border dispute, Assam-Meghalaya, Nagaland-Manipur and Assam-Arunachal disputes. Among them the Assam-Nagaland dispute is the longest running and the most violent.

In order to get a glimpse of the Assam-Nagaland border turmoil one needs to go back to the time when India was under the British rule. The entire conflict started in the year 1866 when a separate district in the name of “Naga Hills District” was formed. In accordance to this district, later in the year 1963 a new state “Nagaland” was carved out of Assam. But the most important matter of concern was that neither the British Government prior to Independence and nor the India Government post-Independence practically took any concrete measures to mark the boundary of Assam and Nagaland; rather it was done only on official documents. Though the “Sundaram

Committee” marked the Assam-Nagaland border but Nagaland never accepted the committee’s recommendations. There are various instances of violence instigated by the Assam-Nagaland border dispute and a very recent instance is the fight between Naga and Adivasis in 16 villages of ‘B’-Sector Uriamghat area of Dhansiri Sub-division of Golaghat district. It occurred on 12th July 2014 and several adivasis were killed, several houses were burnt and many people were displaced (Jeyaseelan 2008).

Out of the four broad issues (cultural difference, territory, resources, power) the majorities of ethnic conflicts occurring in Northeast India are provoked by territorial or border disputes, (i.e. 68.97%). Since this region is inhabited by multiple tribes and communities, demands for ethnic homelands could be witnessed frequently. But the main problem arises while deciding the borders of the ethnic homelands. People belonging to diverse ethnic groups are scattered here and there and therefore the territorial demarcation of the ethnic homelands becomes highly sensitive and intricate. For instance the Assam-Nagaland border territories are still disputed areas where frequent outbreak of violence could be seen. Some of the ethnic conflicts that occurred in Northeast due to territorial dispute are as follows:

1. Mizo-Reang conflict,
2. Bodo-Muslim conflict (3 times),
3. Naga-Kuki conflict,
4. Assamese-Naga conflict (4 times),
5. Bodo-Adivasi conflict (3 times),
6. Meitei-Naga conflict,
7. Khasi-Pnar-Karbi conflict,
8. Karbi-Dimasa conflict,
9. Dimasa-Hmar conflict,
10. Khasi-Nepali conflict,
11. Dimasa Zemi conflict,
12. Khasi-Garo conflict and
13. Garo-Rabha conflict.

Resource and Immigration related Issues

Immigration and conflict over resources are two inter-related causes that often instigate ethnic conflict in Northeast India. Whenever there occurs immigration in a

particular area there arises conflict between the aboriginal people and the immigrants over the issue of resources. The natives want that the resources should be utilized only for their betterment and the immigrants will take undue advantage of their resources thus depriving the natives of their right to utilize their resources. 17.24% conflicts are included in this category. Examples of such conflicts are as follows:

1. Assamese-Foreigners conflict(2 times),
2. Tribal-Bengali conflict,
3. Karbi-Kuki conflict and
4. Arunachalese-Chakma conflict.

Scarcity of resources, unequal distribution of resources and the desire to gain resources for enriching one's own community are some important issues that often ignite spark of violence among ethnic groups. In Northeast India, land, oil and forest resources often act as bone of contention among various communities. For instance, land is regarded as a significant resource in tribal societies that are mostly agrarian.

In tribal society, land is the integral part of their life. Land is the primary force of economics. But it is also related to tradition, family ties, religion and so on. The tribals in the hills as well as in the plains of northeast India have been disturbed in a great variety of ways with regard to their land since 1947, notwithstanding the government policies and programmes. The process commenced in and around Shillong, the headquarters of greater Assam administration and now capital of the State of Meghalaya, where land was released liberally after 1947. The same story was more or less repeated in Nagaland after 1963. The regrouping of villages in Mizoram after the insurgency in 1966 and in Nagaland earlier, found the villagers at communication points under the care of security forces but in the process they completely lost their ancestral villages, paddy fields and traditional places of worship. The land alienation of the tribals in Tripura was largely caused by machinations of vested interests as a result of which the tribals sold their ancestral land to migrant Bengalis and went away deeper into remote areas of the hills. Assam is a classic case where the tribals have lost their land and the future of social cohesiveness and maintenance of peace would greatly depend upon the way the land problem of the tribals is tackled in the coming years. The Assam scenario needs a more detailed analysis in view of its large size and possible impact on other States of the region.

There are separate provisions in Assam for administration of land in the hill districts, i.e. North Cachar Hills (Dima Hasao) and Karbi Anglong; and in the plains districts. In the hill districts, the land is owned communally and no individual has a transferable right in land. Under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India, the authority of land administration is vested in the autonomous district councils who run the administration in accordance with old customs and usages. As regards the plains, the tribal belts and blocks (37 in number) were constituted immediately after Independence under executive orders under the direction of a perceptive indigenous leadership...(IDMC Report, November 2011).

In the edited book of N.G. Mahanta (2012) says that the native communities have been agitating to preserve their identity and protect their rights. In 1947, the Bodo constituted 49% of Assam's population, but this percentage dropped to 29% according to 1971 census due to internal and external migration. Land alienation also took place especially in the tribal areas. Gita Bharali (2012) cites:

My land is my backbone... I only stand straight, happy, proud and not ashamed about my colour because I still have land. I can dance, paint, create and sing as my ancestors did before me... My land is my foundation. I stand, live and perform as long as I have something firm and hard to stand on. Without land...we will be the lowest people in the world, because you have broken down our backbone, took away my arts, history and foundation. You have let us with nothing- An aboriginal leader from Australia (Mahanta, N.G. and D. Gogoi, 2012:63).

The N.C Hills District Council is empowered to make laws with respect to the occupation, allotment and use of land; forest management; regulation of shifting cultivation; social custom and succession of headmen and chiefs. In such a Sixth Schedule area, an outsider is not allowed to buy and sell land. Moreover, in this area regulation for the control of trade by non-tribals is made by the council. The council is also vested with the power to collect revenue and taxes (Sanjay Borbora 2002:1286). This strategy of vesting power on one particular ethnic group obviously results in the empowerment of one group and the relative deprivation of several other groups inhabiting that particular region which comes under the jurisdiction of autonomous council. The traditional political institutions are not democratic and they favour

separatism and therefore exclude outsiders. Since traditional authority is the basis of tribal identity, the forces of separatism and conflict are more active.

In the modern democratic system, though the arrangements of the Sixth Schedule, the tribal populations are allowed to enjoy self rule by establishing special autonomous district councils that are sometimes exempted from national laws (John Harriss 2002:05).

Sanjay Borbora in his study found that the existing state policy towards the ethnic groups in the Northeastern region is responsible for the outbreak of conflicts. As for instance, in N.C. Hills, certain land related government policies affected social relations (Sanjay Borbora 2002:1285-1292).

Land alienation has emerged to be a major problem in the Garo hills or the marginalized areas in the contemporary era. In order to strictly restrict the alienation of tribal land, the Garo Hills district (Transfer of Land) Act was passed in 1955 and this act prohibited the transfer of land by a tribal to a non-tribal. But in the border areas instances of forceful occupation of land could be seen (Mark 2004:526-27).

The relationship between man and land is considered to be a sacred relationship and the Garos and much of Garo culture and history revolve around this. It is often behind that the Garos migrated to the present Garo Hills of Meghalaya from the Tibetan plateau. The Garo people call themselves A'chik which means, "bite of the land"- a feeling that elevates the relationship of land and the people who inhabit and work on it to a sacred level (Sangma 2008:53).

Apurba Baruah (1991:37-38) writes that while the tea garden labourers did not add to the pressure on land in rural Assam because they have more or less confined themselves to the tea plantations, the Nepalis settled down in villages and thus there was every possibility of their coming into conflict with the Assamese peasants. But what saved the situation was that the Nepalis slowly got assimilated with the Assamese. So did the tea garden labourers so much so that a new dimension was added to the Assamese culture by the tea garden labourers ...The conflict that exists between the indigenous Assamese population and the immigrant Bengali in Assam is generated because of the resistance of the latter to the process of assimilation (Susmita Sengupta 2006: 124-25).

R.N Dutta mentioned that the danger in India is the tendency of national leaders to speak of “one state, one nation” and “to take the degree of Aryanization as the measure of “Indianization”. One of its results is that the identities of the regions that are considered sub-streams tend to become submerged in the “mainstream” (Walter Fernandes 2008:3).

Power

Regarding power as a cause of conflict, Dahrendorf puts forward the argument that conflict is an inherent tendency of society. Those groups with power and those without power will pursue their respective interests that are necessarily different. According to him, there is often a conflict between the powerless and the powerful, the former seeks power and latter defends it. Thus, power is a “lasting source of friction”(Dahrendorf 1968:138). Dahrendorf believes that power is not vested upon the powerful by the community to perform some “common will”, instead, they grasp and use that power to fulfill their own selfish motives. Consequently some communities, groups or individuals are deprived and this deprivation leads to conflict between the powerful and the powerless. Moreover, the conflict between the Garos and the Khasis of Meghalaya that has been discussed earlier is also an instance of conflict seeking power and equal status. In this case as has been pointed out by Dahrendorf, the deprived community, i.e, the Garos were seeking power whereas the powerful community, i.e, the Khasi were trying to defend and the result was a conflict between these two tribes.

In some cases, ethnic sub-groups have continued to demand greater autonomy after the creation of an Autonomous Council. For example, in 2003, an agreement between the Government of Assam, the central government and Bodo groups created the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), which administers the Bodoland Territorial Area district in Western Assam. In 2011, however, some Bodo groups who had not succeeded in occupying prominent positions in the BTC renewed their original demand for a separate Bodoland State (IDMC Report, 2011). The Garos and Rabhas are no exceptions to this situation. The existing Autonomous Councils have different degrees of legislative, administrative, executive and financial powers. For each council these are specified provisions in the Sixth Schedule. They also receive central funds which are channeled through the respective state government. The state and

district authorities only retain jurisdiction over the territory under the Autonomous Council in some domains, such as law and order (including issues related to violence-induced internal displacement). The ethnic group for which the Autonomous Council is set up generally dominates administration and decision making, while other minority groups within the Council's territory, whether indigenous or not, tend to have very limited access to political representation and power (IDMC Report, 2011).

A discussion of the present autonomous councils invariably needs to refer back to the historical background of the Northeast India during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period. In the pre-colonial era the tribes of Northeast were enjoying autonomy and lived as secluded communities and this state of absolute freedom changed with the advent of Britishers and therefore perhaps after the departure of the Britishers, i.e, in the post-colonial period they were not satisfied to be subordinates to either the Indian government or any other. They rather want to go back to their original state of absolute autonomy. And to fulfill this aim several insurgency groups have emerged and several ethnic conflicts have occurred. Before the arrival of Britishers, most of the tribes of Northeast enjoyed autonomy and after the colonial period they did not regain autonomy, instead, they were handed over to the Indian Government. Since from the socio-cultural perspective, they are very aloof from the rest of India, they found themselves deprived and alienated. Such issues instigated them to engage in conflict for the aim of regaining their previous state of power or autonomy. The demand of the separate Nagas homeland started just after India's independence as an instance of such sentiment.

The power based conflicts are mostly related to the insurgency groups and the governments rather than among the ethnic groups of Northeast India. The Northeastern region has witnessed several conflicts where there is a tussle between some ethnic community who wants to gain sovereignty and the state and central governments that exercise administrative power. In such conflicts, the active role of insurgency groups could be seen. For instance, the Nagas did not want to be part of the Indian Union after Independence and they expressed their resentment. Similarly ULFA is struggling till today for the cause of liberating Assam from the rule of Indian Government. Moreover, several ethnic groups are struggling with the Assam government for gaining autonomy and separate statehood.

TYPES OF CONFLICT IN NORTHEAST INDIA

In Northeast India, there is no single pattern or particular type of conflict or issue responsible for the outbreak of conflict. Conflicts witnessed in Northeast India are of diverse character and the issues involved in it are also of varied types. Moreover, in some instances of conflict one can notice an amalgamation of various issues and characteristics in a single conflict. For instance, the Assam Movement (1979-1985) reveals itself to be a multi-dimensional movement that encompasses diverse characteristic features and issues. To mention some of its characteristics, one may say that it included both violent incidences and non-violent measures like democratic peaceful protests, strikes, dharnas etc. The diverse issues involved in it were – the issue of illegal immigration (Bangladeshis), identity crisis, political issue and so on and so forth.

The issues of territory, boundary and ethnic identity are related to the Garo-Rabha conflict. The boundary of the GGL (Greater Garo Land) is extended up to river Brahmaputra in Goalpara district of Assam where the Garos are in minority than the Rabhas. To achieve the political power or Sixth Schedule status for Rabhas in Assam is also a major root cause of the inter-ethnic conflict between Garos and Rabhas.

The nature of inter-ethnic conflicts in Northeast India is also quite different from the model that has been given by the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research. The types of latent, manifest, crisis and severe crisis are also found in Northeast India but the interestingly there is not a particular type of conflict occurring in Northeast India that entirely sticks to the characteristics of the latent or manifest, crisis and severe crisis. Among these types of conflicts the two most frequently occurring in Northeast India are crisis and severe crisis.

Moreover, in Northeast India “changes of conflict” could be seen in different phases; (i) national struggle and fight for a distinct regional identity (1830-1947), (ii) assertion for resources, language and identity (1947-1985), (iii) contesting through regional movements and militancy (1985-2000) and (iv) conflict over land, river and development (2005 onwards) (Mahanta 2012:03-29).

From the above discussions, it becomes obvious that inter-ethnic conflicts in Northeast India are based on diverse issues and are led by diverse insurgency groups and other organizations. The following table shows the conflicts in Northeast India:

Table 2.1

The Patterns of Inter-ethnic Conflicts in North-East India

Sl. No.	Name & Year of Conflict	Conflict Lead by	Principal Causes of the Conflict
1.	Assamese and Bengali, 1960s-70s	Mass involvement	Language
2.	Assamese and Foreigners (1979-85, 2012)	All Assam Students Union (AASU) and mass involvement	Immigration
3.	Assamese and Nagas (1979,1985,1989, 2014)	NSCN-IM (Naga Militant group)	Border
4	Tribal-Bengali (1980s)	Tribal National Volunteers (TNV)	Immigration
5	Naga-Kuki (1992-2000)	NSCN & KNA Militant Groups	Homeland
6	Bodo and Muslim (1993,1996 & 2012)	BLT & NDFB (Bodo Militant Groups and Mass involvement)	Ethnic homeland
7	Meitei-Pangal (1993)	Mass involvement	Religion
8	Arunachalese-Chakma (1994)	All Arunachal Pradesh Student Union(AAPSU)	Immigration
9	Kuki-Tamil (1995)	Kuki National Army (KNA)	Ethnic hatred
10	Mizo-Reang (1997)	Mizo Students Federation (MSF)	Ethnic homeland
11	Zomi-Kuki (1997-98)	Kuki National Front (KNF) and Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA)	Ethnic dominance
12	Bodo and Adibashi (1996, 1998,2014)	Bodo Militant Group	Territorial dispute
13	Meitei-Naga (2001)	Mass involvement	Ethnic 'Homeland'
14	Khasi-Pnar and Karbi (2003)	United Peoples Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) and Karbi National Volunteers(KNV)	Territorial dispute
15	Karbi-Kuki (2003-04)	UPDS and KRA militant groups	Immigration
16	Karbi-Dimasa (2005)	UPDS and DHD (Dima Halam Daogah) militant groups	Territorial dispute
17	Khasi-Garo (2005)	Khasi Students Union (KSU) and militant groups	Administrative Power
18	Dimasa-Hmar (2009)	DHD and NSCN-IM militant groups	Territorial dispute
19	Dimasa-Zemi (2009)	NSCN militant group	Territorial dispute
20	Khasi-Nepali (2010)	Mass involvement	Territorial dispute
21	Garo-Rabha (2011)		Road blockade and sixth scheduled status

Except Sikkim, in the other Northeastern states, the frequent occurrence of ethnic conflicts is a major problem. The most conflict-prone states are Assam and Manipur and the intensity of conflict is comparatively less in Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. There are found 29 conflicts, including 4 conflicts between the Assamese and the Nagas, 3 between the Bodo and the Muslims, 3 between the Bodo and the Adivashis and 1 between Assamese and Immigrant Muslims. Out of these 29 conflicts, 18 (62.07%) occurred in Assam, 5 (17.24%) in Manipur, 2 (6.90%) in Meghalaya and 1 (3.45%) in Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh respectively.

From 1992 to 2014, inter ethnic-conflicts have been increasing and more than 20 (68.97%) instances of conflicts could be seen during this period. Such conflicts have occurred more among indigenous ethnic groups.

Of the 29 conflicts, 13 (44.83%) conflicts have taken place among the indigenous ethnic groups of Northeast India; 6 (20.69%) conflicts occurred due to international immigrants and 6 (20.69%) conflicts occurred between Northeastern indigenous groups and immigrant communities from other states of Indian Union.

On the basis of ethnic diversity, 11 (37.93%) conflicts occurred among tribal communities out of which 10 (34.48%) conflicts occurred among the hills tribes in Northeast India. Likewise, 10 (34.48%) conflicts took place between the tribal and non-tribal communities and 4 (13.79%) conflicts occurred among non-tribal communities.

Thus, almost 20 (68.97%) inter-ethnic conflicts have been led by insurgency groups in this part of the country. It has resulted in the heavy loss of human life and property. About 4 (13.79%) conflicts were lead by student's organizations and only in 6 (20.69%) conflicts including Garo-Rabha conflict mass participation could be seen.

An analysis of the inter-ethnic conflicts shows that majority of ethnic conflicts occurring in Northeast India are provoked by territorial or border disputes, i.e, 20 (68.97%). Likewise, 5 (17.24%) conflict occurred due to immigration and conflicts over resources and 4 (13.79%) conflicts occurred due to the cultural differences among the ethnic groups in Northeast India.

From 29 inter-ethnic conflicts in Northern region of India, there can be seen other types or patterns of conflict on the basis of the involvement of groups or communities – (i) conflict among tribal communities, (ii) conflict among non-tribal communities and (iii) conflict between tribal and non-tribal communities.

Conflict among tribal communities

The conflict among tribal communities may further be divided into two types- (i) conflicts among hill tribes (ii) conflicts between the hill and plain tribes.

Instances of the first type of conflicts are the Karbi-Dimasa conflict, Dimasa-Zemi conflict, Dimasa-Hmar conflict, Khasi-Garo conflict, Khasi-Pnar-Karbi conflict, etc. In such conflicts, the involvement of militant groups could be seen in most of the cases. Territory (Nagaland), administration, 'homeland' etc. were the leading issues of this type of conflict. Till now, 10 (34.48%) conflicts have occurred only among the hill tribes.

The second type of conflicts is the conflict between the hill and plain tribes. There is only one such kind of conflict that took place between the hill and plain tribes, i.e, the Garo-Rabha conflict.

Conflict among non-tribal communities

The conflicts among non-tribal communities have occurred only in the plains. The issues of these conflicts are mainly concentrated on immigration, religion and language. 4 (13.79%) instances are found in Northeast India; namely, the conflict between the Assamese and Bengali speaking people (in 1960s and 1970s), the anti-foreigners movement (in 1979-85 and 2012) and the Meitei-Pangal conflict (in 1993). One typical characteristic of this type of conflicts is that the conflict took place between the 'native' and 'Immigrant' communities.

Conflict between the tribal and non-tribal communities

The conflict between tribal and non-tribal groups may also be further divided into two types; viz., (i) conflict between the aboriginal tribal and aboriginal non-tribal groups and (ii) conflict between the aboriginal tribals and immigrant non-tribals. These ethnic conflicts are mostly visible in Northeast India. Out of 29 inter-ethnic conflicts that occurred in Northeast, 14 (48.28%) conflicts belong to this category.

In the first category, there are 5 (17.24%) conflicts out of which four major conflicts occurred between the Assamese and the Nagas in 1979, 1985, 1989 and 2014, and one conflict occurred between the Meitei and the Naga in 2001.

Secondly, 9 (31.03%) conflicts took place between the aboriginal tribal and immigrant non-tribal groups; namely, the conflict between the Bodo and the Adivasi in 1996, 1998 and 2014, the conflict between the Kuki and the Tamil in 1995, the conflict between the Bodo and the Muslim in 1993, 1996 and 2012, the conflict between the Tripuri and the Bengali in 1980s and the conflict between the Khasi and the Nepali in 2010.

Having discussed these issues, it should also be mentioned that the conflicts of Northeastern region may be analyzed on the basis of who instigated the people or who took initiative in starting the conflict, i.e, the agency of conflict.

There were 4 (13.79%) conflicts led by students' organizations such as the Mizo-Reang conflict was led by the Mizo Students Federation, the Arunachalese-Chakma conflict led by the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union, the Anti-foreigners Movement (1979-85) was led by the All Assam Students Union and the Khasi-Garo conflict was led by the Khasi Students Union.

Again, 5 (17.24%) conflicts are led by groups of the non-tribal masses such as the Assamese-Bengali conflict, the Meitei-Naga conflict, the Meitei-Pangal conflict, the Anti-foreigners Movement (2012) and the Khasi-Nepali conflict. These conflicts occurred without strong involvement of students' organizations, militants groups or any specific organizations.

The rest of 20 (68.97%) inter-ethnic conflicts in Northeast India took place with involvement of insurgency groups. These are the Assamese-Naga, Naga-Kuki, Bodo-Muslim, Kuki-Tamil, Zemi-Kuki, Bodo-Adivasi, Khasi-Pnar-Karbi, Karbi-Kuki, Karbi-Dimasa, Dimasa-Hmar and Dimasa-Zemi conflicts.

The insurgency groups involved in the conflicts are Kuki National Front (KNF), Kuki National Army (KNA), Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA), United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Dima Halam Daogah (DHD), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM, NSCN-K), Karbi National Volunteers

(KNV), Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), etc.

In most of the inter-ethnic conflicts in Northeast India, insurgency groups are found involved. The militant groups that are involved in the inter-ethnic conflicts in Northeast India could be listed as follows: the Kuki National Front (KNF), Kuki National Army (KNA), Zomi Revolutionar Army (ZRA), United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS), Dima Halam Daogah (DHD), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), Karbi National Volunteers (KNV), Boro Liberation Tigers (BLT), National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), Tribal National Volunteers (TNV), United Bengal Liberation Front (UBLF) and A'chik National Volunteers Council (ANVC). It became more dangerous because of the use of illegal arms in ethnic clashes and as a result thousands of lives were lost, thousand of houses were burnt down, lacs of people were displaced and huge property was destroyed.

From the analysis of 29 inter-ethnic conflicts in Northeast India that took place in the last 40 years, it has been found that due to these ethnic clashes more than 8744 persons were dead, 1841370 persons were displaced and 16099 houses were burnt down. In tribal areas, the intensity of loss of lives and public property is higher than non-tribal areas. Besides, the use of arms could mostly be found in tribal areas whereas the conflicts in plain areas are executed mostly through 'dharna', bandh, strike, etc. where the risk of destruction of life and property is comparatively less.

The forgoing discussion depicts the structure, types and patterns of inter-ethnic conflicts in Northeast India. It indicates that multiple causes are responsible for the frequent outbreak of inter-ethnic conflicts in the Northeastern region of India. A study of conflict in Northeast India reveals the fact that the most brutal and violent conflicts have mostly taken place in the tribal dominated areas. Another characteristic could be seen that in the hilly areas, conflicts mostly occur between tribal groups whereas in the plain areas conflicts mostly occur between tribal and non-tribal. In the plain (non-tribal) areas, the nature of conflict is comparatively less violent because non-tribal people mostly take the help of democratic protests. In order to address and comprehend this intricate issue of inter-ethnic violence, one needs to traverse a long way in the field of research.

A discussion on the ethnic conflicts in Northeast India must also take note of the crucial role played by the problems like **insurgency, immigration and land alienation** in instigating ethnic violence with high frequency in the Northeastern region. Let us have a look at these problems be looked at, now.

Insurgency

Insurgency and inter-ethnic conflict have a distinctive affinity in north-east India. Insurgency groups have fought for outright independence or autonomy for their community, the increasing scarcity of collective land available to indigenous people has led some to instigate violence against people they regard as “outsiders” in order to change ethnic demographics in their favour. Inter-ethnic violence between indigenous groups has also led to internal displacement (IDMC Report 2011).

The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India has been a means for some groups to establish a de-facto ethnic “homeland”, as it provides special protection to some “tribes” in north-eastern states, by recognising “Tribal Areas” administered through Autonomous Councils. A dominant ethnic group in an area is seeking for “imaginary homeland” and tension emerged among the other minority or subordinate ethnic groups living in that territory. The hundreds of ethnic groups in north-east India do not live in distinct areas, and so their demands for ethnic homelands have often led to generalised violence and, in turn, internal displacement. The Sixth Schedule does not lead to effective and stable protection of the many ethnic groups in Northeast India, but rather perpetuates potentially violent competition for land and political power (IDMC Report 2011).

After the Independence of India the ethnic groups have gradually been deconstructing the Assamese umbrella identity and developed mainly tribal and ancestral ethnic groups. The idea of self-rule as well as greater autonomy is the major goal for their existence. The militant actions, rise of Christianity in the hills and many other processes could be seen for ethnic establishment. The more assertive tribes who consistently rebelled against their incorporation within the new Indian nation-state such as the Nagas and Mizos ultimately succeeded in attaining status of ‘statehood’ and greater autonomy (Das 2009:1-9).

A tie between the mainstream politicians or political leaders and the so-called underground militants is one of the significant aspects of ethnic crisis in Northeast India (Phukan 2004:15). The Nagas set a trend and now almost every small community, with some noticeable cultural markers, imagined or real is asking for separate political identity and privileges that leads to the rise of conflict (Phukan 2004:25). Many communities of Northeast India have reached the stage of ethnic identity formation and the feeling of nationality. Ethnic groups like Asomiyas, Bodos, Khasis, Rabhas, Mizos, Nagas, Karbis, Garos, Kukis and some other groups have assumed themselves to be nationalities and have demanded political rights to control their own affairs (Phukan 2004:28,29).

The Northeastern region is known as hotspot of ethnic violence, extremism and insurgency. The region witnessed the emergence of numerous extremist organizations challenging the sovereignty and integrity of the Indian state. The demands of these extremist groups vary from autonomy to secessionism and sovereignty (Kumar 2013:19). The following insurgency groups have born in the states of Northeast India:

Arunachal Pradesh

1. United Liberation Volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (ULVA),
2. United People's Volunteers of Arunachal Pradesh (UPVA),
3. United Liberation Movement of Arunachal Pradesh (ULMA).
4. National Liberation Front of Arunachal: Koj Tara Dragon Force (ADF).

Assam

5. United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA)
6. National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB)
7. Adivasi Cobra Force (ACF)
8. Kamtapuri Liberation Organisation (KLO)
9. Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam (MULTA)
10. All Adivasi National Liberation Army (AANLA)
11. Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA)
12. Dima Halam Daogah (DHD)
13. Karbi Lobgri North Cachar Hills Liberation Front (KLNLFF)

14. Karbi People's Liberation Tiger (KPLT)
15. Dimasa National Revolutionary Front (DNRF)
16. United Kukigram Defence Army (UKDA)
17. Rabha Viper Army (RVA)-
18. United Democratic Liberation Army (UDLA)
19. Adam Sena (AS)
20. Adivasi Security Force (ASF)
21. All Assam Adivasi Suraksha Samiti (AAASS)
22. Barak Valley Youth Liberation Front (BVYLF)
23. Gorkha Tiger Force (GTF)
24. Harkat-ul-Jehad
25. Harkat-ul-Mujahideen
26. Islamic Liberation Army of Assam (ILAA)
27. Islamic Sevak Sangh (ISS)
28. Islamic United Reformation Protest of India (IURPI)
29. Karbi National Volunteers (KNV)
30. Karbi People's Front (KPF)
31. Koch-Rajbongshi Liberation Organization(KRLO)
32. Muslim Liberation Army (MLA)
33. Muslim Security Council of Assam (MSCA)
34. Muslim Security Force (MSF)
35. Muslim Tiger Force (MTF)
36. Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam (MULFA)
37. Muslim Volunteers Force (MVF)
38. People's United Liberation Front (PULF)
39. Rabha National Security Force (RNSF)
40. Revolutionary Muslim Commandos (RMC)
41. Tiwa National Revolutionary Force (TNRF)
42. United Liberation Militia of Assam (ULMA)
43. United Muslim Liberation Front of Assam (UMLFA)
44. United Liberation Front of Barak Valley (ULFBV)
45. Dimasa National Democratic Front (DNDF)
46. Adivasi Cobra Military of Assam (ACMA)
47. Birsa Commando Force

48. Santhal Liberation Tigers
49. Adivasi People's Army
50. United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS)
51. Hill Tigers Force (HTF)
52. Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT)
53. Dimasa National Security Force (DNSF)
54. Rabha National Security Force (RNSF)
55. Karbi People's Front (KPF)
56. Barak Valley Youth Liberation Front (BVYLF)
57. Adivasi United Liberation Front of Assam
58. United Social Reform Army of Assam (USRAA)
59. Revolutionary People's Front (RPF)
60. Kuki Front Council (KFC).

Manipur

61. Kuki National Army (KNA)
62. Kuki National Front(KNF)
63. Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA)
64. People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK)
65. Kuki Liberation Army (KLA)
66. United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF)
67. People's United Liberation Front (PULF)
68. Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP)
69. Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL)
70. Manipur People's Liberation Front (MPLF)
71. United National Liberation Front (UNLF)
72. People's Liberation Army (PLA)
73. Chin-Kuki Revolutionary Front (CKRF)
74. Hmar People's Convention (HPC)
75. Hmar Revolutionary Front (HRF)
76. Indigenous People's Revolutionary Alliance (IRPA)
77. Iripak Kanba Lup (IKL)
78. Islamic Revolutionary Front (IRF)
79. Kangleipak Kanba Kanglup (KKK)

80. Kangleipak Liberation Organization (KLO)
81. Kom Rem People's Convention (KRPC)
82. Kuki Defence Force (KDF)
83. Kuki Independent Army (KIA)
84. Kuki International Force (KIF)
85. Kuki Liberation Front (KLF)
86. Kuki National Organization (KNO)
87. Kuki National Volunteers (KNV)
88. Kuki Revolutionary Front (KRF)
89. Kuki Security Force (KSF)
90. Manipur Liberation Tiger Army (MLTA)
91. Northeast Minority Front (NEMF)
92. People's Republican Army (PRA)
93. Revolutionary Joint Committee (RJC)
94. United Islamic Liberation Army (UILA)
95. United Islamic Revolutionary Army (UIRA)
96. Zomi Revolutionary Volunteers (ZRV)

Meghalaya

97. A'chik National Volunteers Council (ANVC)
98. Hynniewtrep National Liberation Army (HNLC)
99. Liberation of Achik Elite Force (LAEF)
100. Garo National Liberation Army (GNLA)
101. Hynniewtrep Volunteer Council (HVC),
102. Hynniewtrep Achik Liberation Council (HALC)
103. Achik Liberation Matgrik Army (ALMA)
104. People's Liberation Front of Meghalaya (PLF-M)
105. Hajong United Liberation Army (HULA)

Mizoram

106. Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF)
107. Hmar People's Convention-Democratic (HPC-D)
108. Bru Welfare Association of Mizoram (BWAM)

Nagaland

- 109.Naga National Council (NNC) - (Adino)
- 110.Naga Federal Government (NFG).
- 111.Naga National Council (Khodao) – NNC (K).
- 112.National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM)
- 113.National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang (NSCN-K)
- 114.National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Unification (NSCN-U)
- 115.National Socialist Council of Nagaland-(Khole-Kitovi) (NSCN- Khole-Kitovi)

Tripura

- 116.All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF)
- 117.National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT)
- 118.Tripura National Army (TNA)
- 119.Tribal National Volunteers (TNV)
- 120.All Tripura Bengali Regiment (ATBR)
- 121.All Tripura Bharat Suraksha Force (ATBSF)
- 122.All Tripura Liberation Organization (ATLO)
- 123.All Tripura National Force (ATNF)
- 124.All Tripura Volunteers Force (ATVF)
- 125.Bangla Mukti Sena (BMS)
- 126.Socialist Democratic Front of Tripura (SDFT)
- 127.Tripura Armed Tribal Commando Force (TATCF)
- 128.Tiger Commando Force (TCF)
- 129.Tripura Liberation Force (TLF)
- 130.Tripura Liberation Organization Front (TLOF)
- 131.Tripura Mukti Police (TMP)
- 132.Tripura National Democratic Tribal Force (TNDTF)
- 133.Tripura Rajya Raksha Bahini (TRRB)
- 134.Tripura State Volunteers (TSV)
- 135.Tripura Tribal Action Committee Force (TTACF)
- 136.Tripura Tribal Democratic Force (TTDF)
- 137.Tripura Tribal Sengkrak Force (TTSF)
- 138.Tripura Tribal Volunteers Force (TTVF)

139. Tripura Tribal Youth Force (TTYF)

140. United Bengali Liberation Front (UBLF)

141. Borok National Council of Tripura (BNCT) (Kumar 2013).

The problem of insurgency and ethnic unrest is explained by Sanjib Baruah as “Durable Disorder”. This “Durable Disorder” is further aggravated by the problem of Bangladeshi immigrants and Burmese refugees especially in the region of Assam and Mizoram which will be discussed in the next section. The indifferent attitude of the Central Government in New Delhi has added to the fire. Instead of addressing the real problem the Government at Delhi only comes out for financial assistance.

Explaining the concept of “Durable Disorder” Sanjib Baruah says that insurgency is only a part of the “Durable Disorder” of Northeast India and it is not the cause. The root cause of this disorder is the northeastern region itself and the understanding of this region as “Northeast India.

The idea that South Asia is a discrete geographical region separated from Southeast Asia is a fiction. There are no "natural" geographical boundaries separating South and Southeast Asia along the Indo- Myanmar border. In territorial terms today's "South Asia" is to a large extent successor to the entity called "British India." Northeast India's ties - historical, cultural, social and economic - do not stop at these international boundaries (Khongreiwu 2013:442).

The notions of autonomy or self rule, ethnicity, identity, nationhood and the like are some of the factors that gear up the formation of insurgency groups and at some points of time give rise to ethnic unrest. The idea of Nationhood- Ethnicity has acquired its present status of supreme importance solely in the context of the project of nation-state building that emphasizes the homogeneity of the politico-cultural entity called ‘Nation’ (Phukan 2004:28). In its antique usage, the term ‘nation’ denoted only one race but from early 19th century, the term nation has started to be used to signify “all the people of a country”. The communities started to differentiate themselves from other communities within the state on the basis of cultural difference (Phukan 2004:29). In India ethnic unrest results from the failure of the state to fulfill aspirations of the competing ethnic communities (Phukan 2004:29).

Immigration

One of the most important causes that often instigates conflict and violence in the northeastern region is the problem of immigration. It has emerged as a gigantic problem that exerts immense influence on the demographic pattern, socio-economic and cultural spheres of Northeast India. Immigration of groups belonging to divergent ethnic background to Assam has been a phenomenon since antiquity. During the colonial period in the 19th century, the local elites articulated anti- outsider sentiment for the first time and the resultant was the emergence of the Assamese nationalism. Within a short period of time, a large scale immigration took place in the state. Since the late 1920s, the Assamese sentiment against immigration assumed a more crystallized form and in the post-Independence period the issue gradually became one of the most potent political issues in the state leading to perennial tension, and also, sporadic violence and bloodshed (Sharma 2012:1-23).

Amalendu Guha's chief contribution lay in his identification of the primarily economic nature of the agitation against the outsiders. He classifies the immigrants in Assam into four groups: (1) tea garden labourers, (2) migrants from East Bengal prior to Independence, (3) Hindus who came as a result of migration and (4) Nepalis who came in search of livelihood. Guha points out that of these the Nepalis and the tea garden labourers did not compete with the natives for jobs, a factor which rendered them more acceptable to the local people. The case of the Bengali immigrant was, however, different. According to Guha the immigrant Bengali Hindus were disliked because they competed with the dominant Assamese middle class for land, jobs and local power (Madhumita Sengupta 2006).

In "India against Itself", Sanjib Baruah suggests that more than any other factor 'colonial geography' shaped 'the projects of peoplehood in Assam- the Assamese sub-national narrative and the counter-narratives as well as the political agendas that followed from these narratives'. According to Sanjib Baruah, throughout the entire colonial period the British treated Assam as a land frontier for Bengal. This is evident both in the decision to introduce Bengali as the state language and in the inclusion of Sylhet in Assam. He states that their policy of encouraging large- scale immigration from Bengal to Assam, as well as the way the boundaries of Assam were drawn produced a demographic balance that kept Assam's language question a highly

controversial one throughout the entire colonial period and beyond (Madhumita Sengupta 2006:125).

Bangladesh war resulted in over 10, 00,000 ‘refugees’ taking shelter, who never returned. The present day Bangladeshi “infiltration” is however said to be a more severe phenomenon. This last wave of illegal exodus from Bangladesh is more dangerous phenomenon, as some among these infiltrators are said to have gotten involved in terrorist activities in parts of urban India. It is said fear within the native Assamese community of being overwhelmed by the unabated influx of illegal Bangladeshi migrants from across the porous border triggered off the long- drawn “Anti-Foreigner Mass Uprising -1979 - 1985”, spearheaded by the All Assam Students Union (AASU). It ended by arriving at an agreement, Assam Accord, on 15th August 1985. The Accord fixed 25th March 1971 as the cut-off date for detection and expulsion of the illegal foreign migrants. The Assam movement was led by AASU. All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP), which was umbrella organization of several outfits, including Asom Sahitya Sabha, emerged as the political forum of the AASU. In 1985, AAGSP swept the elections on the wave of anti-foreigner sentiment. The ULFA’s inception dates back to the frenzied years of the Assam movement when a section of the militant youth lost faith in peaceful programmes of AASU and the AAGSP. According to Baruah (1992), ULFA combined Naxalism with a strong dose of “sub-nationalism”. In 1990, the ULFA had forged links with various insurgent outfits inside and outside the country, including the PLA, NSCN and even JKLF in Kashmir. In 1986, ULFA first established contacts with the then unified National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) of Myanmar for training and arms. Subsequently, links were established with Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The ULFA, according to Gohain, ‘advocated a line of “de- nationalization” or “divesting oneself of ethnic identities except that of Assamese identity”. It characterized India as a “colonial state” and the northeast as the ‘colony’, though no serious economic analysis substantiating this assertion had come to light’ (Das, 2009).

Land Encroachment and Land alienation

In Northeast India, one of the most important causes of conflict is land dispute. It is the centre of most conflicts because land is the major resource and it

plays an important role in the economic aspect of life of the people in this region. The process of privatization of tribal land is divided into the following four types:

- (i) Transfer of land to non-tribal people,
- (ii) Encroachment of tribal land by the immigrants,
- (iii) Acquisition of tribal land for development projects,
- (iv) Monopolization of tribal land by the tribal elite (Fernandes and Borbora 2008:01).

As has been stated earlier, identity consciousness or crisis of identity is often seen as an important cause of conflict. Identities that shape conflict are not necessarily primordial but are a creation of political necessity and administrative convenience. As an example, the Naga-Kuki conflicts and later the conflict between Kukis and Paites demonstrate that identity conflicts have been waged not merely on questions of land, immigration and settlement, but also on the overweening fear of loss of identity itself (Bhagat Oinam 2003: 2013).

Conflicts may have many causes, but at the root of each conflict are questions of access, control and distribution of resources. The most important resource is land. Land is the central to the livelihood of the people in Northeast India because about 70 to 75 percent of the people are employed in the primary sector as against 66 percent in the country as a whole. Agriculture is the principal means of livelihood of the people. Another 20 percent depend on the tertiary sector, which is already saturated (Mahanta and Gogoi 2012:65).

Land alienation, therefore, is considered as central to the causes of ethnic conflict in Northeastern region. There are three main sources of alienation:

- (i) land alienation due to immigration,
- (ii) land alienation due to development projects, and
- (iii) loss of tribal land to non-tribals and to the tribal elite (Mahanta and Gogoi 2012:78).

Lack of Land Reform Policies

Land reform policies have to be implemented, mainly on matter of ceiling, land distribution and other land-related reforms whether of the primary, secondary or tertiary nature.

- (a) Rabha, among the major Scheduled Tribes of Assam has the least land-holding at their disposal. For Instances, the Miri and the Deuri have the highest number of land owners and land-cultivators as against Rabhas who have the highest number of ST landless labourers (derived from The Scheduled Tribes Census of India 2001).
- (b) The communal atmosphere, especially, in times of polarization on the eve of elections in Assam state is being deliberately used to blur the concept of land-owners and settlers, especially in case of individuals belonging to the religious minority. Reports in some of the newspapers have mentioned it as a “clash between Hindu Rabha and Christian Garo and illegal Muslim immigrants. Land is the crux of identity politics in Assam. Border-disputes have been one of the major reasons of clashes and disturbances among the communities of Assam and bordering states. Along with the Rabha-Garo clashes, in 2010 there were clashes of intense nature in the Saraipung area, between the people from Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. People were displaced in the summer of 2010 and there were numerous incidents of arsons, killings and villages burnt. Existing state policies and initiatives have failed to provide solution. The political leaders of Assam and Meghalaya were supposed to sit in deliberation to resolve the long-lasting inter-state border issue in August 2011. After five months of that diplomatic overture, the Rabha and Garo clashes erupted in the Assam-Meghalaya border areas.

Before winding up this discussion on the pattern, characteristics, issues, causes, problems related to the frequent outbreak of ethnic conflicts in Northeast India one must refer back to the **Colonial period** where seeds of ethnic unrest were sown by the colonial masters.

Colonial Roots of Ethnic Unrest

During the colonial period, various tribes of Northeast India were regarded to be wild and primitive. The colonial boundaries that the Britishers drew had already divided the people and this colonial project of “cartographic surgery” was materialized by the production of various new states consisting of various tribes in the post-colonial period. Sanjib Baruah (1999) is of the opinion that the emergence of the new states in the post-colonial period is not merely caused by the act of redrawing of the northeastern region’s political map but because “Assam” never existed in the pre-colonial period.

It was a failure not because the region's political map was redrawn, as Sanjib Baruah argues, because there never was an "Assam" in the pre-colonial period. Rather it was a failure because the "cartographic surgery" or "political engineering" was carried out without considering the pre-colonial traditional systems/boundaries of the various distinct ethnic groups of the region (Khongrewo 2013:440).

The politics of division initiated by the British was carried forward by the post-colonial rulers and perhaps due to the construction of identity, each ethnic group started to seek their own state. This crisis of identity brought disillusionment to the tribes and in order to address their dissatisfaction and grievances, the disillusioned ethnic groups thus organized their respective revolutionary organizations. Identity crisis and an intense desire to have a separate ethnic homeland often give rise to conflict between the communities living in the Northeastern region.

The Garo-Rabha conflict is one of such ethnic conflicts that created turmoil in the Northeastern region of India a few years ago. It resulted in brutal killings and displacement of people that shows the violation of all norms of humanity and the prestigious claim of mankind to be civilized among all other creations of this planet. Since this research project is mainly centered on this conflict, all the aspects of Garo-Rabha social life needs to be taken into account in order to analyze the Garo-Rabha conflict, its genesis and outcome. The next chapter focuses on the social life of the Garo and Rabha communities belonging to the border areas of Assam and Meghalaya.