

ETHNIC CONFLICT  
AND MULTICULTURALISM:  
A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

## **Chapter-II**

### **Ethnic Conflict and Multiculturalism:**

#### **A Theoretical Analysis**

This chapter mainly focused on the theoretical and conceptual aspects of ethnic conflict and multiculturalism whereby the theory and concept of ethnic conflict and multiculturalism are analysed in different perspectives. Ethnicity can be confined to two main components, the former consist of a group of village while the later comprises of an ethnic behaviour where ethnic identity and loyalty is evident. It is closely related with the issue of land, territory and area through determination of an individual's recognition at a particular time and place.

The theoretical debate on the nature of ethnicity has largely taken place within the parameters of the primordialist-instrumentalist spectrum. The Primordialists argue that ethnicity is formed and shaped by deep historic, cultural, social, and psychological and, some would say, biological realities, and has an irrational and ineffable quality. Instrumentalists, on the other hand, emphasize the flexibility of ethnic ties.<sup>15</sup> Ethnicity is largely seen as a social construct, a political resource for competing interest groups or as the consequence of the rational choice of individuals to pursue goals of wealth, prestige and power in a collective manner.

Ethnicity is clearly a phenomenon with more staying power than other social formations such as social class or religious denomination. At the same time it is subject to change, assimilate and manipulate along with the changing time and situation. As

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<sup>15</sup> Ernest Regehr, quoted in John Paul Lederach ,*Building peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*, 1995: p. 7.

such ethnic conflicts are often based on non negotiable character and values and therefore they tend to be of longer duration. It also takes different forms differing from violent to nonviolent means.

Furthermore multiculturalism is also used to describe or name a certain political ideal or norm of justice. It also implies a multi diverse ethnic or cultural diversity. Therefore to have a better understanding of diversity and the causes of ethnic conflict it is very necessary to study and analysed the theoretical aspect of ethnic conflict and multiculturalism in a wider perspective.

## **2.1 Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflict: A Perspective**

Ethnicity and ethnic identity are like a manifestation to phenomena in human society which are too complex to be broadly defined because the thought processes and activities with the help of intellectual limitation are found to be variously featured and negotiated.

Hence, it is obvious that, depending on the factors like territory, society, and culture, the discourse about identity struggle are bound to be self-defining as the context are considered to be specific to a great extent, and making it impossible to apply pre-mediated approach.<sup>16</sup>

Ethnicity is created and recreated as various groups and interests put forth the competing visions of the ethnic composition of society and argue over which rewards or consent should be attached to which ethnicities. The second widely held view is that ethnic identity is a social construct, in the sense that it results from social discourses that ends up conditioning individuals to identify with particular groups.

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<sup>16</sup> Nath.H.K, *Morphication of Identity in Northeast India: the Case of Tai-Ahom Identity*, 2008, p.2.

In contemporary usage, the word “ethnic” also retains this basic meaning because it describes a group of people who share some level of unity and consistency and who are aware of having a common plight and historical experience. These shared historical experiences are often founded on the feelings of relative deprivation. Once these similarities are realised, the group can then construct boundaries, where beliefs, customs and cultures are developed.<sup>17</sup>

The terms ‘ethnic,’ ‘ethnic conflict,’ and ‘civil society’ mean different things to different people. To be hopeful of misunderstanding, one needs to specify the meaning one is using. There are two distinct ways in which the term ‘ethnic’ is interpreted. In the narrower construal of the term, “ethnic” groups mean ‘racial’ or ‘linguistic’ groups. This is the sense in which the term is widely understood in popular discourse, both in India and elsewhere. For example, for politics and conflict based on religious groupings, Indian scholars, bureaucrats, and politicians since the time of the British have used the term ‘communal,’ not ‘ethnic,’ reserving the latter term primarily for linguistically or racially distinct groups. There is, however, a second, broader definition. As Horowitz argues, all conflicts based on group identities—race, language, religion, tribe, or caste—can be called ethnic.<sup>18</sup>

The attributes of an ethnic group do generally serve as a common ground for ethnic ties and for the development of ethnicity. Ethnicity concerns the feeling, behaviour, and psychological makeup of an ethnic group. A controversial matter in the discussion of the concept of ethnicity concerns whether or not religion is an element of ethnicity. Moreover, this issue is also controversial when viewed in comparison with the existing reality.

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<sup>17</sup> Cashmere.E, *Enclycopaedia of Race and Ethnic Studies*, Ruotledge, London, 2004, p.142.

<sup>18</sup> Horowitz Donald, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, 41-54.

Ethnic self-consciousness and its consolidation and asserting along the lines of tribe, community, or language groups have become increasingly apparent in the recent years in the entire region. Ethnicity usually refers to the differentiation of social groups on the basis of five distinct criteria. Firstly, an idea of a homeland or place of common origin is a key element, whereby an ethnic group can be identified with their place of origin. Secondly, a common language, or a distinct dialect of a language shared with others, which results in the construction of shared memories and emotional belonging. Thirdly, identification with a distinct religion, or a religion shared with others can be a central feature of many ethnic groups. Fourthly, a common culture with a distinct social institutions and behaviour, diet and dress and, fifthly, a common tradition, or shared history of one's own people or nation are other criteria which are used in specifying ethnic groups.<sup>19</sup>

Ethnic groups who find themselves in conflict may employ various emotional mechanisms which will lead to exaggerated perceptions of their justifiable and moral superiority. The creation and nurturing of an opponent representation is an important mechanism to lessen the emotional and moral stress of conflict, but also to maintain a sense of the superior self.

An important part of the process of maintaining ethnic identity is the continuous interpretation of historical events. This interpretation is invariably selective and aimed to enhance the self-esteem of the glorious past of the groups and the sense of victimhood. By attaching religious or ideological meaning to such selective interpretations, they are strengthened to the point of acquiring the status of absolute truth. Of particular importance is the fact that new generations are socialised into a selective

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<sup>19</sup> Ian Law (UK), Michal Nekorjak and Ondrej Daniel (Czech Republic) and Róza Vajda, (Hungary) "Comparative analysis of Ethnic relations Edumigrom", *Working Paper 4*, 2009, p5.

understanding of the past and thus they internalise these perceptions.<sup>20</sup>

Two closely-related assumptions can also be analysed in the literature of ethnicity. The first proposition is that the characteristics of ethnicity changes over time, both within the lifetime of individual and in terms of a wider view of a society. In other words, individuals and communities give importance to ethnic identities in certain periods than in others and sometimes no importance at all. Debates over the placement of ethnic boundaries and the social significance of ethnic groups are the fundamental mechanisms in ethnic construction.<sup>21</sup>

Ethnic consciousness can also be understood as a situation in which the social, psychological, and political importance of ethnic identities increase relatively to other identities, and ethnic intolerance refers to a disagreement of access to resources and rights to other ethnic groups. In this chapter, the terms ethnic group is used interchangeably to refer to a body of individuals who share cultural or racial distinctiveness, especially common ancestry or territorial origin, which distinguish them from members of other groups.

It can also refer to a group of people who live in the same geographical location and that such a group may consist of more than one ethnic group. Ethnicity in the contemporary world has also emerged as a means for social mobilization and has certain emotional factors which can contribute towards potential instability in the society.

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Hechter, "Ethnicity and Rational Choice Theory" in Hutchinson and Smith 1996, op. cit., p 90 - 98;

<sup>21</sup> Nagel. Joane, "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and recreating ethnic identity and culture, Social Problems", *Special Issue on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America*, University of California Press, Vol. 41, No. 1, 1994, pp 152-176.

The term, 'ethnic conflict' generally refers to a condition in which one particular group of human beings whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic cultural, religious and socio-economic, political or other is engaged in conscious opposition to another identifiable group because this group is pursuing incompatible goals.<sup>22</sup>

Ethnic conflicts have been approached in scholarly literature as the product of social mobilization and political change that disrupt traditional stability in ethnically diverse societies. The role of ideological factors in this process has generally been overlooked by social scientists, which tend to highlight structural variables in their interpretations. The sources and stakes in ethnic argument are often of highly symbolic significance, and this lends critical importance to the ideological dimension both for the purpose of understanding and resolving the conflict.

Sociological accounts of ethnicity are highly different and tend to break the traditional linkage between ethnicity and other, as it emphasize that all are ethnically located in a situation where prejudice and identity are understood by history, language, descent and culture.

Ethnic conflicts have caused massive human suffering across space and time, proving to be one of the most destructive, and devastating products of modern ethnic tensions. While the human cost involved with ethnic conflict is in itself worthy of attention, this phenomenon can have even more distressing long-term consequences. For instance, even at relatively lower rates of casualties, the destructive capacity of ethnic conflict often results in massive population displacement. It is also an inalienable part of human condition, depending on how it is understood and handled. The sources and stakes in ethnic confrontation are often

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<sup>22</sup> Ahmed Saied Nasar Abu(ed), *National Security Issues; North East India perspectives*, OKDISCD & Akansha publishing House, 2007, p135.

of highly symbolic significance, and this lends critical importance to the ideological dimension both for the purposes of understanding and resolving conflict.

In any ethnically plural society that allows free expression of political demands, some ethnic conflict is more or less inevitable, but it may not necessarily lead to violence. When there are different ethnic groups that are free to organize, there are likely to be conflicts over resources, identity, land, and policies.

The significance of ethnic conflict often holds a contradiction among various groups depending on their socio-political and economic life. The factor of ethnic conflict also differs from time to time and place to place depending on the system of administration in a multiethnic society.

Ethnic conflict may indeed have an economic basis, but that is not its core feature. Irrespective of internal class differentiation, race, language, culture, or religion it tends to define the politics of an ethnic group. Inversely, class conflict tends on the whole to be economic, but if the class into which one is born is also the class in which one is trapped till death and this is true for large numbers of people then class conflict takes on problematic overtones.

## **2.2 Theories of Ethnic Conflict**

Ethnic conflict is the most common type of internal armed conflict in the world and often involves systematic attacks on the common people. Theories of ethnic conflict rely on some combination of two

broad categories of motives: instrumentalist model sometimes called rationalist and primordial or consummators.<sup>23</sup>

The most dominant explanation for ethnic conflict is primordialism as it argues that the people's ethnic and religious identities have motivated them to come into conflict. Primordialist argues that ethnic conflict and the desire for self-independence arise out of the systematic denial of minority's aspiration, goals, values and needs. A general lack of trust in others intention also compels the ethnic groups to pursue conflict through gradual escalation.

Instrumentalist explanations emphasize on the fact that those who participate in conflict hope to derive some material benefit from the conflict, such as jobs, wealth or political power. As such primordial's views focus on the inherent aspect of conflict, which they interpret as an outbreak of mutual hatred. To some extent it is possible to think of these two views as, respectively, conceiving of ethnic conflict as a technology, as it modifies the limitation and opportunity faced by individuals, or putting it directly into the preferences of the individual.<sup>24</sup>

Ethnic conflict is also sometimes considered as preventive, in which the stronger group prevents from conflict to protect itself from aggression by a smaller group. If the smaller group could commit to no conflict because of their marginalisation, then the larger group would not feel a need for prevention. Ethnic conflicts are often considered as the expression of basic social and political conflicts between classes, population segment, or interest groups within the wider society.

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<sup>23</sup> F.Caselli and W.J Coleman, "On the Theory of Ethnic Conflict", CEP Discussion Paper No 732, *Centre for Economic Performance London School of Economics and Political Science*, July 2006, p.9.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

Ethnic conflict generally is a clash of interest or the pursuit of incompatible goals between one or more individuals or social groups. Traditionally, conflicts have been viewed as bad and something to be completely avoided. On the other hand, human relational theory conceives conflict as a natural phenomenon—sometimes functional and other times dysfunctional. Interaction theory of conflict, on its part, analyse that conflict is a positive force which helps certain degree of social interaction except when it is mismanaged by every party concerned with it.

The theoretical framework ethnic conflict also shows those different types of conflict theories such as human nature, frustration-aggression, psychoanalytic, relative deprivation, human needs and economic one. The human nature conflict theory generally advances the contention that human being is by nature aggressive and destructive. It thus views violent behavior as genetically programmed into human nature. According to frustration aggression theory, human beings, as goal oriented organisms naturally become aggressive whenever they are prevented from achieving their expected desire. The perspective of ethnic conflict mainly focuses on psychological problem of human being. It seems a narrow definition of group boundaries and sharp distinctions between friends and enemies; and, therefore, one group becomes an enemy of another through unconscious psychological process.

Ethnic conflict takes different forms with a nature substantially ranging from peaceful expression of grievances to outright use of physical force or violence. This means depending on the prevailing circumstance, the parties involved in the conflict and the means preferred to settle the dispute, ethnic conflict varies from peaceful reflection of conflict of interests to a violent struggle and civil war. The politicization of ethnic conflict is simply one form of politics, but one tends to increase and harden separation and

obstruction through the symbols and tradition that openly question the base of the nation- state. In the political struggles, ethnicity and classism complicate the terms of social conflict and make institutional reforms more difficult.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps one of the apparent limitations of the theories of ethnic conflict is that they tend to sidestep discussing conflict resolution mechanisms. The bulk of the existing literature mostly focuses on problem description rather than on developing possible methods of ethnic conflict resolution.

Ethnic conflicts are one particular form of such conflict: that in which the goals of at least one conflict party are defined in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault line of confrontation is one of ethnic distinctions. Whatever the concrete issues over which conflict erupts, at least one of the conflict parties will explain its dissatisfaction in ethnic terms—that is, one party to the conflict will claim that its distinct ethnic identity is the reason why its members cannot realise their interests, why they do not have the same rights, or why their claims are not satisfied. Thus, ethnic conflicts are a form of group conflict in which at least one of the parties involved interprets the conflict, its causes, and potential remedies along an actually existing or perceived discriminating ethnic divide.

### **2.3 Conceptual Problem of Ethnic Conflict**

The concept of ethnic conflict varies from competing to violent conflicts where the combatants display different cultural symbols. At present the concept of ethnic conflict is none of these things as

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<sup>25</sup> The theory of ethnicity is understood by different ethnic groups in different perspective and this contradiction of understanding ethnicity often leads to misunderstanding among the diverse ethnic groups resulting into violent outcome.

it has been allowed to drift into a poor concept because of the strange combination of understanding ethnic conflict.

If reconstruction has a unique role to play, it is providing good concepts that enjoy both within-case and cross-case validity. It is high time to engage in what Weber called a reconstruction of concepts. The challenge of making ethnic conflict a useful concept begins with finding a useful definition of ethnicity itself.<sup>26</sup>

Ethnicity is usually defined as that part of a person's identity which is drawn from one or more concept like race, religion, shared history, region, social symbols or language. It is distinct from that part of a person's identity that comes from personal moral doctrine, economic status, civic affiliations or personal history. For a start, the mere existence of ethnic indication in conflict cannot be the basis of calling something 'ethnic conflict'. If the concept of ethnic conflict is to be useful, it must point to a distinctive fundamental explanation for given illustration of supporting argument.

In most cases, ethnicity holds a largely perceived phenomenon, as the characteristics and factors vary across groups and individuals. Considering the concept of ethnic conflict is confusing because ethnic conflict as an ends-based concept only makes sense if the motivating purpose of controversy is related to some specific relevance to an ethnic group. Constructed ethnicity is a moving and contested target and so explanations of following conflict with reference to such ethnicity are liable to be considered. Unlike class conflict which can be proved or disproved by using pretty stable measures of the people involved income, education, occupation, etc; the same cannot be said of ethnicity.

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<sup>26</sup> *ibid*

Narrow mindedness against other ethnic groups appears as a necessary increase and decrease of situation as conditions change. The attributes of an ethnic group serve as a common ground for ethnic ties for the development of ethnicity.

Ethnicity is politicized into the ethnic factor when an ethnic group is in conflict with the political elite over such issues as the use of limited resources or the allocation of benefits. Fundamental problems posed by present phrase of ethnic conflicts are astonishingly different arising out of an increase 'politicisation of ethnicity' and resulting in conflicts between member groups of a state and polity, which itself is thought to be in the crisis of the state.

Therefore a concise perception of ethnic conflict is a sense of identity consisting of subjective or symbolic use of culture by a group of people in order to differentiate themselves from other groups. It is difficult to manage ethnic conflict until and unless ethnic diversity is managed through a proper mechanism and as such Multiculturalism brings an overview of ethnic diversity and its management.

## **2.4 Causes of Ethnic Conflict: An overview**

Ethnic conflict has complex causes and diverse effects, ranging from petty slights to murderous violence. Some light can be thrown on its causes on the commonly found in situations of ethnic contact and conflict. Conflict occurs when a particular set of factors and conditions leads to a major structural crisis. On the one hand, there is the easily observed negative assumption that if there is more contact then the lesser conflict will take place.

Ethnic conflict can also be considered as one of the bitterest ironies of human life that although virtually all human beings cherish a desire to live in peace, they continually find themselves embroiled in conflict, pitted against others in relationships marred by tension, distrust or open hostility. This incongruity is particularly distressing because it is immediately evident to them that cordial, harmonious relations with others are a necessary condition for their own genuine happiness. Not only do such relations allow pursuing undisturbed goals but is also considered essential to the personal fulfillment, as they bring the meaningful communion with others. Contentious living, in contrast, is always intrinsically painful, involving a hardening of subjective armor, a tightening of the knots of anger and hate. Indeed, whatever the outcome of conflict may be — whether victory or defeat — the result itself is ultimately detrimental for both victor and victim alike.

Conflict may aggravate within as silent suspicion and resentment or it may explode into violent rage and devastation. It may implicate at the level of personal relationships, or as members of an ethnic group, a political party, a social class or a nation. But in one or another of its many manifestations, the presence of conflict seems inescapable.

The causes of ethnic conflict can be studied whereby ethnicity depends upon, and increases with the amount of contact between any two groups and the extent of the cultural differences that differentiate them. Two theories can be applied to the causes of ethnic conflict; primordial's and institutionalist model.<sup>27</sup>

The primordial's approach helps explain the role of emotions and the conflict potential of ethnicity. The institutional, political

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<sup>27</sup> Blagojevic. Bojana, "Causes of ethnic conflict: A conceptual framework", *Journal of Global Change and Governance*, Volume III, Number 1, Winter 2009, p.5.

entrepreneurs and competition over resources approaches explain how the communication of institutional and political factors with ethnic emotions leads to ethnic conflict, ethnic intolerance, competition, and eventually violent conflict.

The former explains that ethnic conflict is caused by historical memories of grievances or injustice while the later states that ethnic conflict is caused by interaction of institutional and political factors which leads to ethnic consciousness, ethnic intolerance and competition. According to primordial's model, emotion is also an important factor for the causes of ethnic conflict in a multi ethnic society.

A society with harmonized objective factors is guaranteed to have political stability but a group will show no consciousness with regard to another group if either its members have no contacts with that other group, or there are no differences in the customs and values of the two groups. When the amount of contact between any two groups depends upon their closeness the level of ethnic consciousness becomes high then other things.

As such, the cultural differences between any two groups will be influenced by the contact between them. An increase in contact will speed up cultural assimilation or, reduce the growth of cultural differences caused by other factors. On the other hand, an increase in ethnic consciousness will reduce the rate of adaptation and increase the rate of cultural differences by assuming that all other things will remain unchanged.

According to the Institutional model, ethnic conflict occurs when a particular set of factors and conditions come together such as a major structural crisis; presence of historical memories of inter-ethnic grievances; institutional factors that promote ethnic tolerance; manipulation of historical memories by political

entrepreneurs to induce emotions such as fear, resentment, and hate towards the others and an inter-ethnic competition over resources and rights.<sup>28</sup>

Each ethnic conflict has its own unique characteristics, and in different contexts, some of these elements will be more important than the others, but all of them are the common factors necessary for ethnic conflict to occur. Ethnically diverse societies carry various degrees of possible conflict. Ethnic emotions, rooted in historical memories of grievances, are at the core of possible conflict. Violence does not unexpectedly erupt between otherwise peacefully coexisting ethnic groups. However, ethnicity is not the ultimate source of violent conflict whereas power and material gain can also be equally strong motivations for leaders and followers alike to choose conflict over cooperation and violence over negotiations. For a proper understanding of the dynamics of different ethnic conflicts it is therefore, not enough simply to look at the degree of violence present.

Whether ethnic conflict arises from competition over government resources, resentment over the division of political and economic powers, or an ethnic community's demands for greater autonomy, there are a number of possible results. Although some outcomes are peaceful, others may spawn intense violence. And while some resolutions are successful, others do not endure. In seeking a peaceful and lasting resolution, government and ethnic leaders are constrained by the history and intensity of their ethnic cleavages, by the degree of previous ethnic cooperation, and by the country's political culture. Nonetheless, within these constraints, the creativity and statecraft of leaders and mediators can contribute to successful solutions. Of course, political elites may

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.3

seek reasonable, negotiated solutions or they may choose to play on ethnic tensions for their own advantage.

Rather, it is an utmost necessity to carefully analyse the different actors and factors in each conflict and the way in which they combine to lead to the growth of violence and construct conflict management and settlement. Thus, it would be mistaken to assume that ethnicity is only a matter of conflict between different politically mobilized groups and states.

On the contrary, there is a range of examples where ethno politics is pursued in a spirit of compromise and cooperation. This is a generally hopeful indication that the presence of different ethnic groups in the same country or region does not inevitably have to lead to violent conflict, and it is therefore useful to explore briefly the reasons for interethnic cooperation. The adjustment of cultural differences to changes in the levels of contact and ethnocentrism takes a relatively long time to work itself out.<sup>29</sup>

Contact may have an effect on the factors of conflict like discrimination, hostility, etc. because of its effect on cultural differences. It may also be a cause of aggressive relationships more often than a cure for them, because, given cultural differences between groups, contact sets up conflicts of interest regarding how exactly the groups are to converge on a common culture or common norms in their communication with each other.

Another important factor for the causes of ethnic conflict is language as it slows down easy cooperation to secure the settlement of association. And those in contact must generally be able to communicate easily with each other, and they must share a common language. Because contact is potentially a cause of

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<sup>29</sup> Forbes. H.D, "Nationalism, Ethnocentrism and personality", *American Political Science Weekly*, University of Chicago Press, Vol:80, 1997, p.2

adjustment, it can also be a cause of conflict. The psychology of ethnic and cultural conflict term benefits of change are conditional only upon increasing mutual accuracy and do not depend on how this is achieved. Thus it makes a great deal of difference to each individual in the situation of contact whether he or she or someone else is required to learn a new language.<sup>30</sup>

While the process of adaptation is taking place, the main advantage to any group of greater mutual precision will partly depend upon whether they are making the necessary adaptations or whether the other group is bearing these costs. Conversely, the stronger the group's resistance, the better the chances that it will succeed in making the other group bears the costs of adaptation.

Political mobilization of ethnic identities also results in ethnic intolerance and competition over resources and rights which, if unresolved, can lead to a violent conflict. When resources are scarce, it is easier for political entrepreneurs to take advantage of the possible conflict of ethnicity.

Ethnic conflict has become a shorthand way to discuss almost all violent argument between communities living in the same nation-state. But such an uncritical view misrepresents the reality of the shared past of these communities, evolving cooperative and sustainable community living strategies, and conjure up images of ancient tribal hatreds. While some of the current conflicts may have open ethnic or cultural dimensions, the core issues are about gaining more power, land and other resources.

Ethnic Conflict is also caused by the tension that has erupted of civil disorder and violence. In the main context, there are two

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<sup>30</sup> The situation is of course quite different in the short run from the perspective of either one of the ethnic groups in a multiethnic society, because most individuals have difficulty learning a new language. Mention be made that the different states of North East India were created on the issue of language and identity.

philosophical approaches to the study of conflicts in society. From Hegel through Weber and Parsons, theorists have analyzed socio-political units as coherent and stable systems which, when subjected to various technological, social or ideological forces respond and develop in characteristic patterns. Another equally respectable intellectual tradition is based on an opposing vision of society. From Hobbes through Durkheim, Dahrendorf and Samuel Huntington, societies have been analyzed as an association of individuals or groups whose interests and desires conflict.<sup>31</sup>

There are two theoretical approaches that apply to the problem at hand which are the consociation and control models. The study of ethnic politics in Malaysia has long been dominated by the first perspective. Such a perspective views Malaysian politics as a process of managing inter-ethnic divisions, tension, and conflict amidst the efforts of ethnic-based political-party leaders to advance the interests of their own communities. Some others argue that the consociation model has been deployed effectively in Malaysia only because a balancing analytical typological category of control is available after all.<sup>32</sup>

Despite the many excellent studies on what causes conflict and on how to build peace in divided societies, particularly Assam, there remains a dearth of practical suggestions for policymakers on how to design and implement self-governing force that can make inter-community peace endure, even as times change and new motivation strengthen the communities. When conflict begins the management is more critical and urgent although more useful efforts are used to defuse potential tensions before they begin.

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<sup>31</sup>Lustick. I, "Stability in Deeply Divided Societies: Consociational versus Control", *World Politics*, Vol.31, 1979, p.p.325-344.

<sup>32</sup> Crouch. Harold. A, *Government and Society in Malaysia*, Talisman, Malaysia, 1993, p.19.

Peaceful management of domestic conflicts needs approaches that recognize the importance of building sustainable internal political structures. This means that today, issues about a state's internal political organization are more important in managing conflicts and accordingly, there has to be a greater focus on domestic political actors, most of all the state itself.

The experiment with ethnic conflict management, throws up new and interesting suggestions for peaceful management of conflict through certain mechanism. Mention be made that the mechanism used by different region may not be appropriate for Assam, but some will certainly be useful. It is because of the separation made by the nation-state boundaries that the two regions, the Indian Northeast and Southeast Asia, are seen to be more different than they are.<sup>33</sup>

Therefore, there is also a need to reach across the range towards the east in trying to study issues of inter-community conflict. In Southeast Asia; it is possibly Malaysia alone that can be compared to Assam, and other countries.<sup>34</sup> But while both Malaysia have tried to respond to indigenous issues, the larger Indian nation-state has conceded little recognition to this critical issue, one that requires a strong policy response. The cause of ethnic conflict varies from time to time with the changing scenario and the majority- minority issues have also led loose the problem of the identity in Assam as well.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, conflict management is a key concern in all organized communities, and all have clearly defined rules to

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<sup>33</sup> Dasgupta Anindita, Post colonial ethnic management: Assam through the prism of Malaysian experience, Ganguly Rajat (ed), *Autonomy and Ethnic Conflict in South and South-East Asia*, Routledge, 2013, p.5.

<sup>34</sup> Crouch.Harold.A, *Government and Society in Malaysia, Talisman*, Malaysia, 1993, p.19.

<sup>35</sup> Dasgupta Anindita, Post colonial ethnic management: Assam through the prism of Malaysian experience in Ganguly Rajat (ed), *Autonomy and Ethnic Conflict in South and South-East Asia*, Routledge, 2013, p.4.

manage conflict, as well as procedures and institutions to enforce them. There are two types of rules, procedures and institutions: traditional and modern, and the same holds for actors involved in conflict management. Conflict management is a three stage process involving conflict prevention, mediation and resolution. Conflict prevention refers to intervention efforts designed to prevent social conflict from progressing to a violent form.

Fundamental intervention is also frequently required to help resolve violent conflicts, which have defied local and regional attempts to manage them. In principle, the central government wants the regional governments to shoulder what is properly their own responsibility. The government is often compelled to intervene, however, especially when matters of national security are in danger.

Another recognized conflict management is analysed through the local administration where the authorities become involved when an act of violence is reported to the police, which is not always the case, or when they learn of impending serious conflict from spreading. Apart from the government and local administration, local NGOs have also become prominent actors in conflict management in the lowlands. Normally, NGO contributions take the form of funding dialogues, and likewise support initiatives that may emerge from these, such as joint peace committees, early warning arrangements, and guarding of disputed resources, etc. Elders play a key role in the many-sided negotiations, with their peers on the opposite side, the authorities, and their own community that must be persuaded to abide by any agreement that is eventually reached. This role is quite undecided, for them, which may or may not be directly implicated.

Elders have also been engaged in negotiations, peace talks, and community meetings between different ethnic groups in efforts to come to agreement on grazing rights. While competition and conflict over resources is common, cooperation and mutually beneficial solutions are also put forward by elderly negotiations and peace talk. This kind of multi-levelled relation tends to promote resource conservation and increases the overall carrying capacity. On the whole, women may well be the strongest proponents of peace building activities in the case study and neighbouring areas. Recognizing the important role women play in conflict and peace building is very significant to sustain the peace in the area.

Conflict is a collective activity. It takes more than one to cause and to resolve a conflict. It is clear that conflicts have multiple causes and that many of these causes are linked to socio- cultural, economic, and political issues.

Even though conflict are often tied to natural resource availability, it stems from multiple and compounding factors. Thus, any attempt to intervene and mitigate the conflict must examine all these complex cause and effect relationships. The problem of escalating conflict is worsened by the fact that competition for the shrinking resources is increasing due to changes in environment. Rising poverty levels within the case study communities also make traditional coping strategies less effective. Therefore an attempt to address conflict necessitates a deeper understanding of the root causes of conflict through a comprehensive analysis.

## **2.5 Theoretical Aspects of Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism or Cultural pluralism is fundamental to the belief that all citizens are equal. It ensures that all citizens can keep their

identities, and can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. Multiculturalism is best understood neither as a political doctrine with a programmatic content nor a philosophical school but as a perspective or a way of viewing human life.

Cultures grow out of conscious and unconscious interactions with each other to define their identity. A culture cannot appreciate the value of others unless it appreciates the plurality within it; and a culture cannot be proper with differences outside, unless it is at ease with its own internal differences. An exchange of ideas between cultures requires a willingness to open itself up to influence and learn from others, and this assumes that it is self-critical and willing to engage in a discourse with itself.

Multiculturalism has become an integral part of contemporary politics and even more, as resent contestation both in political theory and public discourse. It has also become the subject of conflicting interpretations, demonstrating specific political and ideological arena with far reaching theoretical and supporting consequences.

Considering Multiculturalism in India, it has different fundamental insights: First, human beings are culturally rooted in the sense that they grow up and live within a culturally structured world and organize their lives and social relations. Secondly, different cultures represent different systems of meaning and visions of the good life. Since each realizes a limited range of human capacities and emotions and takes hold of only a part of the whole of human existence, it needs other cultures to help it understand itself better, and expand its intellectual and moral prospect. Another aspect of multiculturalism is that, every culture is internally plural and reflects a continuing conversation between its different traditions and strand of attention. This does not mean

that it is devoid of rationality and identity, but that its identity is plural and diverse.<sup>36</sup>

Through multiculturalism, India recognizes the potential of all citizens, encouraging them to integrate into their society and take an active part in its social, cultural, economic and political affairs. Our advantage lies in having been a multicultural society from our earliest days. Multiculturalism is a relationship between the state and the Indian people and gives equal rights and equal responsibilities. By taking an active part in the civic affairs, we can affirm these rights and strengthen India's democracy.

As such, inclusiveness is also necessary for a multicultural society because the essence of inclusiveness makes us realize that we are part of a society in which language, colour, education, race and culture need not, and should not divide us. A multicultural society cannot be stable and last long without developing a common sense of belonging among its citizens.<sup>37</sup>

Although equal citizenship is essential to promote a common sense of belonging, it is not enough. Citizenship is about status and rights; belonging is about acceptance, feeling welcome, a sense of identification and the two do not necessarily coincide. One may enjoy all the rights of citizenship but feel that one does not quite belong to the community and is a relative outsider. This feeling of deprivation is difficult to analyse and explain, but it can be deep and real and can also seriously damage the quality of one's citizenship as well as one's sense of commitment to the political community.

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<sup>36</sup> Parekh, Bhikhu C. *Rethinking multiculturalism: cultural diversity and political theory*. Harvard, UP. (2002). p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> Dr Mishra Sarojini ,Dr Palai Nirod, Dr Das Kumar, "Social cleavages, Multiculturalism and emerging space for state in India under globalization regime", *International Economic History Congress, Session 22, Helsinki, August 2006*,p.3

Multiculturalism, as the name indicates, is first of all the simply idea of comparing different multicultural situations. Underlying this comparative approach are different types of reason. First is the simple fact that there are many different forms and types of multiculturalism. When we discuss of multiculturalism we often do as if multiculturalism is the same thing. This supposition is in a sense understood in the word itself. The very success of the term multiculturalism, as a word is to describe the forms of policies, sociological situations, or political problems; it is likely that between the different situations that we define as multicultural there is more issues that separate them than they have in common.

The word multiculturalism as it is used denotes many different kinds of things and it primarily constitutes an attempt to take this fact into account. The plurality of meanings and uses of the term multiculturalism is also related to different issues. The terms 'multicultural' and 'multiculturalism' denote or refer to very different types of things. For example, 'multicultural' or 'multiculturalism' can be used to refer either to some social or historical situations or they can be used to identify a certain type of policies.

Thus, when the American sociologist of Korean origin John Lie talks of multiculturalism in Japan in his book *Multiethnic Japan* (2001) he refers to a sociological phenomenon, the presence of different cultural groups within Japanese society. He however also deplores the absence of multiculturalism in Japan, and when he does he understand the term this time as referring to a policy designed to address this social phenomenon.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Lie. John, *Multiethnic Japan*, Harvard University Press, 2004, p.12

Furthermore, the word multiculturalism can also be used to describe or to name a certain political ideal or norm of justice. Multiculturalism in India ensures that all citizens can keep their identities, can take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging. Acceptance gives each Indian citizen a feeling of security and self-confidence, making them more open to accept diverse culture.

Territory constitutes, by definition so to speak, multicultural situations. It is also considered as a political arrangement where members of one ethnic and cultural group dominate over individuals who are deemed to belong to different ethnic, national or cultural groups. However, territorial powers can adopt towards dominated cultures and different policies. One is a policy of assimilation that does not recognize any value to the local culture but aims to the contrary at replacing it.

Contrary to multiculturalism, democratic multiculturalism does not reduce culture to a private affair. To the opposite it constructed around institutions whose specific goal is to protect the cultural differences between the various cultural groups that make up the polity and to promote cultural equality.

It is interesting that in democratic multiculturalism some cultural groups, especially minority groups, are often subject to what may be called an influence which can be considered as the feeling that the evolution towards political autonomy is not yet complete. Multiculturalism also evolves from difference between the cultures in presence which are considered important and especially from situations where there are great differences of political power between the groups.

Liberal multiculturalism unlike the other forms influence others in a traditional retreat that locates difference in a primitive

past of cultural existence. This type of multiculturalism, often referred to as cultural tourism, is evident in many social works including the strategies of work with a particular ethnic minority group.

Liberal multiculturalism, while well intended settle people into tightly bound identities that reproduce notions of natural, durable, and unbridgeable differences between people. Mention may be made of India which embraced diversity, or cultural pluralism in both policy and practice. The Indian Constitution which is the source of many state policies can be said to be a basic multicultural document, in the sense of providing for political and institutional measures for the recognition and accommodation of the country's diversity. Cultural diversity is viewed as one of India's most important attributes, socially and economically.

Through multiculturalism, India recognizes the potential of all citizens, encouraging them to integrate into their society and take an active part in its social, cultural, economic and political affairs. Our advantage lies in having been a multicultural society from our earliest days. Our diversity is a national asset. India contains the entire globe within its borders.

Multiculturalism is a relationship between the state and the Indian people. Our citizenship gives us equal rights and equal responsibilities. By taking an active part in our civic affairs, we affirm these rights and strengthen India's democracy. Although equal citizenship is essential to fostering a common sense of belonging, it is not enough. Citizenship is about status and rights; belonging is about acceptance, feeling welcome, a sense of identification. One might enjoy all the rights of citizenship but feel that one does not quite belong to the community and is a relative outsider. This feeling of being fully a citizen and yet an outsider is

difficult to analyse and explain, but it can be deep and real and can seriously damage the quality of one's citizenship as well as one's sense of commitment to the political community.

Multiculturalism is also best understood neither as a political doctrine with a programmatic content nor a philosophical school but as a perspective on or a way of viewing human life. In India it has three central insights: First, human beings are culturally embedded in the sense that they grow up and live within a culturally structured world and organize their lives and social relations. Second, different cultures represent different systems of meaning and visions of the good life. Since each realises a limited range of human capacities and emotions and grasps only a part of the totality of human existence, it needs other cultures to help it understand itself better, expand its intellectual and moral horizon, stretch its imagination, and so on. Third, every culture is internally plural and reflects a continuing conversation between its different traditions and strands of thought.

Cultures grow out of conscious and unconscious interactions with each other, define their identity. A culture cannot appreciate the value of others unless it appreciates the plurality within it; A culture cannot be at ease with differences outside it unless it is at ease with its own internal differences. A dialogue between cultures requires that each should be willing to open itself up to the influence of and learn from others, and this presupposes that it is self-critical and willing and able to engage in a dialogue with itself.

An identity is born because of a variety of factors and every ethnic group has its own distinct culture, language or dialect and traditional institutions. The fact of belonging to one group often gives rise to fellow feelings and sentiments. Factors like the desire to preserve one's culture and traditional institutions, preventing

them from being assimilated with the dominant culture, fear of being deprived of what is one's due and exploitation of resources by outsiders make such sentiments stronger. Identity is directly related to the emergence of educated elite in the concerned community. In the absence of any other major social force such an elite comes to acquire a hegemonic position in the community, perpetuates its hegemony and mobilizes the community on communal lines.<sup>39</sup>

The stronger groups being unable or unwilling or both often do not take cognizance of even the legitimate needs and aspirations of weaker ethnic groups. Such intolerance and resistance lead to the growth of a feeling of discrimination and alienation on the part of smaller group. The dominant group possesses a tendency to make all group aspirations and demands as anti-national or secessionist without going into their merits or demerits. The smaller groups get lost in the process of forced assimilation in the name of accommodation and integration.

This gives rise to the desire for self-expression and an identity separate from that of the dominant groups. Along with such factors of ethnic identity formation, a crisis is created by politicisation. The very crisis arising out of cultural, economic and linguistic deprivation grows and develops into a conflict through political interference.

Multiculturalism implies a multiplicity of contesting cultural voices that are allowed to articulate the imagined community of the nation on their own terms. As such, it should be seen as a contestation of mono-culturalism, the impulse to impose one cultural order on all sections of society.

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<sup>39</sup>As a result of mismanagement of multiculturalism, factors such as a desire for self-expression, perceived discrimination and injustice, aspirations of small time politicians, better economic development of neighbouring small states results in the rise of ethnic movements in Assam.

Therefore multiculturalism in India thus cannot be reduced to a single ideological concept. When the sharply contrasting cultural constructs of the national imaginary are set in a comprehensive relation there exist infinitely complicated situations that cannot be resolved in the name of ideological consistency or logical unity.<sup>40</sup> That is the reason why it must be accepted that Indian identity is a constant engagement and a coming together and moving apart, of different cultures.

Multiculturalism inhabits a space where it presents culture as a site of contestation and competition, in which the periphery is engaged in conflict with the centre, setting off the free play of various elements. The continuous deployment of transformation will resist the structure of domination and marginalization and retrieve the lost historical cultural voices; it thus can serve the purposes of multiculturalism. Though multiculturalism imagines cultures as autonomous, it opens up a space for constant negotiation between various cultures and even facilitates the process of cultural formation.

Multiculturalism helps the ethnic groups to grow conscious of their existence and rights. But over-interference of politics in the phenomenon of an identity crisis makes the situation worse. The present situation of identity crisis, social formation and rise of sub-nationalism is to a great extent due to political orientation in the wrong direction.

Mention be made that politics plays a two-way role in ethnicity and rise of sub-nationalism. Firstly, politics of recognition and representation has encouraged the growth of the ethnic groups' demand for a distinct set up which results in the formation of sub-

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<sup>40</sup> Derrida Jacques and Tully James, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*, 1982, pp 43-44.

nationalism or a nation within a nation. At this stage, it is important to recognize the distinctness of these groups.

However, when recognition is perceived as a favour granted or a right acquired through a political struggle, the state policy of recognition of traditional institutions and representation of the ethnic groups in the decision-making bodies can nourish stronger sentiments and emotions of ethnicity among other groups. Its outcome can be noticed at various levels. In such circumstances, Benedict phrase 'imagined community' seems to become a reality<sup>41</sup>.

Each ethnic group therefore lives within an 'imagined reality' concerning its own worth relative to other groups, its own sense of entitlement and the threat posed to its well-being by other groups. The fact that this 'reality' is imagined does not imply that it is therefore ineffective and meaningless. Perceptions and belief systems often have a greater impact on the course of events than objective realities.

Ethnic sentiments, emotions related to their culture, language, symbols etc. and politics of recognition and representation come together to give birth to an image of their communion or nationhood which can also be described as sub-nationalism. In fact, there is a need to imagine a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-linguistic integrated society, but politicisation has turned this imagination into a conflict and crisis. Secondly, the presence of political interference is again felt when this sub-nationalism grows to its full capacity causing a threat to the state.

Speaking of multiculturalism in the context of Assam, the instance of politicisation and alienation of ethnic groups from the greater Assamese identity can be traced to the politicization of their

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<sup>41</sup> Anderson. Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflection on the origin and spread of Nationalism*, Verso press, London, 1983.

identity aspiration. The identity crisis of the ethnic groups in Assam can be analysed through the emergence of consciousness of being different from the group under whose identity, it continued for so long, feeling of discrimination, want for more economic, educational and job facilities.

Besides, the vested political or power interests of the ethnic groups which were fulfilled through the sentiments of culture, language and symbols also led to the emergence of identity crisis. The political ambitions and organizations of other interests become easy at the backdrop of cultural identity as cultural identity is an emotional and sentimental issue that evokes mass support. The autonomy movements in Assam have started with the premise that immense discrimination has been done to them by the dominant group as well as the centre and they demand for autonomy; while they end with the grant of autonomy in a specific area which fulfils their curve for power.<sup>42</sup>

Accordingly, some liberal theorists has revisited the entire concept of liberal-individualism in order to establish an accommodative framework to acknowledge that there are compelling interests related to culture and identity which are fully consistent with liberal principles of freedom and equality, and which justify granting special rights to minorities. Kymlicka's liberal culturalist position is a pertinent example. His argument, in short, is that modern states invariably develop and consolidate a 'societal culture which requires the standardization and diffusion of a common language, and the creation and diffusion of common educational, political, and legal institutions.'<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Das Anindita, Post colonial ethnic management: Assam through the prism of Malaysian experience in Ganguly Rajat (ed), *Autonomy and Ethnic Conflict in South and South-East Asia*, Routledge, 2013, p.p.5-6

<sup>43</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture*, Oxford University Press, NewYork, 1989,p.10.

To ensure freedom and equality for all citizens, equal membership, and access to, the opportunities made available by the societal culture should be given to them. But in the case of national minorities, the case is quite different. These groups already possessed a societal culture and they have fought to maintain these institutions. Freedom for them involves the ability to live and work in their own societal culture. However, Kymlicka's 'liberal' position has been dismantled by other liberal. Another eminent liberal philosopher – Brian Barry strikes at the main root of Kymlicka's 'liberal' understanding.<sup>44</sup>

He is critical of Kymlicka's emphasis on 'diversity' and 'autonomy', for they refer to policies that would systematically weaken precisely those rights of individuals to protection against groups that liberal States should guarantee. That the State does not lend any special weight to the norms of illiberal – or liberal – groups, is, according to him, the essence of what it means to say that a society is a liberal society.<sup>45</sup>

Therefore, multiculturalism is the first and foremost aspects about developing new models of democratic citizenship, grounded in human-rights ideals, to replace earlier uncivil and undemocratic relations of hierarchy and exclusion. Multiculturalism is precisely about constructing new civic and political relations to overcome the deeply entrenched inequalities that have persisted after the abolition of formal discrimination.

When one talks about cultural plurality in India, since it shares little or no commonality in its traditional culture with the rest of India, the case of the tribal people in the North East India is especially acute. To address the identity crisis in the region, one

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<sup>44</sup> Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality, An Egalitarian critique of Multiculturalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge, U.K,2001,p.14.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*

has to bear in mind the cultural plurality of the North east in general and the sharp difference between the people assimilated into various cultures and the unassimilated ethnic people in particular. Out of constant interactions, cultures influenced each other and developed commonalities. Both ethnicity and multiculturalism eventually function as something to control cultural differences.

Multiculturalism acknowledges the validity of the cultural expressions and contributions of the various ethnic groups. This is not to involve that all cultural contributions are of equal value and social worth, or that all should be tolerated. It also pays contribution to the people, by not rejecting it simply because it differs from what the majority, or those in power, regard as important and of value.

Multiculturalism also encourages and enables the contribution of the various groups to society or an organization. It clearly understood the socio-historical sense corresponds to a set of anthropological, historical and sociological questions concerning the causes, nature, stability, possible evolution and consequences of situations where various cultural groups exist in the same State or territory.

On the contrary we can say that ethnicity and multicultural competence can be identified and developed when human resource management functions on the behaviour that has the most relevant successful performance by eliminating cultural differences. The feeling of deprivation is caused by the manner, in which the wider society defines itself, and the improper ways in which the rest of its members talk about these groups, or the ways in which they treat them. Although members of these groups are in principle free to participate in its public life, they often stay away

for fear of rejection and ridicule or out of a deep sense of alienation.

For all their differences, there are also similarities: indigenous-immigrant tension and clash, sons-of-soil movements, demands for affirmative action for the backward majority indigenous population, primacy of the indigenous language, culture and public symbols, identity issues tangled with the perceptions of socio-economic and cultural domination and discrimination nevertheless is instructive.<sup>46</sup>

For instance, it can create an awareness of strategies that have been done elsewhere and help to bring out symbolic, institutional and structural arrangements which will induce the conflicting parties to co-exist on civilized terms.

Though multiculturalism tries to conceive culture as autonomous, it also opens up space for constant negotiation between the processes of the formation of ethnicity whereby ethnic conflict is concerned. Considering the theories of ethnic conflict and multiculturalism in this chapter, the next chapter will analysed and explained ethnic diversity and the system of managing diversity which is considered to be one of the important factors for curbing ethnic conflict.

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<sup>46</sup> Esman, Milton J. "Ethnic Pluralism: Strategies for Conflict Management", *Center for Development Research: Facing Ethnic Conflicts* (14-16 December, 2000) p.7.