

CONFLICT HAPPENING AND  
PEACE PROCESSES IN  
NORTHEAST INDIA

Edited by  
Ganesh Prasad

Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies  
University of Delhi

# **Conflict Mapping And Peace Processes in North East India**

*Edited by :*

**Lazar Jeyaseelan**

**North Eastern Social Research Centre  
Guwahati**

## **Conflict Mapping and Peace Processes in Northeast India**

© North Eastern Social Research Centre 2008

Published by:

North Eastern Social Research Centre  
110 Kharghuli Road (1<sup>st</sup> floor)  
Guwahati 781004  
Assam, India

Tel. (0361) 2602819  
Fax: (91-361) 2732629 (Attn NESRC)  
Email: [nesrcghy@gmail.com](mailto:nesrcghy@gmail.com)  
Website : [www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/NESRC](http://www.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/NESRC)

Cover page designed by:

Kazimuddin Ahmed  
Panos South Asia  
110 Kharghuli Road (1<sup>st</sup> floor)  
Guwahati 781001  
Assam, India

Printed at : Saraighat Laser Print

## Acknowledgement

This volume comes out of the efforts of some civil society organisations that wanted to go beyond relief and charity to explore avenues of peace. Realising that a better understanding of the issues involved in conflicts and peace building was required, they encouraged some students and other young persons to do a study of a few areas of tension. The peace fellowships were advertised and the applicants were interviewed. Those appointed for the task were guided by Dr Jerry Thomas, Dr L. Jeyaseelan and Dr Walter Fernandes. The studies were sponsored by Catholic Relief Services, Guwahati, under the guidance of Gopen Moses and Deben Sharma.

After their completion the case studies were entrusted to Dr L. Jeyaseelan of Imphal for editing. I continued the work of editing after his sudden death on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2007. However, the book remains in his name because he had the sense of responsibility to send me the CD two days before his sudden death at the young age of 48. This book too has been sponsored by Catholic Relief Services. For this I thank Ms Enakshi Dutta, Regional Manager and Mangneo Lunghdum, peace studies coordinator at CRS.

I owe an immense debt of gratitude to the staff of North Eastern Social Research Centre, in particular Ms Anamika Deka who worked day and night to get the book ready for the press well in time before the date of release. Mr. Kazimuddin Ahmed of Panos designed the cover. This book would have remained incomplete without their assistance.

October 2007  
North Eastern Social Research Centre

**Dr Walter Fernandes**  
**Director**

## Dedication

*Dr. Lazar Jeyaseelan who had accepted the responsibility of editing this book phoned and told me on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2007 that he had done what he could, that he was sending the CD to me and that I should complete this work. He must have had a premonition because he died of a massive heart attack two days later during a public function at Makhan Khallen village, Senipati District, Manipur.*

*Born at Madhurokkanmoi in Tamil Nadu on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1959, Jeyaseelan came to the Northeast at the young age of 18. He spent most of his years in the region in Manipur. After his doctorate from Manipur University he was active in the academic and civil society circles of the Northeast in general and of Manipur in particular. Because of his administrative abilities for several years he was the Chancellor of the Imphal Archdiocese.*

*To Dr Jeyaseelan search for peace was a personal commitment. As an administrator he had witnessed the murder of some of his colleagues who refused to yield to extortionist demands. He felt dehumanised when he saw the atrocities committed by the security forces whose mandate is to protect the citizens. He, therefore, joined many other organisations that were searching for peace with justice. In gratitude for his commitment to peace we dedicate this book to him.*

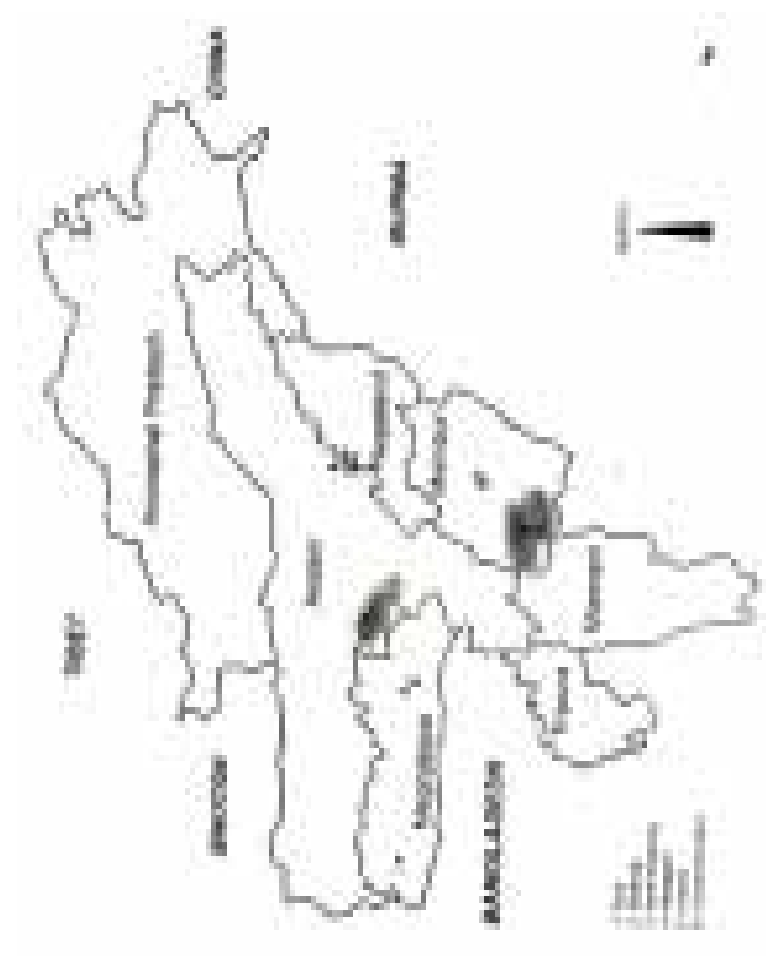
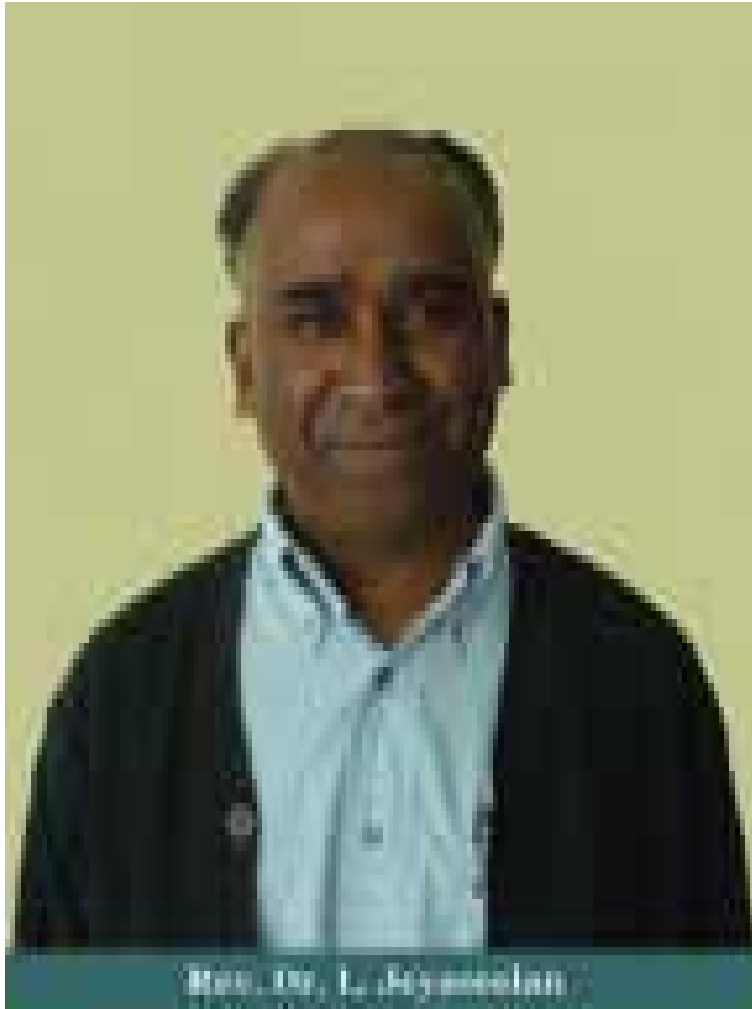


Table of Contents

<i>Title</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Page</i>
<i>Dedication</i>		
<i>Acknowledgement</i>		
1.Introduction	L. Jeyaseelan	1
2. Impact of Assam-Nagaland Territorial Dispute in the District of Golaghat, Assam	C. Kindo & D. Minj	8
3. Response of the Youth to the Karbi-Kuki Conflict In Karbi Anglong	Joseph Damzen	54
4. Community’s Response of the Karbi-Kuki Conflict in Karbi Angolong	Bulu Terang	94
5. Meitei-Naga Conflict with Special Reference to the Territorial Issue in Manipur	M. Dominic Maring	113
6. Kuki-Naga Conflict with Special Reference to the Chandel District of Manipur	D. Michael Haokip	145
7. Kuki-Paite Conflict in the Churchandpur District of Manipur	Rebecca C. Haokip	185
8. Youth in the Context of the Garo- Khasi Tension in Meghalaya	Amrit Sangma	209
9. The Garo-Khasi Tension: Implica- tions for the youth and Women	Sarah Maria Bang	249



## INTRODUCTION

Lazar Jeyaseelan

Conflicts occur because of a variety of reasons. Those who indulge in them justify them as struggles for justice. For some they are a way of life. Most ordinary people want to live in peace but are often dragged into them against their will. Those affected by them tend to see insurgency only as a law and order issue though most conflicts go beyond it. When a problem is not solved for a long time, popular resentment can result in a conflict. If it continues for a long time it can become a vested interest of those who benefit from it. They may include the community leaders, the militants, the security forces and businesspersons. The militants give expression to the resentment that is more often than not, created by social and economic processes. Many common persons resort to a conflict when they, as a nation or people feel aggrieved and none attends to their grievances. Injustice too arouses genuine anger. For example, when faced with atrocities such as rape, murder, stealth and serious crimes against humanity, particularly by the security forces whose mandate is to protect the citizens, people feel angry and frustrated. If these crimes are not dealt with, ordinary people may resort to violence to undo the evil. Violence thus becomes a spontaneous act that is justified as natural and just.

### The Situation in the Northeast

All such situations seem to exist in the Northeast. The causes differ. In some cases it may be poverty, unemployment or land alienation, in other cases it is atrocities by the security forces or militants or criminal acts by anti-social elements. In many instances it is search for a new identity. Grievances build up when no steps are taken against the perpetrators of injustice. Anger and frustration build up when grievances are not attended

to. That becomes a breeding ground of violence. The Northeast needs to be analysed within this context of a search for an identity, an economy whose benefits reach all the people and its ethnic and cultural diversity. Much of India knows the region only as one of conflict. The decision-makers tend to interpret the conflicts almost exclusively as a law and order issue and ignore the causes leading to them.

That gives birth to militant organisations which take up the issues in their own manner. Their power grow because of abuses by the security forces such as pseudo-encounters and rapes and the possibility they have of impunity by hiding behind the immunity provided by the Armed Forces Special Powers Act. The United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), the United National Liberation Front (U.N.L.F) of Manipur, NSCN-IM and K of Nagaland are among examples of militant groups. Some of them may demand sovereignty, a few may think of a plebiscite and others may ask for a bigger territory. In every case, they give expression to some cultural, economic or social aspiration of the people. That legitimises the conflict as a struggle for a new identity, economy and political set up. Some of them succeed partially. The Mizo National Front won a Mizo State and recognition of their customary law through a struggle. The militant outfits of Nagaland won a Naga State. But they are not always satisfied with that success, so the conflict continues.

Many of these developments take the region beyond insurgency to militarisation which is much more than the all pervading presence of the security forces. When a conflict continues for a long time, violence and counter-violence become part of everyday life. Though the people pay its price, they develop a sense of helplessness and come to accept violence and other aspects such as extortion that accompany it as intrinsic to their life and develop a psyche of acceptance of violence. Anti-social elements,

the economic, the security forces and others who benefit from it develop a vested interest in ongoing conflicts. Some of them even work against those who try to bring about peace. The ordinary persons suffer. Ethnic conflicts are one of its expressions.

The ordinary people are usually ambiguous about such developments. Many of them sympathise with the cause that the militant groups uphold but not with their violent methods. Most militants groups in their turn say that no one understands them because they give expression to the grievances of the people but are rejected as terrorists. That there are grievances is beyond doubt. One can include among them lack of development, deprivation, neglect of the region, diverse ethnic communities seeking justice and identity and the refusal of the political and economic decision-makers to listen to the grievances. In the absence of a healthy dialogue, most grievances lie buried beneath the debris and find expression in acts of sabotage and violence. They are desperate attempts to call the attention of the nation but continue to be viewed only as law and order issues. The situation gets worse when criminal or extortionist elements exploit people's discontent by using the conflict as a source of illegal income.

### **The Background of This Volume**

The present book deals with some of these issues. The focus in this volume is less on the nationalist struggles and more on the ethnic conflicts in three States of the region. Lack of development, encroachment on their land and other events cause shortages that add to the massive unemployment from which the people of the region suffer. They also feel that those who control the economy devalue their culture and attack their identity. Every ethnic group begins to feel that its identity and culture are under attack. As a result, economic, cultural and political issues merge into one. Conflicts follow from it.

The region has witnessed many such conflicts and this volume brings some of them together. The chapters are based on field studies done by students and young persons, all of them beginners who tried to understand the issues and suggest possible peace initiatives. Their analysis may be inadequate but it helps one to identify the main concerns that these conflicts express. They also mention possible conditions for peace building. The studies on which these chapters are based, are an outcome of the realisation by many civil society groups that charity and relief work cannot solve the problems of the region. The situation has to be understood first hand. To make a meaningful intervention, one has to have an understanding of the roots of the conflicts confronting the region as a whole. That was the effort in these studies.

### **Ethnic Conflicts**

The focus in the case studies is on ethnic conflicts. We begin with the Assam-Nagaland border dispute. When Nagaland was formed in 1963, the borders were defined on paper but one is not certain that they were marked clearly on the ground. As a result, tension has prevailed between Assam and Nagaland for more than four decades. There have been armed clashes between the police forces as well as between ordinary people. Political elements have used the conflict and uncertainty to create their own vote banks. Militant outfits have exploited the situation to their own advantage. Both the States seem to view control over this oil-bearing land as a source of future revenue and ignore the good of the people. The "neutral" security forces that are brought to the region to keep peace seem to have developed a vested interest in the conflict by turning it into a source of income. Thus the conflict continues. Minj and Kindo try to understand the forces behind it.

Damzen looks at the Karbi-Kuki conflict that is mainly identity-related. Can two ethnic groups live in peace in the same district without introducing the domination-dependency

syndrome? The district is named after the Karbis who are considered indigenous to it. A section of the Kukis tries to find a new identity through an autonomous council within the district. The threat perception that results from it is accentuated by the militant groups that claim to represent and protect their own communities. Extortion adds to the problem. Terang continues the same theme and tries to find out the response of the community. Outsiders may initiate processes of reconciliation but ultimately genuine peace can come only from the communities involved.

In Manipur the extension of the Naga-Centre ceasefire caused a major conflagration between the Meiteis and Nagas. Maring identifies the processes that led to it. The Naga nationalist struggle has been in existence for decades. The ceasefire of 1997 began a possible peace process. A condition of the militant outfits was greater Nagaland. Instead of seeing the issue in an overall North Eastern perspective, the Centre extended the ceasefire to all the Naga-inhabited areas. The Nagas found a new identity in Nagalim but it was a threat to the Meiteis who have also had an eye on tribal land. They consider territorial integrity basic to their power and identity. The protests that followed led to bloodshed and greater polarisation than in the past. June 18, 2001 marked the death of many persons and it has since then been commemorated as Martyrs' Day. The Centre withdrew ceasefire extension with the same speed with which it had introduced it thus further polarising the communities. The researchers try to understand the issues involved and search for steps towards peace.

Manipur is representative of the diversity of ethnic groups in the Northeast. It has also witnessed many conflicts between them. Two of them are studied in this volume. Michael Haokip studies the Kuki-Naga conflict. Both the Nagas and Kukis are alliances of many tribes. Loyalties have changed at times. Thus, there was a foundation of conflicts but a balance was kept for many centuries

because of their interdependent economies. The colonial divide and rule policy changed this situation since they used one set of tribes to control the rest. Participation in the World Wars changed the alliances. The formation of militant groups among both of them intensified the rivalry which had begun with their quest for land. A series of incidents exploded into a crisis.

In her study of the Kuki-Paite conflict, Rebecca Haokip shows how religion becomes a source of power and of alliances. One tribe took control of the original Christian denomination to which they were converted. Leaders of that tribe dominated the Church as well as tribal organisations. When new alliances emerged out of what was originally considered a Kuki conglomeration because of dissatisfaction with this structure, those who broke away from it joined both another tribe and a new Christian denomination. Thus both religious and tribal division intensified their rivalry.

After Manipur comes Meghalaya that is inhabited by three major tribes viz. the Garo, Jaintia and Khasi. The Garo being less educated, when the State was formed they were granted 40% reservations in education and jobs. Today, the Khasi-Jaintia alliance feels that they have been wronged because they are around two thirds of the State's population. That has become the bone of contention. The Garos feel neglected and demand a Garo State made up of the territories with a substantial Garo population in the Garo Hills as well as in the Khasi Hills and Assam. Cultural and ethnic difference add to this divide. The militant outfits accentuate the divisions and add to the conflicts. Amrit Sangma studies the issue from the point of view of the youth and Sarah Maria Bang looks at the conflict from women's point of view.

## CONCLUSION

The present volume is thus an effort to understand the conflicts in the Northeast and take them beyond the law and order or



militant-centred interpretation to their social, cultural and economic origins. Suggestions are made for conflict resolution. Some of them may sound simplistic or idealistic. Amid such simplicity, the focus is on the youth and women, two groups without whose support peace with justice is not possible. By focusing on these groups one attempts to introduce an element of hope. The thinking behind the suggestions is that peace is not merely absence of arms. It is primarily a search for a new and just society that can instil hope but has in reality become a source of division. The Church and civil society groups, particularly women's organisations, seem to be the best groups to bring about unity. They need to study some traditional conflict management systems and update them. They need training in many techniques. Women's organisations, for example, have done much for peace but they need a better analytical outlook than what they have. The Churches run institutions that bring all the tribes together under one roof. But they have used them primarily for education and spiritual formation, not for peace

---



## **IMPACT OF ASSAM-NAGALAND TERRITORIAL DISPUTE IN THE DISTRICT OF GOLAGHAT, ASSAM**

---

*Constantine Kindo & Daniel Minj*

The vexed issue of the Assam-Nagaland border dispute goes all the way back to 1866 when the Naga Hills District was formed. Since then a series of events unfurled in the history of these two States that culminated in the formation of Nagaland in 1963. However the British regime as well as the post-1947 Indian Government never took care to demarcate the Assam-Nagaland boundary properly. That has resulted in the long territorial dispute between these two states. The consequences of the lingering territorial dispute are numerous. They need to be addressed by the Centre as well as the State Governments of Assam and Nagaland, to bring about an amicable solution and achieve peace in the entire border belt.

To get a picture of this territorial dispute and to understand the gravity of the situation, it is imperative to retrace events that led to the creation of the state of Nagaland. The sequence of events leading to the Assam-Nagaland boundary dispute is equally binding. The claims of Assam and Nagaland over the forest tracts along the border is in reality a border conflict. Assam claims that the forest tracts are well within its territory as notified in 1925 by the British Government. The Nagas counter that the alien rulers tried to deprive the people of the then Naga Hills district of their legitimate right to this vast and valuable plains area. Thus the boundary issue centres round the 1925 notification.

The present study was done in order to understand the situation. The researchers interacted with a number of government officers,

public leaders, church leaders, village headmen, senior settlers, intellectuals, security personnel, student leaders and the general public among Nagas as well as non-Nagas. The response was good and we were able to gather much information from such interaction. Contact was first established with the non-Naga village headmen through the Gaon Bura Association of Ghulapani area. Through the students' associations the researchers then contacted the Naga leaders. Based on the understanding got from documentation and from discussion with them, this report will focus on the issues around the dispute.

### **Geographical Status of the Assam-Nagaland Border Area**

On the Northeast corner of the Republic of India lie the States of Assam and Nagaland. Assam extends from latitude 24.1°N to 26.0°N in breadth and longitude 89.67°E to 96.04°E in length and accommodates 2.64 percent of the country's population. As such it is the most populated State in the Northeast. The seven States of the Northeast (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura) are surrounded by Bhutan, Tibet and China to the north, Myanmar to the east and Bangladesh to the south. Assam has common borders with all the States of the region as well as with Bhutan and Bangladesh. At Independence, Assam included the present States of Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland. It was even bigger prior to the Partition. A substantial area of the province went to East Pakistan. However, by 1980, its area of 2,55,000 sq. km. was reduced to 78,438 sq. km.

After the Yandaboo treaty with the Burmese emperor in February 1826 the British regime took over the political control of Assam and gradually consolidated its administrative control over its fertile plains. Within this territory lived many tribes whom the British administrators considered wild and hostile. The tribes who occupied the Hill tracts of Assam are collectively known as

Nagas. The British rulers did not succeed easily in taking control of their areas. Several conflicts followed and ultimately they were brought under the single administrative unit of the Naga Hills District through a Notification dated 15 November, 1866 that read:

“It is hereby notified that, with the sanction of the Government of India, the Lieutenant Governor has been pleased to abolish the sub-division of North Cachar in Assam, and to constitute a separate district, consisting of that part of the district of Nowgong which lies on the right banks of the river Doyang. The name of the district will, for the present be the Naga Hills, and its headquarters will be Samoogooting. It will be administered by a Deputy Commissioner under the control of the Commissioner of Assam.”

The description of the territories included in the new district of 'Naga Hills' was vague and lacked clarity and specification. However this order of the British Government paved the way for the inclusion of large tracts of land along the foothills into Assam. The British Government tried to rectify the loopholes on the notification of 1866 through another order dated 28 June, 1875. In the meantime the tea industry received a boost in Assam and the attention of the regime was drawn towards this lucrative business. The eyes of the tea garden management fell on these tracts of land and it got due permission to grow tea in this area.

Since the inclusion of certain reserve forests of the foothills in the Naga Hills District created impediments on their way, the administration felt the need to reorganise the district boundaries. As a result changes were effected in the boundary line from time to time including the transfer of the reserve forests on the foothills to the administrative control of the Sibsagar district of Assam (Present Sibsagar, Jorhat and Golaghat District). In 1913, Dimapur was included in to the Naga Hills District. Having undergone several alterations the boundary of the Naga Hills District received what was considered a final settlement in 1925 through Notification No.

3102R dated 25 November, 1925. It was supposed to supersede all previous notifications.

It demarcated what it called the permanent boundary line between Assam and the Naga Hills District. According to some claims, except for a short stretch of about 20 kilometres towards the north from the Taukok Nadi to the Tiok Nadi, this boundary line was defined accurately and in great detail in a notification dated 25<sup>th</sup> November 1925, and was not altered subsequently. The British regime claimed that the notification was based on a survey conducted between 1916 and 1923. In the Notification natural boundaries like hills, rivers, streams, etc. are not mentioned. Instead, numbered boundary pillars in the documents of the Survey of India are mentioned. These pillars have either perished or have been removed deliberately. Because of this lack of clarity, the notification took more the form of guidelines than demarcation on the ground. As a result, the ground reality remained vague though both sides agreed to follow the guidelines. It remained unchanged till 1947 when Nagaland had two administrative units known as the Naga Hills District and the Naga Tribal Area inhabited almost entirely by the Naga Tribes. On 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1957, they were combined into one to form the Naga Hills-Tuensang Area and administered as a 'Part B Tribal Area'.

1947 marked both independence and the emergence of A. Z. Phizo under whose leadership the Naga National Council raised the issue of sovereign Nagaland. Much before that the Nagas had begun dreaming of development and prosperity of the Nagas. In 1918, the 'Naga Club' was formed consisting of some government employees and village Headmen. This was the pioneer and major organisation of the Nagas. On 16 January 1929, the members of the Naga Club met the Simon Commission and raised the issue of independence of the Nagas. In their memorandum to the commission they had

stated, "you are the only people who have ever conquered us and when you go, we should be as we are."

In 1945, the 'Naga Hills District Tribal Council' was formed and on 2 February 1946 it was renamed 'Naga National Council'. On 13 July, 1947 the NNC met Mahatma Gandhi to make their demands clear. In June 1947 the commission had already signed a nine-point charter with Sir Akbar Hydari the Governor of Assam. In 1957, the first sitting of the 'Naga People's Convention' was held at Kohima and Mokokchung. On 30 January 1980 these Naga organisations together formed 'The National Socialist Council of Nagaland' (NSCN) committed to the cause of Naga integration. Apart from the NSCN, also the Naga Students Federation, Naga Hoho and other non-political organisations favour the creation of Nagalim. The NSCN has taken the cause to "Unrepresented Nations and People's Organisation" (UNPO) in 1993. They have successfully raised the issue of 'Independence' in this and other international platforms.

In 1947 began the armed struggle for a Naga nation that the Indian army suppressed with an iron hand. The Government of India banned the Naga National Council and announced a price on Phizo's head. There are allegations that in the name of suppressing insurgency the Indian army committed atrocities on the Naga youth, burnt down Naga villages, raped women and committed other atrocities. Thus, the Naga issue stood as a serious challenge to the Government. Mahatma Gandhi seems to have understood the Naga cause better than most other Indian national leaders did. When the NNC leaders met him on 13<sup>th</sup> July 1947, he is reported to have said: "Nagas have every right to be independent". However, the conflict continued.

In the midst of turmoil a peace process began in the hills. One section of the Naga nationalists agreed to a solution within the

framework of the Indian constitution. At its second meeting on 20 and 21 May 1958 held at Amang village in Mokokchung district the Naga People's Convention demanded a new Nagaland State. In its support it also prepared a 16 point charter of demands from the Indian Government. After a series of negotiations the Indian Government conceded the demand of a new state comprising the Naga Hills District and the Tuensang region. Thus, Nagaland became the sixteenth State of the Indian Union on December 1, 1963 based on The State of Nagaland Act 1962 whose Clause 3(1) read:

3. Formation of the state of Nagaland (1) As from the Appointed day there shall be formed a new state to be known as state of Nagaland comprising the territories which immediately before that day were comprised in the Naga Hills – Tuensang area and thereupon the said territories shall cease to form part of the state of Assam.

Thus the boundaries of the new state were exactly the same as the boundaries of the combined Naga Hills District and Naga Tribal Area before 1957. However, the dispute continued with another section of the Naga Nationalist Movement continuing their armed struggle for a sovereign Nagaland. In recent years they speak of 'Nagalim' or Greater Nagaland comprising the Naga inhabited areas of Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar. That can bring much territory now forming part of Assam under Nagalim. However, the border dispute pre-dates this claim and is not linked to it directly. the border dispute keeps lingering and has to be solved.

**Profile of Golaghat District :** *(Extracted from Notes on Assam – Nagaland Border Areas of A,B,C and D Sectors under Golaghat District by J.C. Pegu Deputy Commissioner, Golaghat, Assam)*

To the West of Nagaland in Assam lie the districts of Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills. This

boundary has a total length of 434 Kilometres. The entire 434 kilometer stretch of the Assam-Nagaland border, predominantly plains land, has long been disputed by the two sides. Much of the land of this sensitive area comes under Reserve Forests which of course are now being encroached upon by settlers from both Assam and Nagaland. Under Golaghat District, along the disputed border, practically no traces of Reserve Forests exist. The rich flora and fauna of yesteryears have been replaced by huts and the land turned into cultivable fields yielding rich crops. This change has attracted migrants from every corner of Assam, Nagaland and even nearby Bangladeshi nationals.

The main disputed area is on the border of Golaghat district situated between the latitude of 25° and 45° North, and longitude between 93.15° E The district had a population of 9,46,279 in 2001. Golaghat became a full-fledged District on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1987. The district situated at a height of 71 metres above MSL is rich in flora and fauna. Famous for its one horned Rhino in the Kaziranga National Park, it is bounded by River Brahmaputra in the North, Nagaland in the South, Kakadonga River and Jorhat District in the East and Nagaon and Karbi-Anglong Districts on its western boundary. The entire patch of the Assam–Nagaland border under Golaghat district covers approximately 125 kilometres including 4 Reserve Forests, viz.

- 1) Diphu Reserve Forest
- 2) Nambor Reserve Forest
- 3) Rengma Reserve Forest
- 4) Doyang Reserve Forest

Different ethnic groups have settled along the disputed Assam-Nagaland border in the district of Golaghat in Assam and Wokha in

Nagaland. On the Assamese side, the Adivasis are the major non-Naga group. The other groups are the Bodos, Nepalese, Muslims, Assamese, Garos and Manipuris.

Among the Nagas, two major tribes can be found in the area. Nagaland’s Wokha district shares a common boundary with the Golaghat district of Assam. Wokha district is dominated by the Lotha tribe and hence this tribe is the dominant force in the area. It is followed by the Sema tribe.

Reserve Forest

For administrative convenience, the Assam-Nagaland border area has been constituted into six sectors – A, B, C, D, E and F spread in the districts of Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Karbi Anglong in Assam. The entire area is under the cover of Reserve Forests. In 1872, the Nambor Reserve Forest was constituted. The Reserve Forests of Abhoypur and Desoi were formed within the then Sibsagar District. In 1887, the Diphu and Rengma Reserve Forests were constituted within the Naga Hills District in the areas that once belonged to the erstwhile Nowgong District and were transferred to the Naga Hills District in 1897 for administrative convenience. The Doyang Reserve Forest was constituted in 1888 in the Sibsagar District.

Sectors A, B, C and D fall within the district of Golaghat, Assam, directly in the disputed zone on the Assam-Nagaland border. For administrative convenience, this trouble torn area has been divided into sectors A, B, C and D. Neutral Forces have been deployed here to maintain law and order. However, most forests have been occupied as Table 1 below shows.

Sector ‘A’ in Diphu Reserve Forest has been formed taking portions of Golaghat and Karbi-Anglong Districts of Assam. The

sector covers an area of 18,365,71 hectares. Encroachers have established 43 villages in it. Only 5 of them are non-Naga villages. According to the 2001 census, 18,050 out of its population of 22,750 are Nagas and 4,700 are non-Nagas. Together they occupy around 17,500 out of its total area of 18,365.71. In this, Nagas occupy 16,950 ha and non-Nagas 550 ha. Assam’s administration is for all practical purposes non-existent here. In 1984 and 1987 the Government of Nagaland established polling stations in this sector and on November 28, 1991, established a sub-division with a sign board ‘Homeland’. At Homeland the Assam government has built a house for its Border Magistrate but citing security reasons no B.M. resides here.

Table 1: Reserve Forests      Sector    Total land    Encroached (ha)

1. Diphu Reserved Forest	A	18363.00	18053.00
2. South Nambor Forest	B	27240.00	2500.00
3. Rengma Nambor Forest	C	13921.00	11800.00
4. Doyang Nambor Forest	D	24635.77	23000.00
5. Desoi Valley Nambar Frt.	E/F	16381.45	13322.46
6. Desoi Nambor Forest	F	2797.15	1532.34
7. Tiru Hills Nambor Hills	F	5954.55	4794.15
8. Abhoypur Nambor Forest	F	6737.98	400.00
9. Gelehi Nambor Forest	F	5157.00	4000.00
Taken from: ‘Brief Notes on Assam-Nagaland Border Areas of A, B, C and D sectors under Golaghat District’ by J.C. Pegu, Deputy Commissioner, Golaghat.(Source : J.K. Pillai Commission Report, 1997)			

‘B’ sector is in the Nambar South Reserve Forest and and is a part of the Rengma Reserve Forest covering an area of 27,057.55

ha. There are a total of 177 villages in it, 126 of them non-Naga and 51 Naga. The total population of the sector is 74,343 out of which 50,420 are non-Nagas and 23,923 Nagas. Encroachers have occupied 25,000 ha in this sector. Out of it 15,000 ha are with non-Nagas and 10,000 ha with the Nagas. The sector has seven posts of neutral forces at Rengmapani, Nokhuti, Panjan, Chetiagaon, Yampha, Majgaon and Rajapukhuri. In addition, there are six Assam police posts at Chungajan Tiniali, Amguri, Dagaon, Rengmapani, Chungajan M.V. and Panjan. On 10 February 1987, the Nagaland government established the Newland Subdivision here. Oil and natural gas have been discovered in this sector and that adds to the conflict since the two States as well as the oil companies want control over it.

The ‘C’ sector is in a part of Rengma Reserve Forest and a small section of Nambar South Reserve Forest covering an area of 13,921.68 ha. There are 84 villages in it, 4 of them Naga and 80 Non-Naga. The total population of the sector is 35,890 out of whom 34,647 are Non-Nagas and 1,243 are Nagas. They have occupied 11,800 out of its 13,921.68 ha. around 2,000 of them Naga and 9,800 Non-Naga. The sector has 4 posts of the Neutral Forces at Uriamghat, Nopani, Silonijan and Khoraghat and an Assam police B.N. post at Nopani. Economically this sector is important as it has oil and natural gas at Haladhibari, Ghulapani and Bidyapur. Besides it land is very fertile. Many suspected Bangladeshi migrants have settled down here. Uriamghat has an Assam Border Magistrate but none resides here.

Sector ‘D’

Sector A, B and C are located in the Dhansiri sub-division of Golaghat district. ‘D’ sector is situated in the Golaghat sub-division of the district and is in the Doyang Reserve Forest. The total area of the sector is 24,635.77 hectares. Out of it, 23,000 hectares are under the occupation of non-Naga encroachers, and

1,000 hectares are under Naga occupation. In 1979, the then Janata regime of Assam proposed to declare the Doyang Reserve Forest as a Revenue Land, but it failed as the Central Government did not give necessary approval to the proposal. There are a total of eleven posts of neutral forces in this Sector at Sorupani, Chandanpur, Merapani, Kallojan, Udalipathar, Seedfarm, Negherbil, No. 1 Tarabil, Ratanpur, Kadamguri and Barogheria. The Assam Government has the residential quarters and office of its Border Magistrate at Merapani but no B.M. resides there.

Table 2: Land situation in Sectors A, B, C and D.

Sl. No.	R. Forest	Sector	TL	LO	LO
			(In ha)	Non-Nagas	Nagas
1.	Diphu R. Forest	A	18,365.71	550	16,950
2.	Nambor South RF	B	20,057.55	15,000	10,000
3.	Rengma RF	C	13,921.68	9800	2000
4.	Doyang RF	D	24,635.77	23,000	1000
* R: Reserved, TL: Total Land, LO: Land Occupied					

Causes of the Territorial Dispute

Several causes can be attributed to the territorial dispute between Assam and Nagaland. They can be divided chiefly into the following heads:

a) Insurgency

Some link the dispute to Nagalim. However, as stated above, this demand is recent. The dispute existed much before even the demand for a sovereign Nagaland which was under the aegis of the NNC and later NSCN. One cannot deny that today most Nagas dream of a greater Nagaland just as they spoke of a sovereign Naga

State in the past. But it is difficult to state with any certainty that is is the main cause of the dispute. However, they as well as other militant outfits like ULFA seem to have intensified the conflict. The NSCN in particular has been running a parallel government in Nagaland and has a large number of cadres and supporters. They as well as other militant outfits require big amounts to run their administration and to look after the well-being of their cadres. These budgetary demands are met by collecing “taxes” both within Nagaland and in other Naga inhabited areas. It can thus be called a force that intensifies the conflict and does not create it by itself.

Table 3: Villages in Sectors A,B,C and D

Reserve Forest	Sector	Total Vill.	Naga Vill.	Non-Naga Vill.
1. Diphu	A	43	38	5
2. Nambor South	B	177	51	126
3. Rengma	C	84	4	80
4. Dovang	D	139	Nil	139
b) Governments' Failure to Solve the Border Dispute				
The vagueness of the borders and the Central Government's				

failure to bring about an amicable and permanent solution to the vexed border dispute between Assam and Nagaland is its immediate cause. The Centre as well as the State governments of Assam and Nagaland do not look sincere and serious in their efforts to bring about a permanent solution to this problem. They have appointed Commissions but their reports and well as agreements signed between the States of Assam and Nagaland remain only on paper. The political parties in power look at the problem only in terms of political gains and losses, very often in the form of a vote bank. As a result, the inhabitants of the boundary have to pass their lives in tension, fear, uncertainty and as second class citizens. The failure of the Border Commissions is another reason and that too can be

attributed to the priority given to the political interests on both sides of the border. The Sundaram Commission of 1971, R.K. Shastri Commission of 1985 and J.K. Pillai Commission of 1997 failed to contribute much to the solution because one of the two States rejected their reports. While the Sundaram and Shastri Commission reports were unacceptable to Nagaland, Assam rejected the J.K. Pillai Commission’s report. As a result, the peace process suffered a setback.

To the political vested interest should probably be added the value of the land, much of it fertile and oil and gas bearing. Because of the dispute no inhabitant can claim ownership over any part of that land. They need permission of the commanding officer to build a house and pay a tax to cultivate it. Such uncertainty can help those who would like to have that land for perspecting oil. The possible revenue from it is another possible reason for both the States to continue to claim that land and not settling the issue amicably.

d) Encroachment of Reserved Forest land

Some think that the Assam government’s negligence has led to the encroachment of the Reserve Forests along the Assam-Nagaland border in Golaghat District. Others are of the view that their present inhabitants were encouraged to settle there by some political leaders in order to create a vote bank. One of its results is that once a home to rich flora and fauna, now it is the most densely populated area of the District. Instead of the forest, there are small huts all over, interspersed with agricultural fields and some scattered trees remaining in the name of Reserve Forests. People from both Assam and Nagaland have settled here with the sole purpose of earning their daily bread and claiming the area as their own. This brings about friction among the people and aggravates the territorial dispute.

e) Breach of Interim Agreements

Four interim agreements were signed between the two State Governments in the presence of Shri KVK Sundaram, the then chairman of the Law Commission, as Advisor in the Ministry of Home Affairs. Two of them were signed by the chief secretaries on 31 March 1972 at Shillong, the third on 2 May 1972 at Kohima and the fourth on 23 May 1972 at Shillong. The agreements sought to maintain the status quo in the border areas until the border dispute was resolved. In principle, the agreements stand even today but in reality, there is constant breach of these agreements. Violating the ground rules, the state governments of both Assam and Nagaland have been undertaking developmental works through their official agencies. Construction of permanent structures such as schools, community halls, churches, supply of electricity, water supply schemes and roads are in progress.

The overt reason the governments of both the States give is common development but behind the intention seems to be their claim over these areas which they reinforce through construction works. As a result there is always resentment from both the States. The public has to suffer this pain without grumbling. Developmental projects in these areas often have a negative bearing on the peace process.

#### **f) Seed Farm: A Bone of Contention between Assam and Nagaland**

In the east, Kakadunga river; in the west, Doyang river; in the north, Ghiladhari Mouza and in the South Naga Hills more than 200 sq. km in Golaghat District is the Doyang Reserve Forest. It is also known as sector D. The controversial seed farm is situated in this sector at Bhelowguri near Merapani. The seed farm is of recent origin, after 1973 when it began to be talked about and was started after the 1985 armed conflict of Merapani. In reality there is no seed farm here but only cultivation done by engaging paid

workers.

The seed farm is spread over 1,000 acres that are managed by the Nagas. It has become a major irritant between Assam and Nagaland since both claim this plot. Assam claims that it is situated in Assam but it is under the patronage of the Nagaland Government. The Naga effort to gain control over it meets with vehement opposition from the Naga side. The State governments have often engaged in conflict over this issue. So Nagaland has set up a Nagaland Armed Police camp nearby, to safeguard its interests.

The highest tension over this plot was witnessed in 2004. On 14 February, 2004, Mr. Neiphiu Rio, the Chief Minister of Nagaland accompanied by a host of Ministers, civil and police officials held a public meeting at the farm site and placed sign boards reading 'Government of Nagaland'. That was resented by the public on the Assam side which organised mass protests against it. At one point of time, it was threatening to turn into a major conflagration and a serious law and order problem. However, the timely intervention of the student leaders of these two sides prevented it from deteriorating further. The 'All Assam Students' Union' (AASU) and the 'Naga Students' Federation' (NSF) took a conciliatory stand.

#### **g) The Landlords, Militants and the Neutral Forces**

The people on the Assam side of the border claim that they have become victims of tax collection by the Naga landlords and militants but it is difficult to attribute all the tension to them. What is clear is that the gun dominates and taxes are collected in cash or kind from those cultivating land in the Reserve Forests. Those



refusing to pay them have to face the gun or abduction for a heavy ransom. Also house tax is collected. The people have no choice but to surrender before the sophisticated arms. Those who claim to represent the landlords and the insurgent outfits have a free access to tax collection mainly in sectors A, B and C.

The role of the neutral forces deployed in the area often sends wrong signals to the public. The people on both sides allege that they are not neutral. Instances of these forces harassing innocent people put a question mark on their neutrality. The disdain and fear with which most people look at them is detrimental to the peace process. People on the Assam side allege that the neutral forces support the Nagas but the latter state that they support the Assamese. Thus they are the centre of accusations and counter accusations.

#### **h) Suspected Bangladeshi Nationals**

Alleged Bangladeshi migrants are a major issue in the Northeast. This border belt has not been spared either. There are allegations that it has become their haven because of the uncertainty around the border areas. They are said to receive the support of some political leaders and government officials who have a vested interest in their presence. The original encroachers resent their presence. They claim that some of them have got their names enrolled in the electoral roll with the help of influential police and government officials. We were told that most of them are found around Merapani in sector D and Bidyapur and Koraghat in sector C and that their presence often leads to conflicts. However, we could not verify their presence and got no details of conflicts.

Most, however, consider the political parties the real cause of the conflicts and the unresolved border dispute between Assam and Nagaland. The inhabitants of the area feel that the political

parties are not sincere in finding a permanent solution to the vexed problem. The common people allege that they only ignite tension for their political gain and treat the people only as vote banks. They entice the people with empty promises before elections but do not keep them. So the problem persists.

A 'cause and effect' relationship is clear but one should probably attribute the situation to a combination of causes rather than a single one. That is one of the reasons why the issue has become very sensitive. As a result, fear and tension are escalating. Violent and unpleasant incidents are a serious threat to law and order. No amount of peace talks will bring about any fruitful and amicable settlement, unless the causes are dealt with. Hence the state governments of Assam and Nagaland together with the Centre need to take serious measures and plan positive and constructive action in order to get out of this border tangle.

### **The Nature of the Conflict**

#### **Genesis of Encroachment :**

This long standing border dispute is due to encroachment of the Reserve Forest both by the Nagas and non-Nagas. 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 villages were allowed for tree plantation and maintenance. Four forest villages, Merapani, Soundangpathar, Kasomari and Amguri were established in Doyang Reserved Forests in 1905 and a few more later at Uriamghat in Rengma Reserved Forest and at M.V. Chungajan in Numbor South. No other settlement had 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, Numbor South and Tengma reserve forests. Some allege that they used these thick forests as shelter for militants. Be that

as it may, one only knows that the Nagaland Government chose some of them as village headmen. Some state that it also facilitated occupation of the area by their followers.

The next stage came in 1962 when the Assam government issued land *pattas* to retired army personnel between Chungajan and Bokajan. It was claimed that its purpose was protection from the Naga militants. Once the reserve forest was thus opened, many others from different parts of Assam settled there with the help of some political leaders. Thus settlements grew and today the forests are inhabited fully. In addition to the encroachers some timber and cane merchants helped deforestation. Thus, encroachment is the main feature of the conflict. It would have been much easier for the central government to solve the border dispute, had there been no encroachment of the reserve forests but all four sectors have been occupied fully by both Naga and non-Naga settlers. The big number of Naga villages especially in sector B Golaghat district enjoy full support of the Nagaland government which makes basic requirements including school buildings available to them. However, the non-Nagas belonging to Assam are only used as vote banks of all the political parties. Incidentally the highest number of voters for Golaghat and Sarupathar constituencies come from these areas. They are deprived of their basic amenities. The feeling among the settlers, real or not, that many recent arrivals are suspected Bangladeshi nationals complicates the situation further. The real fear of the inhabitants is that they will lose their land. Thus, one can see among them anxiety over land ownership, tension, uncertainty about their future, threat from insurgents and confusion caused by different political parties. Their future seems to be bleak as the entire region is neglected by the Centre and the State governments. The inhabitants are remembered only during the elections.

#### **Various Aspects of the Conflict:**

The impact of the territorial dispute can thus be divided into three main heads:

- a) Land
- b) Security
- c) Taxation

#### **a) Land**

Both Assam and Nagaland lay claim over this tract of land but the entire region has not been declared disputed. At present only the Diphu, Rengma, Nambor South and the Doyang Reserved Forests, also known as A,B,C and D sectors are disputed. However, because of the complexity of issues involved this territorial dispute has become long and contentious. Both sides claim to be legitimate owners of the land. The failure of the Centre to demarcate the boundary clearly has only augmented the age old conflict. This persisting land dispute leads to violence and the residents of the area suffer much due to it. There have been a number of unpleasant incidents and barbaric acts resulting in the death of innocent people. The gruesome incident of Chungajan in 1979, Rajapukhuri in 1989 and the armed conflict of Merapani in 1985 can be cited as glaring instances of such violence.

The reserve forests have been under civilian occupation for more than four decades. Under normal circumstances they would have been turned into revenue land. But it cannot be done because of the ongoing dispute. As a result, the settlers do not have ownership rights despite the *Indian Forest Conservation Act 1980*. The once dense reserve forests are today devoid of trees but the State government can take no steps to turn it into revenue land because the case (civil original Jurisdiction, Original suit No. 2 of 1988) filed by the Assam government is still pending before the supreme court. In the meantime, the peace process has come to a halt and the people are deprived of civic facilities.

#### **b) Security**

Thus, encroachment of reserve forests is the main cause of the hostility between the Nagas and non-Nagas. Initially the aim was just to settle down and earn a livelihood but soon the scenario changed with the extension of territory becoming the main aim. Directly or indirectly both the States are involved in it. To protect the Naga encroachers, the Nagaland government posted Armed Police in these areas. Assam tried to evict the Naga villagers but failed in it. In March 1968 the Nagaland Armed Police set fire to about 200 houses of Bodo families in the Doyang Reserve Forest. The situation along the border became tense and deteriorated further when the Nagaland government established 17 Nagaland Armed Police Posts and 13 check-gates 2 of them manned by the CRPF in what Assam claims to be its territory. These and other actions threatened peace along the border but the issue also drew the attention of the Centre which saw the need to seek an amicable and permanent settlement and appointed the one man K. V. K. Sundaram commission. It suggested four interim agreements but the effort turned out to be a failure.

The States entered into these four Interim Agreements in order to maintain peace and tranquility but neither State abided by their terms. Both pointed an accusing finger at the other for going against the agreements. Following them would have looked like giving up their claim over the land. So it became imperative for the States to go against them. Under these circumstances, the Assam-Nagaland boundary became the scene of great tension and violence. It resulted in the Chungajan carnage of 5th January 1979. After this tragic incident both the state governments agreed to withdraw their State Armed Police and replace them with neutral forces with a view to restore peace and normalcy in the affected areas.

Accordingly the neutral forces were deployed in the disputed areas. At present there are 31 border outposts, 26 of them manned by CRPF and 5 by the Assam Police. There are also a number of

Nagaland Police Battalion camps established by the Nagaland Government. The responsibility of the neutral forces is to create and maintain peace and to provide security to the people. But even after their deployment the overall situation remains unchanged. Violence and bloodshed continue with no security of life and property. The people continue to live in fear and tension. The people are the victims of the conflict. Sometimes the security personnel themselves become the cause of people's insecurity. Hence the people question their role.

After the Chungajan incident, another meeting was held between the two Chief Ministers on 13 April 1979. It was decided that "No new settlements should be allowed in these areas nor shall any new encroachment be permitted." Even those who had fled the area out of fear or panic should be allowed to settle only in their former area. According to the agreement any construction or reconstruction required permission from the Border Magistrates. The CRPF personnel make full use of this clause, demand money for any construction and allow it only when they are satisfied. Gradually the people have started reacting and many conflicts and clashes are taking place between the CRPF and the people. Thus the neutrality of the neutral forces has come to be questioned.

There have also been many cases of inhuman activities but the neutral forces have done nothing to prevent them or arrest the miscreants. Some allege that they work hand in glove with the insurgents and help them to enforce their demands. Others think that the security persons themselves are afraid of the insurgents. Whatever the case, the people in all four sectors face trouble from the neutral forces. Many conflicts between the CRPF and the people have been reported. For example, *The Sentinel* reported on 9 July 2004 that, the CRPF personnel were involved in collecting gunda tax from the business community of Merapani. The CRPF personnel of Udaliather Border outpost in D sector had to face the wrath of more than 500 women for confiscating their tools,

vegetables and fish. According to a news item published in 'Pratidin' of 15 September 2004, they had to face great opposition from Naga women after killing a Naga young person. Many a time the CRPF unit had to be changed after committing such atrocities. It is an irony that the people face the greatest insecurity from those who should protect them.

### C) Taxation

While land is the primary problem the people face, taxation is the most sensitive issue in the area. In normal terms 'Taxation' means tax paid to a government. For the inhabitants of the disputed Assam-Nagaland border, the term bears a different connotation. Here it means the powerful resorting to extortion of money, crops and domestic goods.

In this vast tract of land among the settlers there are 'Protected Encroachers'. They do not possess land documents and hence neither State government collects taxes from them. But the land yields rich crops. As the inter-state boundary dispute still remains to be solved, persons with gun power and support from their militant outfits, regularly collect taxes from the weaker communities. Taxation in the area exists in an organised as well as in an unorganised manner. Some insurgent outfits collect them in an organised way while some self-styled chairmen and leaders do it in an unorganised way. Generally the militants collect it over a fixed period of time and at a fixed rate. The others do it according to their whims and fancies.

In sectors A, B and C, 'Tax' can be classified under the following heads: I) Land Tax, ii) House Tax, iii) Ransom, and iv) Random Demands. Those without a gun are the worst victims of taxation, since they have to give in to the demands of those who own guns. The neutral forces are mere spectators when cases of taxation come to their notice. Even the Assam government remains passive. In spite of numerous reports in the media the Assam

government ignores their plight. As a result the tax collectors have a hayday.

- a) **Land Tax:** Those who collect the tax claim that the disputed land belongs to them and demand crop-sharing on an annual basis. The non-Nagas have to pay them five to ten mounds (1 mound = 40 kg.) of paddy per bigha annually. Some villages have started resisting this illegal tax but only after having paid a heavy price.
- b) **House Tax:** The powerful claim also house tax of Rs 120 per year on the plea that they have settled on their land.
- c) **Ransom:** Those who resist these demands often pay a heavy ransom to the powerful who abduct their kith and kin. Even without resistance abduction seems to have become a source of easy money. The minimum amount demanded is Rs 50,000. There are instances of killing the hostages when the ransom demand is not met.
- d) **Random Demands:** This mode of taxation is very common. Anyone having a gun and wishing to earn easy money can adopt this mode to collect money even from the poor.

Thus the conflict is intensified by issues of land, security and tax. Its primary cause is the non-existence of a permanent demarcated boundary. If the central and state governments make a conscious effort to bring peace and harmony to the area, they can take meaningful steps to end these practices. Only then can the people living in the disputed territory can hope for a better tomorrow.

### Some major incidents in the Disputed Area since 1979

People living along the boundary, have been facing many tragic incidents around land, security and taxation. They have become a part of daily life now. Some of the most tragic and notable incidents have taken place in Golaghat District between 1979-1989.

### **(a) The Chungajan Carnage, 5th January 1979**

The Assam-Nagaland Border has been witnessing tension long before Nagaland was granted statehood but the situation has deteriorated due to the border dispute. Meetings between the two States have been held at the Commissioner, Chief Secretary and Chief Minister levels. At their meeting at Kohima on 2nd January 1979 the two Chief Ministers agreed to settle the border problem through bilateral discussion, to maintain the status quo and to observe the spirit of the Interim Agreements of 1972. The situation was expected to improve after this cordial discussion. There was a general expectation that a new chapter had begun with this agreement. But an organised large scale attack on 5th January 1979 shattered the dreams.

Between 3.00 a.m. and 5.00 a.m. on 5th January 1979, several villages were attacked in the Diphu, Rengma and Nambor South Reserve Forests. The attack was concentrated on the villages near Chungajan Tiniali, Chungajan Mikir village and Uriamghat. The attackers armed with daos, spears and guns killed whomever they came across and burnt their huts. They also burnt two wooden bridges on the Chungajan Rengnilpani Road. Official records reveal that as many as 54 villagers were killed and 39 injured. The police in the border outposts were taken by surprise as the attack was planned and carried out in the early hours and just after the meeting between the two Chief Ministers. Only 16 of the attackers could be apprehended. Not even the Police Patrol Party was spared. 467 huts were burnt down and about 23,500 persons of the area and its neighbourhood fled for safety. These refugees were accommodated in 13 relief camps set up at Sarupathar and Bokajan.

After this incident, the affected areas and their adjoining areas were declared 'Disturbed Area' under provisions of the Assam (Disturbed Areas) Act, 1955 and the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958. On 28th January, the Chief Ministers of

Assam and Nagaland met at Shillong to review the situation. The Chungajan carnage was the first major calculated attack by the Nagas on the non-Nagas.

### **(b) Armed Conflict of Merapani, 4-6 June 1985**

The Chungajan carnage of 1979 was followed by a series of incidents along the Assam-Nagaland border in Golaghat District. The sequence of events ultimately led to the bloody armed conflict of 1985 at Merapani and its adjoining areas. It is an irony that the conflict began when the commissioner level meeting was in progress at Chumukedima near Dimapur in the presence of the Central observer, a Joint Secretary in the ministry of Home Affairs

On 3rd June 1985, the commissioner level meeting was scheduled to be held at Chumukedima near Dimapur. The central observer could reach the meeting only on 4th June. At 5.15 p.m. on that day as the meeting was in progress, information was received that a conflict had broken out between the Naga Armed Police (NAP) accompanied by armed Naga civilians and the Assam Police in the Merapani area. Its immediate cause was the attempt to construct a permanent check-gate building at Merapani to which the Assam Government objected. But on 20<sup>th</sup> April, a Naga contractor built a fence around the check-gate. A resident Powaram Kachari alleged that he had encroached on his a private land. The officer-in-charge (OC) of Merapani Police Station requested the contractor to stop his work. When he refused to comply with the request, the fencing materials were seized and brought to the Merapani Police Station. Given the prevailing tension that could be viewed as a discriminatory act and it resulted in an armed clash between the police forces of the two sides. The timely intervention of higher level officials from both sides averted a crisis. However, that evening the Merapani police station was gheraoed by civilians demanding release of the seized materials.

In the meantime, tension was building up all along the

border. Peace initiatives were taken to ease the situation since the Commissioner level meeting was in progress at Chumukedima. But the clash began at 4.20 p.m. of 4<sup>th</sup> June, with attacks on Police Posts at Veluguri, Upper Merapani and Naghribil. The tension then spread to Sishupani and Digholpani BOPs. There was heavy firing by the police and civilians armed with sophisticated weapons. The firing continued the whole day of 5<sup>th</sup> June. Finally, on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1985, the firing came to a halt with the understanding that the Commissioner, Upper Assam Division and IGP (Border), Assam should go to Chumukedima for discussion with their counterparts.

Loss of life and property was high. “Ninety six villages involving 7,607 families were affected in the disturbances in the Merapani area. 12 schools, 16 temples, 3 mosques, one PWD Rest house, one Forest Beat Office, one Magistrate’s quarters, one Veterinary Sub-Centre, 2 Gaon Panchayat Offices, one Police Station with 5 quarters, one Forest check gate, 5 Bops, one rice mill, one kerosene oil depot, 238 shops or sheds, one Bank and two PWD bridges were destroyed. 4,386 heads of cattle were either killed or stolen. Three trucks, one jeep and one police van were damaged. Twenty eight police personnel and thirteen civilians lost their lives and 89 police personnel and 12 civilians were injured during the incident. Unofficial sources state that the loss of life and property and the casualty numbers were much higher.

The affected people were sheltered in 46 relief camps opened in different parts of Golaghat District. Initially 32,229 people were accommodated. The armed conflict of Merapani has gone down in history as an example of bitter hostility between the two otherwise friendly peoples. The memory of those fateful days continues to haunt the people. The tension continues and peace has become elusive.

#### **(C) The Massacre of Rajapukhuri, 7th April 1989**

The Merapani armed conflict was followed by the 7th April

1989 killings of Rajapukhuri village under Sarupathar P.S. in sector B of Dhansiri sub-division in Golaghat district. The three villages are inhabited by the Adivasis and the Muslims of Hokai, a village established by one Hokai Sema, adjacent to Rajapukhuri No.3. Tension had been building up in the area as Hokai Sema had been demanding the withdrawal of the Muslim families from the villages for four to five years before 1989. As time passed, it became a land issue and on the fateful night of 7th April 1989, an attack was carried out in the three villages of Rajapukhuri. Houses were burnt, domestic animals were killed, men, women and children were brutally slaughtered! The sleeping folk of Rajapukhuri were taken by surprise. On the following day, the non-Nagas burnt down Hokai village and killed many Nagas. The retaliation would have been greater but for the timely intervention of Fr. Mathew Chanikuzhy, Parish Priest of Lachitgaon Catholic Church.

According to official records, the death toll was 25 with 15 injured and 178 houses burnt down. Unofficial sources speak of a much higher toll. The common people still complain that the killings could have been prevented, had the Administration of Assam taken precautionary measures. They also question the role of the neutral forces because they do not seem to have responded to the situation. The BOPs are located close to Rajapukhuri where the killings took place but they did not come to stop them. This is a typical example of an incident due to the land dispute along the border. Such incidents have been taking place in the area regularly but the outside world does not hear about them.

#### **(d) Daldali Land Dispute, 1996**

Daldali is a small non-Naga village situated in Sector ‘D’ under Merapani PS of Golaghat District. For maintaining law and order, the village is placed under Chandanpur BOP. Approximately 30 Adivasi families live in the village established in the early 1970s close to the Naga hills. The land is very fertile and that seems to have attracted the attention of the settlers in its neighbourhood.

Because of it there has been ongoing tension between the two communities but the Assam government does not seem to have taken any steps to protect the people. On 28<sup>th</sup> May 1996, Alexius Lakra who was leading the people in their effort to save their land was brutally murdered by some armed assailants. The people of the village fearing more such attacks, left behind around 250 bighas of land and property and asked the Post Commandant of Sarupani BOP to provide them security. As a result, Chandailpur outpost was established.

A public meeting was organised in the presence of the Deputy commissioners and Border Magistrates of Golaghat and Wokha districts to bring about an amicable solution to the dispute. It was decided that the land of Daldali village would remain seized until the problem was solved. As a result many lost their land and were left homeless. However, in their absence some encroachers constructed a permanent structure adjacent to the Chandanpur outpost. To aggravate the situation the residents have been receiving regular ransom notes. The role of the neutral forces is being questioned once again on this issue. Also the local unit of the 'All Adivasi Students' Association of Assam' (AASAA) got involved in the issue. Among others they made it mandatory for the people to give up alcoholic drinks and banned giving their land to others. Also the commandant of Chandanpur outpost encouraged them in their endeavour but things took a negative turn when an inhabitant of Binaypur village was beaten up by AASAA activists for allegedly assisting the land grabbers under the influence of liquor. He lodged a complaint at the Chandanpur outpost resulting in the arrest of the President and Secretary of the Student Body of the area. They were allegedly tortured in the camp.

This turn of things diluted the effort of the people of Daldali to protect their land. They felt that the blood Alexius Lakra had shed for this cause, the torture of the student leaders and the effort of the local Mahila Samiti were futile. They have till date lost

over 250 bighas of their land and the Assam government has not helped them to protect it. The Assam administration has been a silent spectator. The public of the entire Doyang region (Sector D) allege that the neutral forces too have become silent spectators

### c) The Seed Farm Dispute

The controversial 'Seed Farm' at Velururi is one of the most burning problems in the Border dispute. It occupies headlines every now and then in the print media because of its exceptional nature. Of equal importance is the history of the 'Seed Farm' and the emergence of the dispute are recorded in the minds of the people as central to the conflict. One does not have to repeat what has already been said earlier other than to say that Sri Soneswar Bora, former Agriculture Minister in the Janata Ministry of the 1970s has written one version in his book, *Doyangor Hriday* (Heart of Doyang). It has attained importance after the clashes of 1985 and has thus become a symbol of the dispute. It has attained importance also because in June-July 1973, the Assam Government carried out a mass eviction drive in the Doyang Reserved Forest. The seed farm began after it. Thus its symbolic value is important for the dispute. It continues to be a centre of attention. The people fear that this farm may become the cause of another bloody conflict.

### d) Incidents related to Security

The situation along the Assam-Nagaland border is also affected by lack of trust between the security forces and the people and by distrust between the communities. People on both sides feel that the security forces are not neutral and are involved in tax collection and harassment of the local villagers. When persons from one side are harassed, they feel that the security forces favour the other when in reality they may be doing the same to both.

The people report one such incident that took place under the Chandanpur BOP in Golaghat District and was publicised in

the print media in May 1996. Chandanpur village, situated about 18 kilometres from Merapani is inhabited by Adivasis and Bodo Kacharis. As mentioned above on 29 May 1996 Sri Alexius Lakra of Daldali village was killed in connection with the land issue. The people allege that the CRPF of Chandanpur and Sarupani BOPs took no steps to address the issue and that they protected the killers. The reaction of the people and the later arrest of the president and secretary of the student body have already been reported above. They add that when about 200 Mahila Samiti members requested the post commandant to release them, the CRPF misbehaved with them and threatened to take action against them. As a result, the negotiations turned into heated exchange of words. In the process a CRPF jawan kicked a Mahila Samiti member. The women beat him up and demanded an apology from him. Fortunately, the jawan apologised and the student leaders were released. That ended immediate confrontation.

Of equal importance is the money that the people have to pay to the security forces to construct houses. The people allege that the neutral forces demand from them free labour and food articles such as vegetables, chickens and goats. "CRPF officials asked pardon" were the headlines in *Dainik Janambhumi* of 5th August, 2000. According to the report Hriday Karmakar, a resident of Milanpur under Sarupani CRPF camp had got verbal permission from the post Commandant to build a house. After he began to build it, the post commandant was transferred. The new commandant who was being posted there for the second time, summoned all those who were building new houses. All turned up except Hriday Karmakar. He was therefore told to come to the camp with the village headman. When he went the next day he was given a dao (knife) and told to make a sitting place for them in the camp. As he was not willing to give free labour, the CRPF personnel tied

him up and kept him under the scorching heat for a long time and forced him to do that work after it. Through a written notice he was then ordered to demolish his house within three days. He challenged the order and continued the construction work. Hriday understood that the Commandant wanted Rs 1,500, the amount which the others had given him but he refused to pay it. Instead he got the permission from the Border Magistrate, had the paper countersigned by the Sector commandant and given to the Gaon Burah to be submitted in the camp.

The Commandant seems to have felt humiliated so 3 jawans were sent to Hriday's house around 3 a.m. They asked him to report to the camp but he refused. After a message was flashed to the camp the commandant came with more jawans and surrounded the house. Hriday had in the meantime locked himself in a room. His wife and 2 daughters had gone to meet the Deputy Commissioner at Golaghat. The jawans broke down the house and forcefully opened the door of the room. Hriday took a spear to attack them but decided to surrender. Before taking him to the camp the jawans took away Rs 3,500 from his house, collected the spear and knives and reported at the Merapani thana that he had attacked them while patrolling. When he returned from the camp he was soaked in blood. The Commandant called a meeting of the Gaon Burahs and accused him of attacking the CRPF. At the meeting it was decided that Hriday should construct a Durga Mandir at Milanpur as punishment for his disobedience and attacking the jawans.

However, on the following day the DC Golaghat visited the spot together with the border magistrate and a doctor, found Hriday in a serious physical condition and got him admitted at the Golaghat Civil Hospital. At a peace meeting that followed the public accused the jawans of barbaric acts after which the Deputy Commandant apologised on their behalf. Hriday also claims that apart from his refusal to pay them money, another reason for ill treating him



was that the Post Commandant wanted his daughter to teach them Assamese in the camp. They refused to go since they suspected ulterior motives.

Another case concerns the death of Jiwan Bara who hailed from No.1 Amguri village under Sarupathar P.S. in Dhansiri subdivision of Golaghat District, 1 km from the camp of 3<sup>rd</sup> APBN, posted at M.V Chungajan. The APBN camp is the gateway to Amguri Village. Jiwan Bara was a talented football player and a regular member of the village football team. On 14th September, 2003, the village team that won the finals of a football tournament at Lahorijan near Dimapur was returning to Amguri amidst jubilation. That day coincided with the 'Raising Day' of the 3<sup>rd</sup> APBN and the M.V. Chungajan camp was in a festive mood. The victorious Amguri team arrived at the M. V. Chungajan camp gate around 7.00 p.m. The jawans who were drunk asked the team not to proceed to Amguri. Jiwan Bara who had gone ahead, hearing the commotion near the gate rushed back to see what the matter was. The situation had gone beyond control and some of team members were allegedly taken to the camp and beaten up. The agitated crowd tried to enter the camp and the jawans opened fire. Jiwan Bara received bullet injuries and succumbed immediately to them. A few others too were injured. The agitated mob decided to burn down the camp but fortunately some others dissuaded them from doing it.

This incident like many others raises questions about the neutral standing and behaviour of this force, so does the report in *Pratidin* of 18th March 2004, that the CRPF Jawans committed theft on 16th March, 2004, at Davidpur. While patrolling the village the jawans found a newly constructed house which they inspected and enquired about its owner. The woman of the house said that she was the owner. At this stage the jawans are reported to have felt hurt, opened the house forcefully and demanded that the fish that was in the house be given to them. In this case the people planned to attack the camp but were dissuaded from doing so. Instead, when the jawans returned after patrolling the area, around 400 women surrounded them, accused them of theft and confiscated

the fish, vegetables, knives and an axe they had allegedly stolen. The argument continued from 10.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m. A jawan who tried to resist was injured. The incident ended when the Post Commandant came and apologised and also told them that they needed no permission to construct houses but would only need to inform the Post Commandant through the Gaon Burah.

Another crime attributed to the CRPF jawans stationed in the Merapani area is the death of a Naga young man on 13<sup>th</sup> September, 2004. According to a news item in *The Sentinel* of 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> September 2004, the CRPF patrol shot at two motor cycle borne Naga young men when they did not heed a signal to stop. The pillion-rider was seriously injured and died on the spot. The next day, the Naga women of the area came out in big numbers to protest against it. They shouted slogans, broke open the gate, burnt the bamboo fencing of the camp and demanded that the body be buried in front of the 61 CRPF camp since it is their custom to bury a person where he dies in an accident. They threatened to attack the camp again if not given permission. The Golaghat administration that had taken charge of the dead body delayed handing it over because they wanted to bury the young man in front of the camp. That also caused tension between the Nagas and the Assamese residing in the Merapani area who thought that it was not proper to bury the body near the camp and demonstrated against it. Later at a peace meeting between the Nagas and Assamese it was agreed that the body would be buried in the area where the Nagas are a majority.

These and other incidents, some of them major and others minor, show what a conflict can lead to. The security forces are sent to protect them but they can become a threat to the people. Whatever the case, it is clear that there is lack of trust between the people and the neutral force. They feel that they use the agreement on prior permission to build houses to make money. The Mahila Samiti has therefore been demanding a genuinely neutral force in

the area. It also shows the ease with which an incident can take a communal turn. In the last case, for example, the Naga women reacted to the murder of a young man but it turned into a Naga-Assamese conflict. The latter thought that the Nagas who were trying to adhere to their custom were using the incident to take control of some land in the area where they are a minority. These and other incidents show the lack of trust on one side between the people and what are supposed to be neutral force and on the other between the communities. Because of lack of trust a minor incident can turn into a major conflagration. Lack of trust has to be dealt with for peace to return. Focus today is on the territory and on law and order. The people may be ignored in the process and the security forces can cause more insecurity. In the process, distrust between the people can grow.

#### **Chief Minister Level Meetings, Inquiry Commissions and Agreements**

Since the early 1970s a series of meetings at different levels have taken place to solve the long standing border dispute. The Centre has appointed inquiry commissions and a number of agreements have been signed between Assam and Nagaland to bring about a lasting solution but there has been no result till today. In 1972, four Interim Agreements were signed between the Governments of Assam and Nagaland, through the mediation of Shri KVK Sundaram of the one man commission on the Assam-Nagaland border problem and Adviser in the Ministry of Home Affairs. The role of the Commission was to:

Ascertain the facts regarding the Assam-Nagaland boundary and the need for any adjustment, having regard to all the facts of the situation including the provisions of section 3 of the state of Nagaland Act, 1962. He will consult the Chief Ministers of the two State Governments and such other persons as he considers necessary. He will try to bring about an agreed solution likely to promote

the welfare and interest of the people of the States and to create faith and good will between them. He will also put forward suggestions if necessary, to maintain peace and tranquility in the border areas pending his final advice.

Having toured the border area on both sides and after consulting government representatives and people of different walks of life of both states, Shri KVK Sundaram submitted his Report in 1976.

Then followed letter 325 - PMO/79 (40-42) of 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1979 from the prime minister to the Chief Minister of Nagaland, in the wake of the Chungajan carnage of 5<sup>th</sup> January 1979. The prime minister asked the CM to adopt measures to check such incidents in the future.

Then came the meeting between the two chief ministers at Shillong to review the situation after the Chungajan killings of 5<sup>th</sup> January 1979. The two Chief Ministers agreed to intensify the efforts to restore normalcy in the affected areas, apprehend the miscreants and maintain the status quo. Then followed the meeting between the Home Ministers of India with the Governors, chief ministers of the two States in Delhi on 28th January 1979. They sought to work out a permanent solution to the issue of the lingering Assam-Nagaland border problem. After the armed conflict of Merapani on 4-6 June 1985, on 24th June a meeting was held at the Kohima Raj Bhavan between the two chief ministers. On 21st August the Centre appointed the one-man B. C. Mathur Commission but on 11th November dropped him from the Commission without assigning a reason and appointed R. K. Shastri in his place. The Shastri commission of inquiry submitted its report in 1987.

#### **Interactions**

The present research study was undertaken in very sensitive areas where the conflict had taken place. It has touched the hearts

and minds of the people. The territorial conflict has affected every individual of the inter-state border area.

Initially, the people of either side looked with suspicion. They hesitated to open their mouth and even suspected the researchers to be Government agents. However, our vivid explanation of the work cleared the doubts from their minds. Visits, meetings and interactions gradually resulted in a series of activities undertaken in the context of the age-old conflict which has been tormenting them. Some of the activities taken up by the non-Nagas can be summarised as follows:

**(a) Meeting with village leaders**

The present researchers made it a point to meet the village headmen, secretaries and elders after entering a village. After hearing about the purpose of the visit they were very accommodative. The preliminary meetings paved the way for the meetings to follow. The leaders eagerly listened to what the researchers had to say and participated actively in the discussion. They narrated their tales of hardship and tragedy which were the outcome of the age-old border dispute.

**(b) Village and Circlewise meetings**

Having interacted with the present researchers, the village leaders felt it necessary to discuss the impact of the Assam-Nagaland territorial dispute with the rest of the village. As a result, they organised meetings circlewise. The general public was made aware of the prevailing situation along the border. The people themselves came forward with suggestions to deal with problem of the sensitive border area. They were especially worried about land issues in the area. Nevertheless, they were determined to protect their land, property and rights as Indian citizens.

**(c) Meeting with Gaon Bura (Village Headman's) Association**

Meeting with the 100 strong Gaon Buras of Ghulapani area was an exceptional experience. Under the initiative of Mr. Levi Tuti, president

of the Gaon Bura Association, 100 heads of villages had gathered at Ghulapani. Determination was written strong on their faces as they expressed their views. The meeting provided much information and data. They have been maintaining records of families, land occupied by each family and important events. The village headmen are ably supported by their secretaries in maintaining records.

**(d) Meeting with Student Organisations**

The role of the Student Organisations is important in maintaining peace and tranquility along the Assam-Nagaland border areas. Student Bodies play a vital role in making the people aware of their constitutional rights and pressurising the government. They also contribute towards the unity of the people. Some of the non-Naga Student Bodies active in these areas are: The All Assam Students union (AASU), All Adivasi Students Association of Assam (AASAA), All Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association (AATTSA), All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), All Assam Nepali Students' Union (AANSU). The Naga Students Federation (NSF) is the leading Naga Student Body active on the Nagaland side. In addition, the North East Students Organisation (NESO) is the forum of the Student Bodies of Northeast India active in matters of Assam-Nagaland border dispute. It was learnt that these student Organisations have been instrumental in maintaining peace and harmony among the people in the region and pressurising the respective governments in taking initiatives to find a lasting solution to the vexed border issue.

**(e) Meeting with Mahila Samities**

There are a number of Women's organisations functioning in the disputed Assam-Nagaland border areas. One of them is the Adivasi Mahila Samiti of Doyang area in D Sector. The Samiti under the leadership of Mrs. Sukesi Ekka has distinguished itself by confronting the neutral forces. The Samiti, time and again stood up to the atrocities committed against the simple and peace

loving people of the area. It has especially succeeded in providing security to the menfolk from the harassment of the neutral forces. As a result, of late, the security personnel have put a check on their unjust activities in the area.

#### **(f) Meeting with Border Coordination Committees**

The Assam- Nagaland Border Coordination Committee, under the aegis of the All Adivasi Students' Association of Assam is a new body formed in 2004. The Committee was formed to protect and fight for the rights of the people of the Assam-Nagaland border areas in the districts of Golaghat and Karbi Anglong in Assam. It has been, time and again, pressurising the Assam Government and the Central government to find a permanent solution to the age-old border dispute between Assam and Nagaland. The Assam-Nagaland Border Coordination Students' Union (ANBCSU) is a major Border Coordination Committee, comprises four Student Bodies of Assam, viz., the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), the All Assam tea tribes Students' Association (AATTSA) and the All Assam Nepali Students' Union (AANSU). The researchers had the opportunity of meeting the leaders of these Student Bodies on 9<sup>th</sup> July, 2004 on the occasion of their 100hr. hunger strike at Golaghat against the barbaric lathi charge by Security Forces on peaceful protestors of the Doyang Mukti Samiti and Brihatar Tengani Union Sangram Samiti on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2004.

#### **(g) Doyang Mukti Sangram Samiti and Brihatar Tengani Union Sangram Samiti**

Doyang Mukti Sangram Samiti and Brihatar Tengani Union Sangram Samiti are the two organisations from the Doyang Region in D sector. They are revolutionary in nature and were formed with a view to protect the rights of the poor farming community of the Doyang and Tengani region. They came into focus in 2004 when this led the general public of Doyang

and Tengani to demonstrate at Golaghat to press the Assam government to protect their land from Naga encroachers and demand pattas.

The researchers had the opportunity to interact with the leaders of the two organisations on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2004 during their mass rally at Golaghat. From the interaction it was evident that fear, tensions and uncertainty prevail in people's minds. Any development in the area is viewed with suspicion. The mass response of the people speaks volumes to this effect. On the other hand, the unjustified lathi charge and use of tear gas on peaceful protestors by the Golaghat Administration was instrumental in creating a bitter relationship between the Administration and the Organisation.

#### **(h) Dispur and Delhi Chalo Programmes**

The Delhi Chalo programme was undertaken by the Assam-Nagaland Border Coordination Committee under the leadership of AASAA on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2004. On the other hand, the Doyang Mukti Sangram Samiti and the Brihatar Tengani Union Sangram Samiti had taken up a Dispur Chalo program on 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2005. It concluded on 19<sup>th</sup> March at Merapani.

These movements have gone down in history as struggles of the people of Doyang and Tengani region to protect their land and rights. In addition, a number of local programmes have been organised at the initiative of the people themselves.

#### **(i) Dharnas, Processions and Submission of Memoranda**

A series of programmes have been taken up in connection with the long-standing border dispute to pressurise the State and Central Governments during 2004 by the people of the Assam-Nagaland border areas in collaboration with the people of Golaghat and Karbi Anglong districts. Different political parties joined them. Some of the notable programmes undertaken were the mass rally organised by the Doyang Mukti Sangram Samiti and the Brihatar Tengani Union Sangram Samiti on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2004 at Golaghat, 100 hr. hunger

strike by the Assam-Nagaland Border Coordination Students' Union (ANBCSU) starting on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2004., memorandum submitted by Assam-Nagaland Border coordination Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2004 to the Prime Minister and the Home Minister and dharna by the Doyang Suraksha Mancha (DSM) on 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2004. All these programmes received mass public support from the affected areas of Assam.

#### **(j) Documentation**

During the course of visits and interactions of the researchers it was learnt that the people inhabiting the Assam-Nagaland border do not own the land they occupy and cultivate. It is because those areas are still reserved forest land, not declared revenue land even though practically no forest remains. As a result, the people do not have pattas and they cannot pay taxes to the government. The people are only recognised as Protected Encroachers.

However, they can obtain certain documents in support of their occupation of the land. They can get the documents duly signed by competent magistrates on stamped papers as affidavits. In addition, the village headmen and secretaries maintain village registers, showing the number of families with members, amount of land they occupy, etc. These documents are to be renewed annually. It was discovered that in A,B and C sectors these documents have been maintained properly. But in D sector the records have to be updated.

The positive side of this effort has been the keen desire of the people for updating their records. They have realised that these documents will become vital, once these lands are declared revenue land. They will form the basis for getting pattas then. They have also realised the importance of the forest conservation Act 1980, according to which no encroachers of Reserve Forests can be recognised as Protected Encroachers till they are declared settlers.

On the side of the of Naga settlers it is evident that there is a close coordination between the Nagaland government, the general

public and the insurgent outfits. The Nagas have been fulfilling the norms for constructing houses by obtaining permission from border magistrates of both Assam and Nagaland. Their records have been maintained with care. Above all, the Nagaland Government is always ready to assist them in times of need. Unlike their Assam counterparts they feel more secure with regard to documentation, The village headmen also deserve credit in this regard.

#### **Some Conclusions**

As stated in the beginning, the researchers interacted with the village leaders, government officials, security personnel and others and checked the documentation. Their records show that the villages in A,B,C, and D sectors were established after 1963. Lachitgaon was the first to be established under the leadership of Sansay Toppo. The other villages followed after clearing the forest. Initially the "landlords" asked for a meager contribution but seeing the rich crop they raised their demand. That is one of the causes of the conflict. The Golaghat district administration states that with the rise in the population of the settlers after they encroached on the forest conflicts started between the Nagas and non-Nagas. They attribute the Chungajan conflicts of 1979, Merapani in 1985 and Rajapukhuri in 1989 to this cause. The opinion of the general public is conditioned by the community they belong to. The non-Naga public leaders think that the conflict began with the encroachment of Assam land by Nagas with the help of Nagaland government and insurgent outfits.

Thus, opinions differ but what is clear is that the inaction of the Centre and the two governments is at the basis of the conflict. Other components add to it. After every major incident, the Government has appointed a commission. One or the other State Government has rejected their reports. The Commissions have thus functioned more as delaying tactics than as a search for a solution. It is important to deal with that aspect. The leaders tended initially to reflect the standpoint of their own community. For example, the student leaders state emphatically that they will not give an inch

of land to the other side. They would like the political leaders of different parties to cross the party line and unitedly fight for the cause of their territorial integrity. The student leaders are also critical of the role of neutral forces in this regard.

Thus, the issue seems to have reached a dead end. The Centre is dragging its feet and the States do not show much interest in a solution. The leaders represent their own community. They feel that the failure of the state governments to solve the issue amicably has led them to the Supreme Court. The final verdict is awaited. While Nagaland opts for an out-of-court settlement, Assam favours a court ruling. The leaders are not certain that the verdict of either process will be accepted without people's involvement. In its absence, the criminal elements seem to get the upper hand. The people feel that the security forces meant to be neutral, are in reality partial. It is difficult to come to a conclusion on this issue. One can only say that corruption seems to be rampant among them. Political leaders exploit the situation to their own advantage.

After much discussion many leaders came round to the view that the conflict should not be treated as a territorial dispute between Assam and Nagaland and as a law and order problem. Many leaders said that the people have to get priority and that the tension can be defused through dialogue between the two communities that can co-exist peacefully. Since many of the settlers on both sides are Christians they felt that the churches can play a role in bringing them together but the State too should intervene in it.

### Conclusion

The conflict has been lingering and the people are the sufferers. The two state governments have been accusing each other when peace should be their highest priority. A dialogue is required that can lead to a certain amount of give and take. There are four Interim Agreements whose spirit can be used as the starting point for a dialogue in which the churches can play a major role because a majority of the Nagas and 15-20% on the Assamese side are

Christians. As some church leaders said, they need to begin with the foundation that like every religious person, a true Christian has to shun violence. As Nakuland Nriame, a student of Gauhati University said in a letter to the editor of *The Sentinel* on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2004, "Gun and bloodshed has become our motto, where has the word of Jesus Christ "Peace and Brotherhood" vanished? I wonder, I feel ashamed to call myself a Naga."

After this starting point the two sides have to face the real issues beginning with lack of trust between them. It has been created by persons with a vested interest in division among them. Some of them have a political interest and others like the criminal elements have a financial interest in the conflict. The security forces can develop a vested interest if it becomes a source of income for them through corruption. A major task of the the facilitators is to break this vicious circle of crime, corruption, criminalisation and political votebanks. Secondly, civil society groups need to intervene in a positive way. They may begin with legal and developmental activities. The people living along the border are deprived of the State's developmental schemes and basic necessities like health facilities, education, drinking water and electricity. The State governments claim that they are unable to implement them due to opposition from their counterparts. Civil society groups can come forward with common developmental and joint cultural programmes, sports activities and others that can help the two communities, their youth in particular to interact with each other. Also legal aspects have to be attended to. A major problem of most settlers is the absence of land records. That facilitates corruption since criminal elements take charge and exploit them. It is important to put all the records in order.

Peace parleys are useful but they require the foundation of mutual trust and hope of dealing with the issues that divide the people. Civil society groups can be instrumental in it and in dialoguing with the student bodies. They may also find ways of putting pressure on the Centre and the Supreme Court to expedite

matters because people are paying the price of their delays. Once the Centre or the Supreme Court give their decision, it is not certain that all will accept it. Church and civil society leaders can through peace talks create a climate of give and take that makes it possible for both to come to a compromise.

Such processes are required also because the economies of these two communities are interdependent. The Nagas depend on the non-Nagas for their rations and other commodities while the non-Nagas depend on the Nagas for their income. No buying and selling takes place if one side is absent. Merapani town is an example. After every payment of monthly salary, Nagas come down to Merapani for shopping. Examples of such markets where business takes place are Ghualapani, Nakhuti and Ampha in sector B, Uriamghat and Bidyapur in Sector C, Ratanpur, Dayalpur and Sarupani in sector D. These markets can very well serve as grounds for exchange of peace resources. Besides, many Nagas depend on non-Naga labourers to cultivate their land on the basis of daily wages or as share croppers. The non-Nagas depend on the Nagas for their firewood and house construction materials.

These are some of the meeting points. One can mention many more such as schools like the one of Ghulapani managed by a non-Naga but both Naga and Assamese students study there. What is required is trust that can be built up through various measures. While doing it, one cannot ignore the fact that many have a vested interest in their division and they will put obstacles on their way. While pushing for peace, ways have to be found of getting the cooperation of these elements or of neutralising them.

### **END NOTES**

1. Bhubenewar Bhattacharyya, *The Troubled Border* (Guwahati : 995).
2. *Ibid*, P. 10
3. Note submitted by the Government of Assam to the Advisor on Assam Nagaland Boundary, 1, May 1972.
4. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, P. 11.
5. *Ibid*, P. 16

6. Devojit Phukan, *Asom nagaland Sima Samashya* (Golaghat : Phukon Grantha Prakashan, 2001), P. 28.
7. *Ibid*, P. 30
8. *Ibid*.
9. *Ibid*, P. Introduction.
10. *Ibid*.
11. Report of the Advisor Shri K.V.K. Sundaram on Assam-Nagaland Boundary, 1976.
12. *Ibid*.
13. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.* P. 17.
14. Phukan *op. cit.*, P. 23.
15. *Ibid*.
16. *Ibid*, P. 25.
17. *Ibid*, P. 26
18. *Ibid*, P. 27
19. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, P. 24.
20. *Ibid*, P. 26.
21. Sonewar Bora, *Merapani Ashanta Kiyo?* P. 1.
22. *Doyangar Hridoi* (Golaghat : 2004), P. 11.
23. *The Telegraph, Northeast* (16 February, 2004)
24. *The Assam Tribune* (27 October, 2004).
25. Sonewar Bora, *Doyang* (Guwahati : 2 October, 1973), P. 2.
26. *Ibid*.
27. Phukan *op. cit.*, P.67.
28. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, P. 1
29. *The Assam Tribune* (27 October, 2004).
30. Phukan *op. cit.*, P. 46.
31. Bhattacharyya, *op. cit.*, P. 20.
32. *Ibid*, P. 23.
33. *Ibid*, P. 24.
34. Minutes of the meeting between Chief Ministers of Assam and Nagaland held on 13-04-1979.
35. Bhattacharyya, *op.cit.*, P. 24.
36. Facts about Assam-Nagaland Boarder (Government of Assam, July 1985).
37. *Ibid*.
38. *Ibid*.
39. Minutes of the meeting dated 28-1-1979 between the Chief Ministers of Assam and Nagaland.
40. Bhattacharyya, *op.cit.*, P. 69.
41. Facts about Assam-Nagaland Border (Government of Assam, July 1985).
42. Report of the Adviser Shri K.V.K. Sundaram on Assam-Nagaland Bound-

ary.  
43. Phukan op.cit., P. 93.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. Bhattacharyya, Bhubaneswar, *The Troubled Border*, Shri Khagendra Narayan Dutta Baruah, Guwahati, 1995.
2. Bora, Sonewar, *Doyang*, Golaghat, 2 October, 1973.
3. *Merapani, Ashanto Kiyo?*
4. *Doyangar Chakulu*, Golaghat, 6 July, 2004.
5. *Doyangar Hirdoi*, Golaghat, 9 August, 2004.
6. Phukan, Devojit, *Asom Nagaland Sima Samasya*, Rashmi Phukon, Phukan Grantha Prakashan, Golaghat, December 2001.
7. *Note submitted by the Government of Assam to Advisor on Assam-Nagaland Boundary, 1976.*
8. *Report of the Advisor Shri K.V.K. Sundaram on Assam-Nagaland Boundary, 1976.*
9. *Minutes of the Meeting dated 18-1-1979 between the Chief Ministers of Assam and Nagaland.*
10. *Minutes of the meeting between the Chief Ministers of Assam and Nagaland held on 13-4-1979.*



**RESPONSE OF THE YOUTH TO THE  
KARBI-KUKI CONFLICT IN KARBI  
ANGLONG**

*Joseph Damzen*

**1. Introduction**

Amid the conflicts in the Northeast is the one of Karbi Anglong. During the last ten years there have been conflicts between the Karbi and Kuki, Pnar and Dimas. That has turned the district into one of ongoing conflicts. The study done on this issue is on one of them. It is an effort to understand the Karbi-Kuki conflict and the possibilities of peace.

**The Region**

Karbi Anglong, the land of the Karbi tribe is in Assam which is an ancient land with a rich cultural heritage and a meeting ground of people of diverse races, cultures and civilisations. Its fertile land, rich natural and forest resources, flora and fauna encouraged the wandering tribes, communities and groups of people to settle down and contribute with their diverse cultures and racial backgrounds to the fusion of a new community. Karbi Anglong with its geographical area of 10,332 sq. km. is its biggest district in area with a population of 8,12,320 in 2001. Most of its inhabitants are of the Mongoloid stock belonging to the Karbi, Dimas, Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Kuki, and Rengma Naga tribes. Also some Adivasi, Assamese, Bengali, Nepali and others inhabit the district. Thus it shares the distinction of being a melting pot for people of different cultures, races and languages.

The district lies between 25°30 and 26°41 North latitude and between 72°7 and 93°52 East longitude. It is bound by Nagaon and Golaghat districts to the North, North Cachar Hills district to



the South, the State of Meghalaya to the West and Nagaland to the East. Its average altitude is 740 mtrs MSL but the Kopili, Jamuna and the Dhansiri valleys have an average altitude of 200 mtrs. The district is rich in natural resources like forests, limestone, coal, tea and wildlife. The district headquarters of Diphu has a railway station and good transport and communications network with the rest of the State and region. Karbi Anglong has three civil subdivisions at Diphu, Hamren and Bokajan. The official language is English while Assamese, Karbi, Bengali and Hindi are some of the languages commonly spoken here.

**Karbi Anglong is administrated by the Autonomous District Council** constituted in 1951 under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution under Articles 214 (2) and 275 (1). The formation of Karbi Anglong in 1951 led to the immigration of Karbis from other areas. Karbis are recognised as a Sixth Scheduled Hill tribe which provides them special privileges, provision for reservation and protection from exploitation by other tribes and communities because they live in a Sixth Schedule District.

### Tracing the Background of the Conflict

For the purpose of the study, it is important to know about the two main Hill tribes of Karbi Anglong that were parties to the Karbi-Kuki conflict. A brief description of their historical and cultural background may be helpful.

#### The Karbis

The Karbis who were formerly known as Mikirs belong to the Mongoloid stock and are a part of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group. Anthropologists place them linguistically between the Kuki and Naga tribes. The Karbis inhabit Karbi Anglong, North Cachar Hills, Golaghat, Nagaon and Kamrup districts of Assam, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh. They came to inhabit the Northeast region before the coming

of the Ahoms in the early thirteenth century. Scholars and anthropologists agree that along with other tribes of the same language groups, the Karbis have their origin in Mongolia and reached here after several centuries. Barelong Terang writes that the Karbis along with other tribes fled from China to avoid persecution from the Chinese rulers.<sup>1</sup> To avoid confrontation with hostile tribes, they again moved from Myanmar to Manipur and Nagaland.<sup>2</sup> After staying in Manipur for about 500 years they, along with some Kuki and Naga groups migrated to the Barak Valley in Assam leaving the rest of the tribes like Lotha, Ao and other Naga and Kuki groups in the hills of Nagaland and Manipur.<sup>3</sup>

The Karbis have five clans, namely- (i) Ingti, (ii) Terang, (iii) Teron, (iv) Timung and (v) Inghi. All the clans follow complete exogamy. Marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited. They do not practise polygamy. Marriage of a male with his maternal uncle's daughter is preferred. The family structure is patriarchal and the line of descent is traced through the male descendants.

Traditionally they are an agricultural tribe practising Jhum or slash and burn cultivation. They prefer to live on the hilltops like the other hill tribes of the region. Karbi villages are scattered and distant from one another. Their men are skilled in bamboo, cane and woodcraft. Women are good weavers. The traditional handloom system of attaching the loom to the waist of the weaver is similar to the Kuki and Naga handloom system.

Though the spread of Christianity in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century contributed greatly to the spread of modern education and their change of outlook, a vast majority of the Karbis still follow their traditional beliefs and religion. Rites and rituals like Chomangkan (a socio-religious ceremony) are woven into their social system. One of their major festivals, Rongker is celebrated annually in the villages on a community basis to

appease the territorial deity for the welfare of the village and to ward off diseases and natural calamities. Hacha Kekan is performed after the harvest of paddy where people pray for the protection of crops from pests.

### The Kukis

The Kukis, a Schedule Hill tribe, belong to the Mongoloid stock and the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group. Kuki is a generic term for a large number of sub-tribes and clans that are closely allied. Dr. Thangkhomang S. Gangte refers to 20 tribes or clans of the Kuki-Chin-Mizo linguistic group recognized as Scheduled Tribes in Manipur as Kuki. They are Aimol, Anal, Chiru, Chothe, Gangte, Hmar, Koirao, Koirang, Kom, Lamkang, Moyon, Mizo, Paite, Purum, Ralte, Simte, Sukte, Thadou, Vaiphe and Zou. They are believed to have originated in China from where they went to Tibet before reaching Myanmar. Today they inhabit many stretches from Nagaland, North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong and Manipur in India to Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and some parts of Myanmar. According to Ms. Nazmeen Anarn their migration into Karbi Anglong in the erstwhile Sibsagar district took place after the Kuki Rebellion of 1917-19. In Karbi Anglong one group inhabits some pockets of Hamren subdivision and a second one inhabits the Singhason-Khanbomon Hill range of Diphu sub-division.

In their tradition marriage within the clan is neither prohibited nor encouraged. So they do not follow complete exogamy but prefer the marriage of a man with the maternal uncle's daughter. They too do not practise polygamy and they have a traditional system of bride price or *man*. The family structure is patriarchal as the line of descent is traced through the man. Like the Karbi they too are *Jhum* cultivators and prefer to settle down on hilltops. Their villages are a cluster of houses built close to each other as protection from alien raiders. A majority of them have converted to Christianity but they adhere to most of their traditions, culture, laws and habits,

rites and rituals such as bride price or *Man*, *Chang-ai*, *Sa-ai*, *Chon*, etc. Their most important festival is *Chavang Kut*, celebrated after the harvest to glorify and thank the supreme being *Panthein* for blessing them with prosperity and peace.

### Circumstances leading to the Karbi-Kuki conflict

The two tribes have similarities in their origin, culture, traditions and way of life. The conflict that took place was a result of certain events that changed their outlook about each other and led the conflicting parties to develop certain attitudes and perceptions. One can mention the following as the main events that led to it:

#### i) Kuki Migration

As mentioned above the Kukis inhabit some areas under Hamren sub-division and the Singhason-Khanbomon hill ranges under Diphu sub-division. According to the 1961 census, 2,914 persons returned Kuki as their mother tongue. By 1991 their number reached 21,883. Their number according to the 2001 census is not known but the Kuki Inpi, the apex body of the tribe claims that according to its internal census, they are about 35,000 in Karbi Anglong at present. This rapid increase has contributed to the belief about Kuki immigration. The socio-political events in Nagaland in the 1980s as well as the Naga-Kuki (1992-93) and the Kuki-Paite (1994-95) clashes in Manipur forced many of them to look for better opportunities elsewhere. The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) then under the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) permitted many of them to settle down in the Singhason and Khonbamon Hills. So it is safe to believe that the migration of Kukis did take place. Though some of them may have merged with the earlier settlers in the Hamren sub-division, the larger group was settled in Singhason Khonbamon Hills.

## ii) The KRC and the ASDC (U)-KNA MOU

The Kukis have got involved in the socio-political events of Karbi Anglong. Many of them have been part of the movement for autonomous statehood for Karbi Anglong and NC Hills. During the ASDC rule in the KAAC, Apao Hangsing, a Kuki party member was appointed the Chairman of the Minority Board of the district. P. Lhouvhum, another Kuki party member was nominated to the council to represent them in the KAAC. After the emergence of the Kuki National Assembly (KNA) in Karbi Anglong many of them thought that a Kuki Regional Council (KRC) within Karbi Anglong would enable them to preserve their identity and develop. The KNA first raised the demand for a KRC in 1992 through a Memorandum to the State Government. It later had two rounds of negotiations with the State Government in 1998 and 1999.

The ASDC split in 2000 due to factionalism. Both factions tried to retain the name of ASDC. The faction led by Dr. Jayanta Rongpi aligned with the CPI (ML) and was renamed ASDC (Progressive) while the faction led by Holiram Terang was named ASDC (United). In 2004, due to the ruling of the Election Commission, ASDC (P) had to rename itself CPI (ML). ASDC (U) was permitted to retain the name of ASDC. In 2001 the ASDC signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the leaders of the KNA. The most important among its four points is the recognition of the Kukis as a traditional ally in the Autonomous Statehood movement and that the ASDC (U) would recommend the Autonomous Regional Council under the Sixth Schedule.

## iii. Emergence of Karbi and Kuki Extremist Groups

As mentioned earlier, Karbi Anglong has been struggling to achieve statehood. Seeing the lukewarm response from the State and Central Governments and the failure of the processes, some groups decided to use armed struggle as a means to achieve their goal. Two such groups, the Karbi People's Force (KPF) and the Karbi National

Volunteers (KNV) formed a United Front on 21st May 1999 and named it the United Peoples' Democratic Solidarity (UPDS). The UPDS sought to realise the dream of a separate self-determined institution or independent Karbi Anglong and NC Hills and also aimed to accelerate the socio-cultural and economic upliftment of the people of the two districts. The UPDS later split due to disagreement over whether to hold negotiations with the Centre or not. One faction agreed to have negotiations while the other faction led by H.E. Kathar decided to stay away. The H.E. Kathar faction of UPDS has been renamed as the KLNLF.

The Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) was similarly formed in Manipur with the aim of using armed struggle as a means of achieving a separate homeland for the Kuki and work for the socio-cultural, political and economic upliftment of its people. The KRA (Karbi Anglong Unit) was formed in 2000-01.

Tension grew between KLNLF and KRA since both were operating in the Singhason-Khonbamon Hills and they did not confine extortion or tax collection to their own community. Many minor skirmishes took place between the two groups and at times innocent villagers became victims. Another reason for the tension between them was the UPDS ban on jhum cultivation in the Singhason Khonbamon Hills on the grounds that it resulted in ecological damage. Both the communities follow this method of cultivation but the Kuki farmers had started growing ginger on a large scale and were developing economically.

## The effects of the Karbi-Kuki conflict

Because of the Karbi-Kuki conflict, hundreds of persons of both sides were killed, countless people were injured and many villagers were reported missing after the attacks. Several villages of both the communities were destroyed completely. Some of the other developments as a result of the conflict are given below.

## Creation of an atmosphere of fear and mistrust

The most important result of the conflict is a feeling of distrust and fear of “the other tribe”. It was impossible for the villagers of Singhason and in its neighbourhood to continue to live in that region. A few days after clashes began between the KLNLF and KRA, many villagers of this area fled their homes leaving their fields and other belongings behind. They avoided carefully areas where the other tribe was in a majority. Village Defence Parties were formed in many villages and an atmosphere of fear developed in the district. Many of them fled to safer areas within the district and others like NC Hills. Most Kuki villagers took shelter in Nagaland and Manipur where some relief camps were set up for them. According to newspaper reports, nearly 2,000 Kuki victims took shelter in relief camps outside the district.

Many persons from both sides had to take shelter in the relief camps that were set up soon after the conflict began. The camps were set up in community halls, government schools and office buildings in towns like Manja, Longnit, Hidipi, Rongplimlam, Dillai, Khatkhati, Bokajan, Upper Deopani etc. The District Administration took steps to provide help to the victims soon after the relief camps were set up. Also social, youth, Church, political and Non-Governmental Organisations came forward to help the victims of the conflict who had taken shelter in these camps. Food materials, medicines, clothes, blankets and other necessary articles were donated by the people of the area who were not affected directly by the conflict.

The State and District administration called in the army after some time as the Police were unable to control the activities of the KLNLF and the KRA. The Army operations were partly successful in bringing down the violence but with their introduction in Singhason and nearby areas, there were reports of army atrocities on the villagers. Since the General Elections were approaching in June 2004, most political parties tried to take advantage of the situation by blaming each other for their actions leading to the conflict.

The Administration has tried to rehabilitate the victims of the conflict by building houses, through grants and other aid. The Deputy Commissioner of Karbi Anglong has also paid compensation to the next of kin of those killed in the violence. As for the two extremist groups, in a recent development, the KLNLF surprised many people by publicly expressing its support for the demand of a Kuki Regional Council.

### **Youth Organisations Active in Karbi Anglong**

As one of the objectives of this study is to understand the impact of the conflict on youth organisations and their role in and during the conflict, we shall give a brief description of some youth organisations of Karbi Anglong. We shall discuss their formation, their aims and their background.

#### **i) Karbi Students' Association (KSA)**

The KSA was formed in 1954 to provide a platform for the Karbi youth to work unitedly and uplift the student community. In 1986, the political party ASDC was formed under the leadership of Dr. Jayanta Rongpi in order to launch a mass movement for the implementation of Article 244 (A) and create an Autonomous state of Karbi Anglong and NC Hills. This led to a division in the KSA. In 2000, the ASDC too split as a result of a clash of ideologies when Dr. Rongpi decided to align with the CPI (ML) to strengthen the statehood movement. The ASDC aligned with KSA but split again with one faction backing the ASDC (P) and the other backing the ASDC (U). The variance is not in the objectives but in the ideology of the factions of the KSA.

#### **ii. Karbi Students' and Youth Forum (KSYF)**

In May 2003, leaders of the three factions of the KSA came together to form the Karbi Students' and Youth Forum (KSYF) to protest unitedly against Clause 8 of the Bodo Territorial Council Accord that demanded the Scheduled Tribe (Hills) status and

privileges to the Bodo settled in Karbi Anglong and NC Hills. The KSYF was also aimed at bringing the youth from different political backgrounds together under one banner to work and fight for the rights of the youth of Karbi Anglong. It was thus meant to be a youth organisation without any political leanings. They were to work together irrespective of their political differences.

### iii. Kuki Students' Organisation (KSO)

The Kuki Students' Organisation (KSO) unit of Karbi Anglong was formed in 1995 with its office at Manja. It stands for the cultural and social interests of the Kuki students and is considered the youth wing of the KNA. It helps in organising cultural programmes like the annual Chavang Kut festival and inter-Kuki village football competition as well as coaching classes for weak students. It has good links with the KSO units of Manipur, Nagaland, Guwahati, Shillong and Delhi.

### iv. United Christian Youth Forum (UCYF)

Formed in 2002, the UCYF is a platform for the Christian youth belonging to different churches from different communal and denominational backgrounds to unite and spread the message of peace, discuss and work on common problems and goals. The UCYF started holding joint Christmas celebrations for the youth and community members of different Christian denominations and organised training and other programmes for building the capacity of the youth in various fields.

### v. Diphu Diocesan Youth Commission (DDYC)

The DDYC was formed in 1999, after dissolving the Catholic Youth Association (Diphu Diocese Unit). It has stood as a platform for Catholic youth of different communities and parishes to come together and work for the development of society in general and the youth in particular. The DDYC has been holding annual youth conventions since 2000 whose central theme is 'peace'. Some of

the themes in the conventions were 'Give peace a chance', 'Youth: Channels of peace' and so on. Apart from these conventions in each and everyone of its programme, DDYC helps the youth to learn and talk about peace and trains leaders for it. Some of the members of DDYC have undergone training on peace building organised by Northeast Regional Youth Commission (NERYC), CRS and Henry Martin Institute. These peace-building trainers had earlier given peace education to the students of several high schools in the district. In November 2004, the members of this team of peace builders met together and formed a peace club called Sadakos. The members of Sadakos resolved to work harder towards bringing peace and encouraging other youth not to use violence.

### The Activities of the Youth Organisations during the Conflict

During the conflict all the above youth organisations played a major role in providing relief to its victims who had to take refuge in relief camps. They also assisted the wounded and protested against the violence through the print media and public rallies. They asked those resorting to violence to lay down arms and solve their differences through talks. On 29th March 2004, the KSYF took out a protest rally against the KRA. After it the leaders of KSYF submitted a Memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner that included demands for payment of compensation and ex-gratia to the next of kin of the victims, adequate security for people in the affected areas, flushing out the KRA militants from Karbi Anglong within 15 days, relief for Karbi victims and punishment to those who directly or indirectly encouraged violence.

The KSO on the other hand networked with the KSO of Nagaland, Manipur, Guwahati, Shillong and Delhi to mobilise help for the Kuki victims. It also played an active role in rehabilitating the Kuki victims. But in April 2004, prior to the General Elections, the organisation surprised everybody including the KNA by calling all members of the Kuki community to boycott the Elections.

The UCYF on the other hand, expressed solidarity with the victims of the conflict regardless of religion and community. It mobilised contributions and donations for the inmates of relief camps and encouraged the partner organisations to individually provide facilities and resources for the rehabilitation of some of the displaced people. Thus, together with DDYC they were able to support confidence-building measures for the Karbi and Kuki youth by bringing them together for prayer gatherings and youth meetings. It enabled the youth from both the communities to meet and interact with each other during the conflict and share their views without fear or hesitation. The peace education given to the students of some high schools in the district could also be termed as successful as these students not only distanced themselves from the conflict but also tried to spread the message of peace in their own way. They also mobilised other youth in collecting food items, clothing and other articles for the victims living in relief camps. Also other youth clubs and organisations mobilised resources for the displaced victims in the camps.

Analysis and Interpretation

The sample for data collection included 90 young persons aged 15 to 35 i.e. 30 each from among the Karbi, Kuki and a third group consisting of other communities. A gender balance was maintained in each community, so also a balance between the urban and rural backgrounds. Their educational status ranged from under-matric to post-graduate. 9 of the 90 were not in the district during the conflict as they were pursuing their studies outside the district. 33 of the respondents claimed to be members of some youth organisation or the other.

The perception of the Karbi-Kuki conflict

A vast majority (88%) of the respondents thinks that the conflict could have been avoided (Table 1 & Figure 1). 97% of the Kuki, 67% of the Karbi and 100% of the respondents belonging to other

communities were clear that the conflict could have been resolved using non-violent methods. Only 12% felt that it was needed.

Table 1: Was the Karbi-Kuki conflict really necessary?(%)

	Kuki		Karbi		Other Communities		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
No	100	93.3	53.3	80	100	100	88
Yes	0	6.7	46.7	20	0	0	12

When asked about how the respondents perceived the nature of the conflict, 41% replied that it was mainly a struggle between underground groups (See Figure 2). 66.7% of the Kuki youth, 20% of the Karbi and 36.7% of those from other communities believe that the conflict would not have taken place if the militant groups did not exist. A smaller number (33%) feels that the Karbi-Kuki conflict was nothing but political. This section of 26.7% of Kukis, 33.3% of Karbis and 40% of the youth from the other communities believed that the conflict was a result of politics. 20% of the respondents believed that it was a struggle for preservation of the identity for both the tribes. Only 6% of the respondents felt that the conflict was between common people.

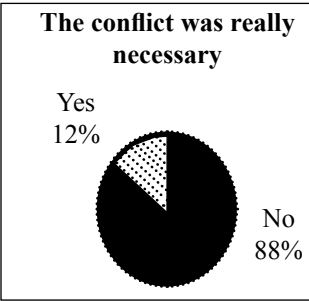


Fig. 1 : Was the conflict necessary?

Table 2: The Karbi-Kuki conflict is in reality

	Kuki		Karbi	
Other Comm.	Total			
All figures in percentage				
M	F	M	F	
A conflict between		46.7		86.7
13.3	26.7	26.7	46.7	41
Extremist Groups				

A political conflict	40	13.3	33.3	33.3	46.7	33.3	33
A conflict of identity	3.3	0	53.3	33.3	13.3	6.7	20
A conf. between people	0	0	0	6.7	13.3	13.3	6

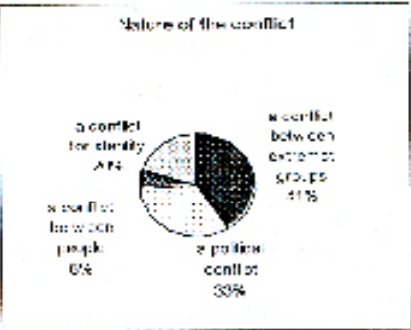


Figure 2: The perception of the conflict by youth

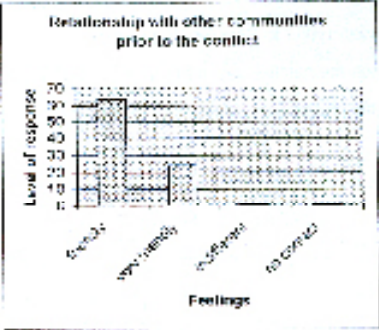


Figure 3: Relationships prior to the conflict

with other youth. A smaller section (26.7%) was more enthusiastic about their relationships and replied that they were very friendly. Only 2 %of the Karbi respondents said that they were indifferent in their relationship with the Kukis.

Table 3: How was your relationship with people of othercommunities before the conflict?

	Kuki		Karbi		Other Comm.		Total
<i>All figures in percentage</i>	M	F	M	F	MF		
Friendly	73.3	60	73.3	73.3	73.3	73.3	71
Very friendly	26.7	40	13.3	26.7	26.7	26.7	27
Indifferent	0	0	6.7	0	0	0	1
No contact	0	0	6.7	0	0	0	1

When asked about their initial feelings on becoming aware of the conflict, 57% said that they felt sad (*Table 4 and Figure 4*). This feeling was shared by 60% of Kukis, 36.7% of Karbis and 76.7% from other communities. 17% of the respondents composed of 23.3% Kukis, 20% Karbis and 6.7% from other communities experienced anger on hearing about the conflict. 16% replied that they experienced fear and only 8% felt like taking revenge for the loss of lives and property. 2% of the respondents claimed to have had no initial reaction to the conflict.

Table 4: Your reaction at the start of the conflict was of-

	Kuki		Karbi		Other Comm.		Total
<i>All figures in %</i>	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Sorrow	60	60	26.7	46.7	86.7	66.7	57
Anger	40	6.7	33.3	6.6	13.3	0	17
Fear	03	3.3	13.3	26.7	0	20	16
Revengefu	0	0	26.7	20	0	0	8
No reaction	0	0	0	0	0	13.3	2

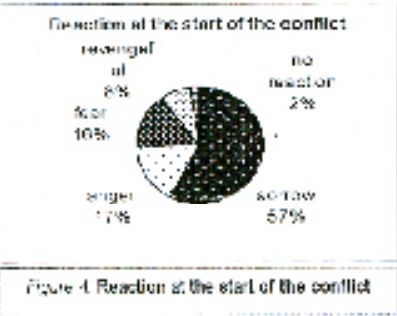



Figure 4: Reaction at the start of the conflict

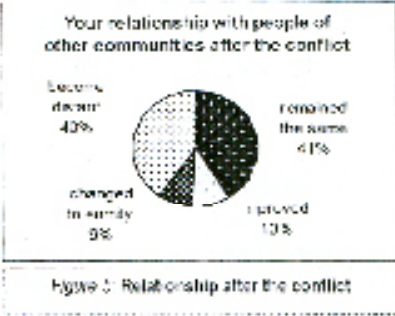


Figure 5: Relationship after the conflict

Improved	0	13.3	13.3	13.3	6.7	13.3	10
Changed to enmity	6.7	6.7	13.3	6.7	20	0	9

Table 5 and Figure 5 show that 41% of the youth claimed that their relationships had not changed after the conflict. They included 33.3% of the Kuki, 46.7% of Karbi and 43.3% others. An equally big number (40%) said that the conflict had changed their way of viewing relationships and made them distant from earlier relationships. They included 53.3% of Kukis, 30% of Karbis and 36.7% of the others. 10% of the youth believed that they had learnt to value relationships as a result of the conflict. 6.7% of the Kuki, 13.3% of Karbi and 10% of those of other communities felt that their relationships with other communities had improved. It is significant that the conflict was able to affect the relationships of 9% of the youth who admitted that they felt inimical against other communities and perceived a threat from them. 6.7% of Kuki youth, 10% of Karbis and 10% of the youth from other communities shared this feeling.

Factors contributing to the conflict

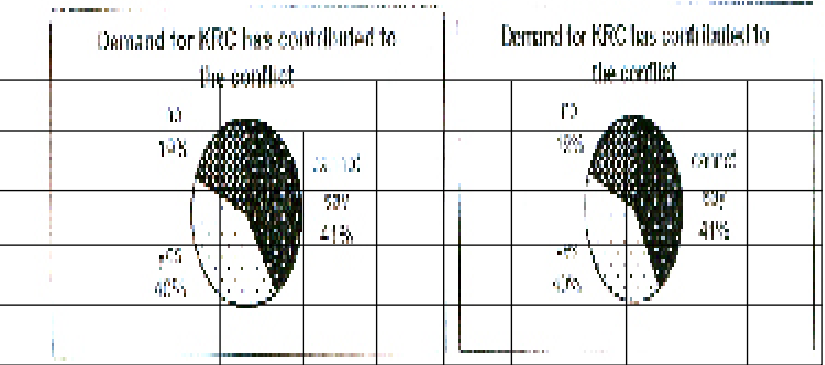
Table 6 and Figure 6 show that 41% of the youth including 53.3% of the Kuki, 23.3% Karbis amd 47.7% from other communities recognised that they could not say how the demand for Kuki Regional Council contributed to the conflict. An equally significant number of 40% including 20% of Kuki, 60% of Karbi and 40% from other communities believed that the demand had indeed contributed to it by bringing about differences in the relations between the two tribes. Only 19% felt that the demand did not contribute to the conflict. This section was made up of 26.7% of Kuki, 16.6% Karbi and 13.3% youth from other communities.

Table 6: Do you think that the demand for Kuki Regional Council has contributed to the conflict-

Kuki	Karbi	Other Communities	Total
------	-------	-------------------	-------

All figures in %.

	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Cannot say	26.7	80	13.3	33.3	53.4	40	41
Yes	33.3	6.7	80	40	33.3	47.7	40
No	40	13.3	6.7	26.7	13.3	13.3	19



When asked whether the demand for the Kuki Regional Council was necessary, 66% replied in the negative (Figure 7). Table 7 shows that 49% of the respondents felt that the demand was not necessary because it could set a bad precedent and encourage also tribes to demand such councils. The rest were divided. Some believed that the demand was unnecessary as they did not consider Kuki indigenous and others felt that the move could divide the tribes in the near future. However, 34% felt that the demand was

are indigenous, 29% felt that because of the contribution of Kuki in different fields like the statehood movement, their demand was necessary. In fact, 9.7% of this section thought that the historic bonds between the two tribes gave the Kuki people the right to demand Regional Council.

Table 7: Was the Demand for a Kuki Regional Council



Necessary?

All figures in %	Kuki		Karbi		Other		Com. Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F		
No, because it could set a bad example for other tribes.	20	33.3	26.7	33.3	26.7	53.3	33	
Yes, because they are a part of society.	47.7	33.3	0	134	33.3	0	20.7	
No, because they are not a part of society.	0	0	20	33.3	13.3	33.3	16.5	
No, because it could divide the district	0	13.3	53.3	20	6.7	6.7	16.5	

Yes, because of their contri- butions in statehood movement	3.3	3	6.7	0	0	13.3	6.7	10
Yes,because Karbis and Kuki have historic bonds	0	13.4	0	0	6.7	0	3.3	

When asked whether the ASDC-KNA MOU could have contributed to the conflict, 48% (66.7% of Kuki, 33.3% of Karbi, 43.3% others) gave no reply (Table 8 and Figure 8). 48% of the youth (33% Kuki, 56.6% Karbi and 53.3% others) said that the ASDC-KNA MOU did contribute to the conflict. Out of them, 34.9% believed that the MOU led to the conflict since it created bad blood between the two tribes, that the Karbis felt it could set a bad example for other tribes. So the rejection of the MOU by them led to bad relations between the two tribes. 30.2% of this section felt that the propaganda unleashed by rival political parties opposing the MOU gave rise to feelings of hatred against the Kuki tribe. Only 4% felt that the conflict was a result of other factors.

Table 8: Could the ASDC-KNA have contributed to the conflict ?

All figures in percentage	Kuki		Karbi		Other		Com. Total	
	M	F	M	F	M	F		
Cannot say	73.3	9	33.3	33.3	40	47.7	48	

Yes, because it led to bad relations between the tribes	20	333	6.7	6.7	20	13.3	16.5
Yes, because Karbis thought set a bad example	6.7	0	33.3	20	13.3	26.7	16.5
Yes, because of propaganda by political parties	0	6.7	6.7	40	26.7	6.7	15
No, because of other factors	0	0	20	0	0	6.6	4

**Parties responsible for the conflict**

When asked about the parties responsible for the conflict, 20% said that the extremist groups alone should be blamed for it (Figure 9). Table 9 shows that 33.3% of the Kukis, 13.3% each of the Karbis and from other communities felt this way. 18.9% felt that both the extremist groups and the political parties should be held responsible for it. They included 20% each of the Kuki and Karbi and 16.6% of the respondents from other communities. They hold the extremist groups solely or jointly responsible for the conflict. they further confirm the sentiment that the existence of extremist groups (KLNLF and KRA) was an important contributor to the conflict and the resulting violence.

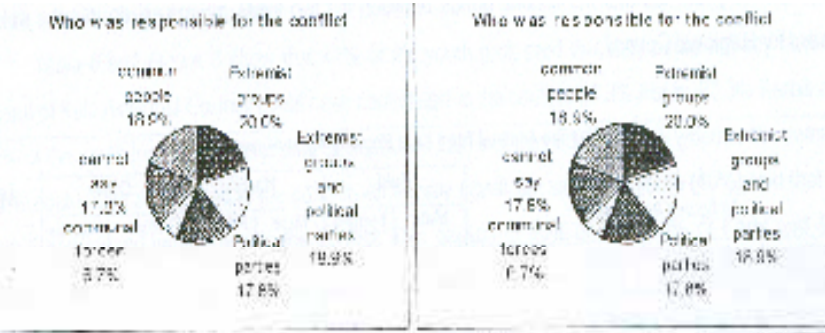


Figure 8: Has the MOU contributed to the conflict? Figure 9: Who was responsible for the conflict?

Table 9: Who was responsible for the Karbi Kuki confict?

Kuki	Karbi	Other	Comm.	Total
------	-------	-------	-------	-------

Table 10 shows that a very significant section (74%) feels that the extremist groups were partially responsible for the conflict. They include 66.7% of the Kuki, nearly 77% of the Karbi and 80% from other communities. 17% of the youth held the extremist groups fully responsible for the conflict. Again while 6% of the youth did not hold them responsible at all.	
--	--

When asked about why the respondents held extremist groups responsible for the conflict, 32% of the youth (See Table 11) said that the extremist groups got involved in order to show their sense of responsibility towards their communities. Another equally large section of the respondents felt that the extremist groups were involved in order to protect the interests of their community. 14% of the youth felt that it was a struggle for supremacy between the KLNLF and KRA that led them to the conflict. A significant section of the youth (10%) felt that they acted on the instigation of larger extremist groups.

Table 11: The Extremist groups responsible for the conflict because

	Kuki		Karbi		Other Communities		Total
All figures in %	M	F	M	F	M	F	
They think they are showing responsibility for their community	33.3	20	40	46.7	33.3	20	32
They think they are protecting the interest of their community	46.7	40	20	53.3	26.7	6.7	32
Of struggle for supremacy	13.3	13.3	20	0	20	13.3	14

All figures in (%)	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Extremist groups	26.7	40	6.6	20	20	6.6	20
Extremist groups and political parties	26.7	13.3	26.7	13.3	20	13.3	18.9
Common people	20	6.7	40	33.3	13.3	0	18.9
Political parties	13.2	13.3	26.7	20	26.7	6.7	17.8
Cannot say	6.7	20	0	6.7	6.7	66.7	17.8

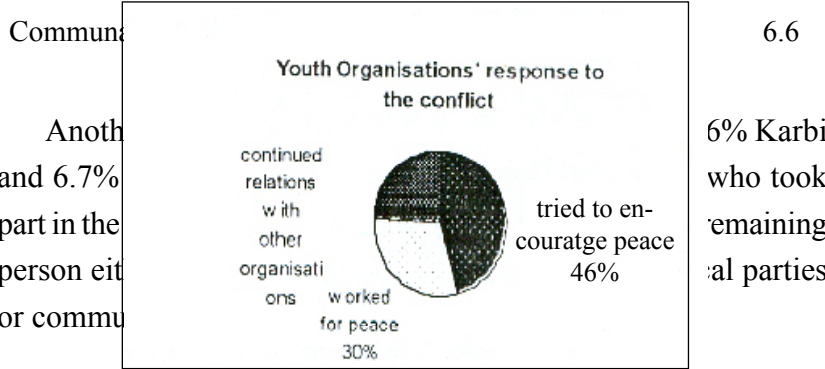


Table 10: Youth Organisations' response to the conflict

All figures in %	M	F	M	F	M	F	Total
Partially	66.7	66.7	80	73.4	73.3	86.7	74
Fully	33.3	0	13.3	13.3	26.7	13.3	17
Cannot Say	0	33.3	0	0	0	0	6
Not responsible	0	0	6.7	13.3	0	0	3

Cannot say	6.7	0	0	0	13.3	53.3	12
They were instigated by a bigger extremist group	0	26.7	20	0	6.7	6.7	10


Role of District Administration during the conflict

When the respondents were asked about the role of the district administration with regard to the conflict, a majority of them (67%) replied that their actions were unsatisfactory. Table 12 shows that 90% of the Kukis, about 77% of the Karbis and about 37% of the

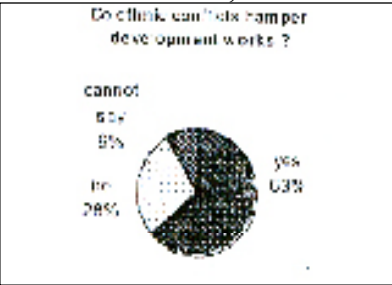


Figure 11: Ethnic conflicts hamper development

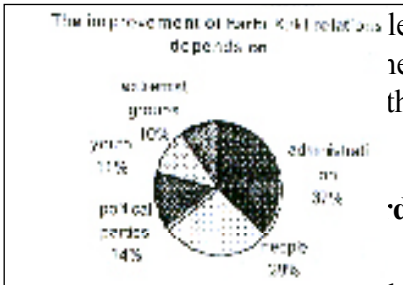


Figure 12: How Karbi-Kuki relations can improve?

All figures in %	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Unsatisfactory	100	80	100	53.3	53.3	20	68
Cannot say	0	20	0	46.7	40	73.3	30
Satisfactory	0	0	0	0	6.7	6.7	2

Response of youth and community to the conflict

Table 13 shows that 32% of the youth experienced fear of loss of life and property during the conflict. Another significant section stated that the conflict led to a change in their relation with people of other communities. 19% of the respondents said that they had or were thinking about changing their place of residence due to an uncertain future. An equally large section of youth could not say anything.

Table 13: As an Individual this Conflict has Led to-

Kuki	Karbi		Other Comm.		Total	
All figures in percentage	M	F	M	F	M	F
Fear of loss of life or property	33.3	40	53.3	13.3	40	13.3
Change in your relationship with people of other comm.	40	33.3	40	33.3	26.7	6.7
Change in place of work, study or residence due to uncertain future	26.7	26.7	6.72	6.7	13.3	13.3
Cannot Say	0	0	0	26.7	20	66.7

When asked about the change at the community level due to the conflict, 32% (Table 14) said that their community had lost trust and confidence in the other communities. Another section (25%) said that their communities were more united as a result of the conflict but were distanced from other communities. 23% said that their communities feared for their survival. While 17%							

did not sa  
internally

Table 14:

All figures  
Suspicion  
confidenc  
Unity with

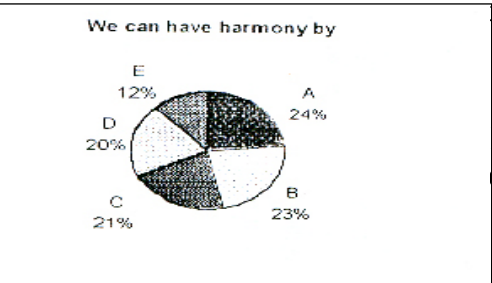


Figure 13: How can we have peace and harmony?

butdivision with other comm.	26.7	26.7	46.7	26.7	13.3	6.6	25
Fear of survival	13.3	33.3	20	13.3	33.3	26.7	23
Cannot say	6.7	0	0	20	26.7	46.7	17
Division within your comm.	0	0	13.3	6.7	0	0	3

Response of Youth Organisations’ to the conflict

33 respondents said that they were members of youth organisations. When asked about the reaction of their organisations, 46% said that they tried to encourage peace. 24% said that their organisations maintained contacts with other organisations and hoped to look for ways to work on matters of peace. Table 15 and Figure 10 show that 30% of the youth claimed that their organisations were able to take up peace initiatives. All the respondents agreed that relief and rehabilitation work was a part of their peace initiatives. Some leaders of youth organisations also spoke about their difficulties in trying to have a dialogue between the communities. Leaders of Karbi youth organisations claimed that it was difficult because the Kuki youth representatives hesitated to come forward. Also the Kuki youth organisations were confused about how to go about working for peace especially to decide which of the Karbi youth groups they could interact with. 14% felt that once the political parties stopped taking advantage of the situation relations would improve. Only 11% felt that youth organisations could take steps to improve relations between the two tribes. The rest of them said that it would take negotiations

ies were divided

Led to

Other Com. Total  
M F

26.7 20 32

between the extremist groups to improve relations between the tribes.

Table 15: Youth Organisations’ Response to Conflict.

All figures in percentage	Kuki	Karbi	Others	Total
Tried to encourage peace	60	55	25	46
Worked for peace	0	18	67	30
Maintained relationships with other organisations	40	27	8	24

Awareness about the Impact of the Conflicts

When asked about the impact of conflicts on development, 63% (73.3% of Kuki, 56.7% of Karbi and 63.3% of others (Table 16 and Figure 11) believe that conflicts of this type do affect development and hamper progress but 28% (23.3% Kuki and 30% each of Karbi and others) felt it is not hampered, rather that it was hampered even before the ethnic conflict by factors such as the existence of extremist groups, corruption and poor administration. 9% were undecided and were unable to reply.

Table 16: Do ethnic conflicts hamper development ?

	Kuki		Karbi		Other Communities		Total
All figures in %	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Yes	66.7	73.3	66.7	47.7	66.7	60	63
No	20	26.7	20	40	20	40	28
Cannot say	13.3	0	13.3	13.3	13.3	0	9

How Karbi-Kuki Relations can Improve

Peace based on justice and mutual understanding was our main concern. So we asked the respondents how Karbi-Kuki relations could improve. 37% of them said that they can improve only if the Administration works towards bringing a permanent solution to the

problem (Figure 12). Table 17 shows that 66.7% of Kuki, 16.7% of Karbi and 30% of other youth believe that the Administration should take steps for the improvement of relations between the two tribes. 28% (16.7% of Kukis, 33.3% each of Karbis and others) believe that healing should take place at the community level.

Table 17: Relation between Karbis and Kukis can improve when

	Kuki		Karbi		Other Comm.		Total
All figures in percentage	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Administraton brings permanent solutions	73.3	53.3	26.7	6.7	26.7	33.3	37
People themselves take up peace initiatives	6.7	26.7	13.3	53.3	20	47.7	28
Political parties stop taking advantage of the situation	0	6.7	47.7	13.3	20	0	14
Youth organisations work for peace	0	0	0	26.7	20	20	11
Extremist groups have negotiations	20	13.3	13.3	0	13.3	0	10

Suggestions on How to Bring Peace and Harmony

When the respondents were asked about their vision of Karbi Anglong five years hence, 58% said optimistically that Karbi Anglong will be a land of peace and harmony (Table 18) against 27% who felt that the district could face more ethnic clashes in the future while 9% believed that the dream of autonomous statehood can be a reality by then. Only 4% believed that different ethnic groups inhabiting Karbi Anglong will try to break the district into smaller units. 2% felt that the name ‘Karbi Anglong’ could also change in five years as that itself could be a source of tension in the future and its change could help people to view it as a land of different tribes.				
---	--	--	--	--

Table 18 : In the Next Five Years Karbi Anglong May

	Kuki		Karbi		Other Comm.		Total
All figures in percent	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Have peace and harmony	66.7	73.4	33.3	66.7	53.3	53.3	58
Have more ethnic clashes	33.3	13.3	40	20	26.7	26.7	27
Become an autonomous state	0	13.3	20	0	0	20	9
Get divided into smaller parts	0	0	6.7	13.3	6.7	0	4
Change its name	0	0	0	0	13.3	0	2

When asked about how peace and harmony could be achieved, 24% (Table 19) replied that believing in unity in diversity was the best way to bring it about. Those who hold this view are represented in section A in Figure 13. They felt that being different does not mean that people cannot live together in peace. Another large section (23%- section B in Figure 13), believes that even if there are differences they can live in peace and harmony by using non-violent methods of solving problems. 21% (section C in Figure 13) said that one can avoid conflicts by respecting the fact that each tribe or community has its own individual needs. 20% (section D in Figure 13) felt that respect for each other’s culture and traditions can prevent conflicts and 14% felt that the climate would improve once the political parties stopped taking advantage of the situation. Only 11% feel that youth organisations can take steps to improve relations between the two tribes. The rest of them said that it would take negotiations between the extremist groups to improve relations between the tribes. Another section (section E in Figure 13) felt that awareness of each one’s distinct culture and tradition can result in peace and harmony.

Table 19: We can have peace and harmony by-

All figures in percentage	Kuki		Karbi		Other Comm.		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Believing in unity in diversity	40	40	20	20	6.7	13.4	24
Solving differences through non violence	33.3	26.7	13.3	13.3	40	13.3	23
Respecting each other's needs	20	26.7	20	26.7	20	13.3	21
Respecting each other's cultureand traditions	0	0	33.4	26.7	13.3	47.7	20
Learning about each other's culture and traditions	6.7	6.6	13.3	13.3	20	13.3	12

- A- Believing in unity in diversity
- B- Solving differences through non-violence
- C- Respecting each others' needs
- D- Respecting each others' culture and traditions
- E- Learning about each others' culture and traditions

Main Findings and Suggestions

So as a group the respondents feel that the conflict was unnecessary and avoidable. Most feel that it was between extremist groups but it resulted in strained relations and even enmity between the two tribes. Several said the same about others like political parties, communal forces and community leaders. The demand for the Regional Council and the ASDC-KNA MOU were seen as unnecessary steps that contributed to the conflict. Many also claimed that their organisations had tried to encourage peace and had kept up contacts with other communities. Most were also aware of the adverse effects of conflicts such as hampering development. They added that the administration should try without delay to find a permanent solution to the problem and that one has to believe in unity and diversity in order to make peace possible.

The Do No Harm (DNH) Analytical Framework

The main findings of the study have been described in the conflict resolution format known as the Do No Harm Analytical Framework (DNH). Suggestions are also made to strengthen local capacities for peace using the same format. This framework uses the strategy to analyse how aid or developmental programmes can minimise conflict situations by developing local capacities for peace. Aid has been known to interact with conflict and in many cases, it may contribute negatively to conflicts through the transfer of resources such as food, medical care, medical supplies or training and also through implicit or hidden ethical messages. So, the Do No Harm Framework helps the implementing agencies to prevent doing harm through their relief and development programmes.

The Do No Harm Framework Analysis is carried out in 6 steps. The first is identification of the parties to the conflict, the processes involved in it and the core problem and issues underlying it. The second step is the identification and analysis of dividers (factors, processes, actions or feelings that divide the two parties). The third step involves identification of the connectors (factors, processes, actions or feelings common to the parties). The fourth step entails the analysis of the programmes of the organisation. The fifth step is the analysis of the programmes' impact on the dividers and connectors. The last step considers programming options.

The Parties in the Karbi-Kuki Conflict

From the preceding sections it is clear that the main parties to the conflict were the KLNLF and the Karbi tribe on the one hand, and the KRA and the Kuki tribe on the other. The political parties, youth organisations, the district administration, the army and the police were secondary parties. The perception of each of the main parties differs regarding the conflict. The Karbi especially the KLNLF perception is that the Kuki in general and the KRA in particular should follow the law of the land and that being a minority, they should not have acted so aggressively. The



Kuki and KRA perception is that it was ethnic cleansing of their community by the majority tribe. But both experienced fear of elimination and loss of control over resources and property.

The conflict gave the political parties an opportunity to blame each other for their contribution to the situation. All the opposition parties blamed the Congress-I ruling at the state as well as district levels, for not doing much to reduce the number of violent incidents. The CPI (ML) also held the ASDC responsible for the conflict because of its Agreement with the KNA. The ASDC retaliated by claiming that CPI (ML) President, Dr. Rongpi was responsible for permitting the Kuki migrants displaced from Manipur by the Kuki-Paite and Naga-Kuki clashes, to settle down in the Singhason-Khonbamon hills. Other political parties too used the conflict to gain political mileage just before the General Elections of 2004. The Congress-I blamed both the ASDC and CPI (ML) for their past for encouraging the settlement of Kukis in Karbi Anglong and the subsequent demand for a regional council.

The behaviour of the KLNLF and the KRA during the blown-out phase was not very encouraging for the people and organisations working for peace. Neither party resolved to back out of violence. Till now it is still not clear if the two underground groups have had any negotiations or not, but the present situation shows that they may have reached some sort of an understanding.

### **The process of the conflict**

A reason of the conflict is that before violence broke out no major step was taken to bring the KLNLF and KRA to the negotiating table. Violence began because of this failure and led to large-scale damage and destruction. The conflict resulted in the breakdown of relations between the two tribes. There was constant fear of loss of life and property. Many people thought of changing their place of work or study. Many youth, women, church and social organisations took out peace-rallies to try to convince the KLNLF and KRA to put an end to the violence, instill confidence

in people the belonging to both the tribes and to encourage people to give peace a chance.

The youth organisations from both the communities attempted without success to bring the youth from their respective communities for talks. Negotiations took place in December 2003 between their representatives in the presence of an all-party delegation from the Assam State Assembly led by the Speaker. Such developments led to a temporary cessation of violence. After a gap of nearly two and a half months, violence started once again. The district administration's activities during the conflict were unsatisfactory. Finally the army and the police were called in to try and bring down the scale of violence. After it there were reports of harassment of innocent villagers by them. By the end of March, all violent activities stopped. Though many victims were able to return to their villages some families were still living in relief camps at the time of the study in late 2004 especially in the Manja and Rongplimlam area. This can be called the cooling phase of the conflict.

### **The Problem Underlying the Conflict**

For the Kukis the main issues underlying the conflict are non-recognition of a major portion of their community as indigenous and the fear of ethnic cleansing of their tribe by the majority Karbi tribe. For the Karbis the issue was a struggle for control over the resources like land and forests. They feared that their community would be outnumbered in the near future if Kuki migration from Manipur and Nagaland did not stop. The atmosphere of fierce competition over the shrinking employment opportunities, agricultural and other natural resources existed already in Karbi Anglong. The growing number of people of other communities did not help in any way. So, the underlying needs of the Kuki were their recognition as an indigenous tribe by the Karbi. In contrast, the Karbi community wanted an end to the migration of other tribes into the district and stopping the Kuki demand for an Autonomous

Regional Council.

The mutually acceptable institutions that exist for both the parties are the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, the State Government and the Central Government. All of them can address the fears, doubts and needs of both the parties. But as stated above, the KAAC's response to the conflict has been unsatisfactory so far. Both the parties also have common interests. The natural and economic resources in the area are important for both of them. They also face similar problems like lack of security of employment, property and life. In fact the main reason why the underground and the community took part in the violence was their protection.

### **The Dividers in the Conflict**

A major system or institution dividing the communities is the existence of militant groups. The UPDS and KRA do not hesitate to use arms when their community's interests are at stake. Another system that divides the two tribes is the non-existence of a well functioning land settlement system in the district. The present system can divide the two communities as it is under the control of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council which is again under the control of the Karbi tribe. Another divider is the political parties that have a vested interest in the division among the two communities in order to build their own vote-banks. Also the bitter experience of both the tribes during the conflict contributed to the worsening of their ties. The burning of houses, occupation of land and the attacks on people prevented those interested in peace from taking steps for this purpose. The efforts to take revenge for the loss of life and property led to further violence. Also the displacement of the Kuki to the NC Hills district and to Nagaland and Manipur kept the atmosphere of hatred and tension alive.

The Kuki victims who had to take shelter in the relief camps set up after the clashes also claim that they had largely been ignored by those giving aid and that most aid providers showed partiality

by providing help mainly to the Karbi victims. Only the Church organisations gave them continued support. This experience of communal feelings getting precedence over the humanitarian aspect led to further division between the two. Language is another divider. While the Karbis are able to speak Assamese and generally use it locally, most Kukis (except those who live in Diphu town) do not use it. They speak Hindi or Nagamese.

### **The Connectors in the Conflict**

The institutions or systems that continue to link people across conflict lines are the educational, religious and economic institutions. Children and youth from both the communities continue to go to schools and colleges for their educational needs. Christians from both the Kuki and Karbi communities also interact with each other in churches and during prayer and other meetings. People from both the communities also come together during weekly market days in the rural areas and in the towns for their economic needs.

Also hospitals, health and other government departments are meeting places for the Kuki and Karbi so are occasions such as religious festivals of Christmas and Easter and the cultural festivals of both the tribes present opportunities. Other occasions are weekly market days in the rural areas and in the neighbouring towns. The communities also share a mutual desire for peace and an amicable solution to the problem that divides them. The violence affected both the communities. People from both the tribes have suffered the trauma of loss of life and property. So, both stand to gain from an end to the conflict.

### **The Programmes of the Organisation**

Apart from such meeting points also economic connectors have to be established in order to strengthen those started by such social processes. The developmental activities of the civil society



groups are among them. For example the experience of Jirsong Asong that has been active in the field of health, social welfare, education and rural development for the marginalised in Karbi Anglong since 1985 shows that a dedicated staff with a vision are required in order to develop an educated, self-reliant community based on human values. The approach is education and awareness building leading to self-reliance. It is not to be limited to any one community. Jirsong Asong has been reaching out to communities like the Karbi, Dimasa, Adivasis, Garos and the Nepalis. Its programmes like micro credit, agriculture, health and education are implemented by the management and staff who are not divided on communal, religious or other lines. Also the beneficiaries are not divided on these lines. It is important especially in providing relief such as food, clothing and medicines during the conflicts. Most of its programmes are aimed at improving the living standards of the marginalized. The youth and education programmes aim to improve and strengthen the community's self-reliance and build value based communities. Most of them are implemented through various youth groups.

We give here the example of Jirsong Asong because it is typical of development agencies that can combine economic development with awareness building. This combination can be an important connector in the peace building process. One should also add among all its initiatives, only its agriculture, health, youth and education programmes have made an impact on the dividers and connectors. The micro-credit programme has so far not included the Kuki community.

The training in sustainable methods of agriculture and rural development provided through St Joseph's school bring the Karbi and Kuki youth together since it is meant for both. Through its health programme, Kuki girls have been able to complete auxiliary nursing and midwife courses. The micro-credit programmes, if extended to all the communities, can strengthen the connectors but most agencies do not utilise them fully for this purpose. The

opportunity they provide of improving the living standards of communities as well as giving unemployed youth an opportunity of choosing their destiny can play a constructive role in their communities. It is one of the ways of showing the youth that joining the militants is not the only way of dealing with frustration. The youth groups like DDYC, UCYF, YCS, YSM and other institutions can bring the youth from different backgrounds together. These organisations showed their potential even during the conflict. For example, the UCYF provided a forum to bring Karbi and Kuki youth together to discuss peace building measures and provide aid to the victims. The DDYC, YCS and YSM encouraged the youth in the use of non-violent methods to solve problems.

These programmes have shown their potential but more needs to be done particularly to involve the Kukis more than at present. Today, women and youth from different tribes meet and interact during the meetings, training and other programmes thereby increasing their awareness of and respect for each other's culture and traditions. Since they also discuss common problems such meetings can increase trust and confidence in each other. They feel today the need to increase the number or level of activities like meetings, cultural and other events in order to ensure greater interaction between the youth of the two communities. They also feel the need to have motivation and training programmes. These activities have thus shown their potential but more needs to be done.

### **Other Suggestions**

While the potential exists, the youth organisations also felt that they were unable to work effectively for the return of normalcy during the conflict. 'Problem Tree Analysis' was conducted in order to identify the cause of this lacuna. It was felt during the exercise that the core problem was some shortcomings of the youth organisations.

- i) The youth did not take time off to think before resorting to violence. They acted instinctively and resorted to violence

possibly due to the lack of awareness of non-violent methods of conflict resolution or simply because of lack of trust in these methods. Another reason is lack of a proper structure to spread reliable information. This conflict showed how the spread of rumours can create as much damage as actual violence. That shows the need to organise some awareness programmes, seminars, workshops and other activities on the importance of peace building and strengthen existing structures like the print media for the spread of correct information.

- ii) Some youth organisations are not empowered to take decisions by their communities, though they desire to find ways to resolve the conflicts peacefully. They cannot act on this desire in the absence of power coming from their communities. By and large the communities seem to lack faith in the capacity or ability of the youth to act. It shows the need both to have sessions meant to strengthen the community's confidence and faith in their decision-making ability and motivation programmes meant to encourage the youth organisations to take steps for the benefit of the community.
- iii) The Kuki youth organisations claimed that because of the presence of so many Karbi youth organisations, it was difficult for them to decide which one to approach to take up peace initiatives. They were afraid that if the KSO worked out a settlement with one of the Karbi youth organisations, the other factions or groups would create hurdles on its way. Besides, when the conflict was full blown, it was natural for the youth organisation to be suspicious of the organisations belonging to the other side. It shows the need for confidence building measures on both sides of the divide.
- iv) There has also been lack of unity among the Karbi youth organisations, mainly because of political and ideological differences. It prevented them from coming together to take collective decisions for a peaceful settlement. KSYF probably has the potential to play this role but it could not act under these

circumstances. Some youth organisations were not willing to take any initiative possibly because they had to be accountable to the community that had not given them adequate power or because they were afraid of risk-taking. Some of them also seem to lack the desire to get involved in peace building work because they perceive themselves as belonging to their community alone or because they lack confidence that they can produce results.

### Summary and Conclusion

It is clear from what has preceded that the conflict has resulted in the breakdown of relations between the two tribes. The Karbi-Kuki conflict was the first ethnic clash in Karbi Anglong. The study on the conflict and the role of the youth shows that prior to the conflict most of them had cordial relations with the other communities. Though there was competition for employment, till then it had not caused enmity between them. In fact the first reaction of the youth when they heard of the conflict was one of sorrow. But as time passed by they became distant from other communities. Yet, they hope that the conflict will not leave a lasting mark on them because most of them view the conflict as unnecessary and avoidable. Though most viewed it as a clash between extremist groups, they are also aware of the political undertones. The communities had to get involved as their houses and villages were destroyed and people were killed under the principle of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth".

Its root cause seems to be a crisis of identity. While the Karbis feared that if the migration of Kukis continued, it would result in further struggles for the existing resources, the Kukis were trying to protect themselves through a Regional Council. It is true that every tribe or community loves its identity and does not want to lose it, but this fear should not have escalated to such an extent as to get the people to kill each other. However, the combination of the militant groups, political vested interest and lack of effectiveness of the administration led to it.

On the other side, the conflict has presented a new challenge to the youth organisations of Karbi Anglong. It was their first experience of such a conflict and they did not know how to deal with it effectively. Also some problems affecting the youth organisations affected their functioning during the conflict. It shows the need for them to address these problems and equip themselves with the necessary capacities of working for peace. The youth are aware of the negative impacts of the conflict and how they are hampering the development work in the district. However, they were hampered by the lack of faith of the community in their capacity to act on this issue. To solve this problem the community must begin to have faith in their capacity and encourage them to work harder for social improvement and get involved in confidence building measures between tribes. In order to bring change in the mindset of the youth motivation programmes on their role in development can be conducted. Finally, the youth have to find ways of ensuring that the victims of the conflict regardless of their tribe are well compensated for the losses sustained during the conflict. Youth organisations can ensure that the district administration shows equal consideration for all while paying it. That can go a long way in showing solidarity and bringing people from different tribes closer to each other.

The district administration has the power as well as the capacity to find permanent solutions to the problem but it does not use that power. Peace cannot come unless it plays its role effectively. It has the duty to take measures to heal the pain of the conflict by providing adequate compensation to its victims, rehabilitating the displaced and taking measures to prevent further conflagration. The youth also feel that both their communities should initiate measures required to strengthen their belief in unity in diversity. They should realise that the answers as to who they are and to which tribe they belong are not in their hands. But they have control over their actions that can either respect the right of each community to be human.

Thus, ways have to be found of rebuilding relations between the two tribes. The youth organisations, the civil society groups and the community leaders have both to work with the administration to ensure the success of this task and ensure that it performs its duty of development and law and order.

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Terang, Barelong, *The History of Karbi*, Publisher Unknown, Guwahati, 2003.  
 Anam, Nazmeen, *The Enchanting Karbi Hills*, Angik Publication, Guwahati, 2000.  
 Gangte, Thankhomang S, *The Kukis of Manipur*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2003.  
 Kathar, Harlongbi I, *Thoughts on Indian Mongolians*, Lipibon, Guwahati, 2003.  
 Lyall, Charles, *The Mikirs*, United Publishers, Guwahati, 1908.  
 Phangcho, Phukan C, *The Karbis of Northeast India*, Angik Publication, Guwahati, 2003.  
 Phangcho, Phukan C, *The Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills*, Self, Diphu, 2004.  
  
*The ASDC-KNA Memorandum of Understanding*, Manja, 4th December, 2001.  
  
*The Telegraph*, Guwahati  
*The Sentinel*, Guwahati  
*The Assam Tribune*, Guwahati



## COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE TO THE KARBI-KUKI CONFLICT IN KARBI AN- GLONG

*Bulu Terang*

In the British age the areas inhabited by the Karbis were called 'Partially Excluded Area' and 'Excluded Area'. The provision of 'Partially Excluded Area' order operated in the districts of Nagaon and Sibsagar. The Karbi settlement in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills came fully under the provisions of the 'Excluded Area'. After Independence, the areas inhabited by the Karbis were carved out of Nagaon, Sibsagar and the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills and collectively formed into the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District on 2nd February 1970. Mikir Hills became a separate administrative district as Karbi Anglong on 14th October 1976.

Today it has a population of 4,22,559 males and 3,89,721 females. Its literacy rate is 58.83%. (male 68.11% and female 48.65%) and population density is 78 per sq.km. The district headquarters is at Diphu. It has three civil sub divisions - Diphu, Hamren and Bokajan. The Karbi Anglong district shares its boundaries with Nagoan, Jorhat and North Cachar Hills districts and also with the states of Meghalaya and Nagaland. In the north are the Nagaon and Jorhat districts, in the south are the North Cachar Hills and Nagaland, Jorhat district and Nagaland are in the east and in the west is the state of Meghalaya.

### The Karbis

The Karbi tribe is also a major constituent of the tribal population of Northeast India in general and of assam in particular. They live on the hills, plateaux and plains of the central part of Northeast India, especially in Assam. Ethnically, they belong to the Indo-mongoloid race and linguistically to the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. The Karbis or Mikirs as they were known earlier, live mainly in the Karbi Anglong district but are also found

in some pockets of Nagaon, Kamrup, Darang, Golaghat and N.C. Hills district of Assam, in Arunachal Pradesh and in the Sylhet district of Bangladesh.

Although classified as “Scheduled Hill Tribe” by the census of India, the Karbis live both on the hills and in the Brahmaputra Valley. In 1991 the Karbi were 55% of the Karbi Anglong population of 8,04760. A study of their physical aspects shows that the Karbi habitations are considerably diverse. The geo-physical structure in particular has formed a distinctive ecological background that has greatly influenced their settlement pattern, economy, population and socio-political life .

**Table1 : Tribe-wise population in Karbi Anglong according to 1971-91 census.**

Name of the Tribe	Percentage of total of ST Population
Karbi	82.29
Dimasa	7.04
Garo	4.32
Khasi and Jaintia	2.26
Kuki	2.82
Man-Tai	0.45
Hajong	0.18
Synteng	0.29
Mizo	0.16
Naga	0.02
Hmar	0.006
Pawi	0.002

*Source: “Statistical profile of the Hill area of Assam” prepared by G.N. Das from the institue of Research for Schedule tribes and Schedule castes of Assam.*

**The Kukis**

The linguistic groups like Baite, Changsan, Chongloi, DOUNgel, Gangte, Guite, Haokip, Hangsing, Lhouvum, Paite and Vaiphe are put loosely under the egalitarian ethnic entity called the Kukis. They belong to the Mongoloid stock and the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group, a sub-family of the Tibeto-Chinese. They are said to possess no demarcated territory of their own but are settled since time immemorial on the banks of the Chindwin River in Myanmar, the Naga Hills, North Cachar Hills in India and the Chittagong Hills Tract in Bangladesh. A majority of them live in the states of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram. The rest can be found in almost all the states of the Northeast. In 1991 they were 21,883 in Karbi Anglong. In Nagaland they are conflated with the Zeliang Naga tribe. Thus, the word Kuki is itself inclusive. Official descriptions such as in census report, refer to ‘any Kuki tribe’ of whom 37 sub-tribes have been identified in Manipur.

**Background of the Conflict**

The Karbis and Dimasas are known to enjoy the status of indigenous tribes in Karbi Anglong because they inhabit a clearly demarcated territory. However, the Kukis although one of the hill tribes, are not considered indigenous in the two hill districts of Assam. Both the hill tribes and nine other plains tribes in theory inhabit the plains of Assam while the Kukis are said not to have a territory of their own in Assam. Historically, the Kukis are one of the biggest migrating peoples in the Northeast. Their identity as a hill tribe is a carry-over of the recognition and acknowledgement they have received in a very different geographical and political status in Assam. Without a well-defined territory demarcating their habitation, they are spread in small pockets principally in Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Assam and elsewhere.

Some historians believe that the settlement of Kukis in Karbi Anglong district can be seen along with the Karbi community in the second batch of migration that took place from the Manipur hills to West Karbi Anglong of Hamren sub division after the thirteenth

century. But their migration was much less in comparison with that of the Karbi. So their settlement was not noticed until the late 1980s. From the Hamren sub-division, some of them migrated to the Singhason hill range in the early 1960s in search of good fertile land and economic prosperity. But most of their migration took place in the late 1980s from the neighbouring Manipur and Nagaland due to different reasons.

That disproves the stand of those who state that the Kuki are not indigenous to Karbi Anglong. According to anthropologists and the local non-Kukis there are two different groups of Kukis in Karbi Anglong. One group that came some centuries ago inhabits the Hamren area as indigenous to the district. They are fully integrated with the local population in all respects. Anthropologists call them 'Old Kukis' whereas the Karbis call them 'Nochans.' The other group that is involved in the present conflict seems to have migrated from Nagaland and Manipur during the last two decades. They are known as the 'New Kukis'. In other words, the present conflict has nothing to do with the 4 to 5 thousand 'old Kukis' who are confined to small pockets in Hamren Sub-division. The conflict took place mainly with the 'new Kukis'

As stated already (chapter 2), an identity crisis of both the tribes seems to be central to this problem. The basis of the Karbi identity crisis was the sudden rise in the number of the Kuki in Karbi Anglong and their demand for a Kuki Regional Council (KRC). Many Karbis felt that it could be a precedent and that many other tribes would demand it. They would find it difficult to call the district Karbi Anglong after it. To the Kukis, the clashes in Manipur in the 1990s were a major issue. The Kuki community as a whole did not have its own administrative platform or demarcated territory. The formation of KRC within Karbi Anglong was their last hope of a platform to raise their voice in a democratic way. Its fertile land that was not yet explored was another reason for their migration to Karbi Anglong. The Kukis were fighting for an identity for two decades and wanted their dream to come true in

the distant Karbi Anglong.

### **Activities of KRA and UPDS and the Conflict**

Other causes too can be added to it such as the collection of "taxes" by the KRA from 2001. It is a general practice of all militant outfits. In this case KRA is said to have gone beyond the Kukis to some Karbi villages whose inhabitants were paying "taxes" already to the UPDS. The KRA claims that the Singhason Hills area was a Kuki territory and that it is their own land. The refusal of some Karbis to pay the taxes and the violence against them by the KRA led to polarisation. Some Karbis joined the UPDS or contacted this outfit for protection. Clashes with the KRA resulted from it. Such clashes were inevitable because the UPDS and KRA have different demands and needs. The UPDS considers itself the protector of the Karbis and the KRA of the Kukis. Innocent civilians were caught in the crossfire between them. At the same time, involvement of bigger outfits like NSCN (IM) cannot be ruled out. This outfit has signed a ceasefire agreement with the Centre. So their involvement can add to the bargaining power of their allies.

The fratricidal Karbi-Kuki conflict took a toll of more than 120 lives apart from the burning down of more than 1,000 houses in over 100 villages belonging to both the communities. The number of casualties is probably much higher, as government agencies could not reach all the sites of ghastly incidents especially in the higher ridges of Singhason-Khonbamon mountain range. The entire episode was triggered off from the last decade. The *Assam Tribune* reported on 2nd December, 2003 that around 5,000 persons, both Kuki and Karbi, took shelter in eight Relief camps set up at Longnit, Bokajan, Dillai, Hidipi and Manja. The *Telegraph* reported on 7th December, 2003 that 27 Kukis were missing. Other communities too were trapped in the conflict. For example, some unidentified persons set fire to a Mizo house in Dimapur. On 21 January, 2004 suspected UPDS militants killed 3 Garos, 1 Bodo and 4 Kukis in Hamren Sub-division.

The President of Kuki Inpi claimed that nearly 500 Kukis fled to North Cachar Hills, around 150 took shelter in the Manja relief camps, some 125 others from Molnom, Khengamol, Koimai, and Nounjang villages of Singhason Manja took shelter in the relief camps at Tuibuong, headquarters of Churachandpur District of Manipur and that 925 Kukis were in 4 Relief camps in Karbi Anglong, 200 in NC Hills District, 250 in Churachandpur District of Manipur and 200 in Dimapur, Nagaland. The Kuki Movement for Human Rights claims that nearly 320 Kuki houses were burnt down in 10 villages.

People’s Reaction

The purpose of this study was to understand the reaction of ordinary people from both the communities. For this purpose the researcher collected data through a questionnaire from ninety respondents, 30 each from the Karbi, Kuki and other mixed communities. There was an equal number of men and women in this sample of 90. The respondents belonged to the age groups of 15 to 70 years. The Tables that follow give the reaction of the respondents to the questions asked of them. More information was got through group discussion in some villages and with individual knowledgeable persons.

Table 2 shows that 64 percent of the respondents were friendly while 36 percent had no prior contact with other communities. 60 percent of the Karbi, 61 percent of the Kuki and 70 percent of the “other” respondents had friendly relations with other communities . 40 percent of the Karbi, 39 percent of the Kuki and 30 percent of the respondents from other communities had no prior contact with other communities. Most Karbi respondents knew the Kuki only through the “ginger business”, as people from Kuki community used to sell ginger.

Table2: Your Relations with People from Other communities before the Conflict (%)

Total	Karbi	Kuki	Other
-------	-------	------	-------

		M	F	M	F	M	F
a) Friendly	64%	62%	58%	71%	51%	72%	68%
b ) No contact	36%	38%	42%	29%	49%	28%	32%

The reaction of the respondents at the start of the Karbi-Kuki conflict differed (Table 3). 61 percent felt sad when they heard of the conflict and 26 percent felt angry because they felt that the conflict was not required. 13 percent felt like taking revenge on the other community. Those who felt sad included 62 percent of the Karbi, 48 percent of the Kuki and 73 percent “others”. 28 percent of the Karbi respondents, 27 percent of the Kuki and 22 percent of the “others” experienced anger while 25 percent of the Kuki, 10 percent of the Karbi and 5 percent from other communities, felt revengeful.

Table 3: Your Reaction at the Start of the Karbi-Kuki Conflict

	Total	Karbi		Kuki		Other	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
a) Sorrow	61%	52%	72%	46%	51%	68%	78%
b) Anger	26%	32%	24%	31%	23%	22%	22%
c) Revengeful	13%	16%	4%	23%	26%	10%	0%

More than half the respondents say that the conflict was for preservation of identity while 36 percent thought that it was a conflict between insurgent groups. 12 percent considered it a political conflict. The issue of the Kuki population rising from 21,883 to what their organisations claim to be 40,000 in 2001 was basic to it. This sudden increase raised questions about which of the communities is a majority and who is a minority. As explained above, the demand for a Kuki Regional Council added to the tension. The Karbi felt that other tribes too could make such a demand and that they themselves would be powerless and would become a minority in the territory that is named after their tribe.

Table 4: What Do You Think are the Causes of the Conflict?

	Total	Karbi		Kuki		Other	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
a) Identity preservation	52%	58%	40%	52%	35%	67%	60%
b) Between Militants	36%	32%	36%	38%	40%	32%	38%
c) A Political conflict	12%	10%	24%	10%	25%	1%	2%

In this stand they fell back on the experience of other tribes like the Tripuris of Tripura who have become a minority. This was shared by 49% of the Karbi respondents while 44% of the Kuki respondents and 64% of the respondents from other communities also felt that the conflict was due to an identity crisis of the different communities.

Table 5: Was It Necessary for Common People to Take Part in This Conflict?

	Total	Karbi		Kuki		Other	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
a) Yes, for survival of identity	48%	62%	42%	58%	43%	38%	45%
b) Yes, for showing one's responsibility towards one's own community	39%	34%	41%	38%	39%	45%	35%
c) Yes, to retaliate for loss of members of one's community	13%	4%	17%	4%	18%	17%	20%

In Table 5, the response to whether common people should have joined the conflict or not is seen. 48% of the total respondents felt that they should have taken part in this conflict for the survival of their identity, 39% said that taking part in the conflict was one way of showing their responsibility towards their own community while 13% said that they should retaliate or take revenge for the loss of members of one's community.

Table 6: Was the Demand of Kuki Regional Council Necessary?

	Total	Karbi		Kuki		Other	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
a) No because it could set an example for other communities	56%	72%	62%	11%	18%	82%	90%
b) Yes, because they are a part of society	33%	6%	2%	89%	82%	12%	8%
c) No, they are not part of society	11%	22%	36%	0%	0%	6%	2%

Two-thirds of the respondents feel that the demand for KRC was not necessary. Table 6 shows that nearly 56% of the respondents said that the demand could set an example to other communities. As many as 67% of the Karbi respondents and 86% from other communities against 15% of the Kuki felt that the demand for KRC could become a bad precedent. Of the 11% of the respondents who felt that the Kukis are not a part of their society so the demand was unnecessary, there were 29% Karbi and 4% of the respondents from other communities. The one-third who felt that the demand was necessary as the Kukis were a part of their society, included 85% of the Kuki against 4% of the Karbi and 10% from other communities.

Table 7: Did the KRC Demand Contribute?

	Total	Karbi		Kuki		Other	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
a) Yes	56%	8%	85%	25%	11%	65%	68%
b) No	27%	6%	10%	72%	68%	7%	20%
c) Cannot Say	17%	12%	5%	3%	21%	28%	30%

Table 7 shows that 56 percent of the respondents felt that the demand of KRC has contributed to the conflict, 27 percent disagree with it and 17 percent are unable to say anything. Those



who felt that it contributed to the conflict include 84 percent of the Karbi, 67 percent “others” and 18 percent Kuki. 70 percent of the Kuki disagreed with it against 8 percent of the Karbi and 4 percent of “others”.

**Table 8: Do You Think the ASDC (U)-KNA MOU Could Have Led to the Conflict?**

	Total	Karbi		Kuki		Other	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
a) Yes	55%	65%	58%	38%	48%	72%	51%
b) No	45%	35%	42%	62%	52%	28%	49%

Table 8 shows that 55 percent of the respondents thought that the MOU led to the conflict against 45 percent who disagreed with it. Only 43 percent of the Kuki respondents agreed with it against 62 each from the remaining two groups. 57 percent of the Kuki disagreed with the suggestion against 38 percent each from the Karbi and “others”..

**Table 9: Who Do You Think Was Responsible for the Conflict?**

	Total	Karbi		Kuki		Other	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
a) Extremists group	67%	62%	51%	72%	58%	82%	79%
b) Political group	21%	28%	40%	11%	33%	11%	6%
c) Common People	12%	10%	9%	17%	9%	7%	15%

Table 9 shows that two-thirds of the respondents say that the involvement of extremist groups led to the conflict, 21 percent hold political parties responsible while 12 percent blame common people for it. 57 percent of the Karbis, 65 percent of the Kukis and 81 percent of the others hold the extremist groups responsible for it. 34 percent of the Karbis think that political parties were responsible against 22 and 8 percent each of the other two groups. Only 9

percent of the Karbis, 13 percent of the Kukis and 11 percent of the others feel that the common people can be held responsible for it.

**Table 10: Do You Think That Extremist Groups Were Responsible for the Conflict?**

	Total	Karbi		Kuki		Other	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
a) Partly	67%	63%	48%	72%	63%	82%	76%
b) Fully	33%	37%	52%	28%	37%	18%	24%

Militant groups were acting on behalf of both the communities. Both the militant groups think that, they are fighting for a cause. The common people are happy that someone is fighting on their behalf but also feel that the militants are partly responsible for the conflict. Only 44 percent of the Karbis, 32 percent of the Kukis and 21 percent of “others” hold the militants are fully responsible for it.

**Table 11: The Role of the District Administration During the Conflict**

	Total	Karbi		Kuki		Other	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
a) Unsatisfactory	89%	100%	100%	100%	100%	63%	72%
b) Cannot Say	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	28%	22%
c) Satisfactory	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	9%	6%

Table 11 shows that 89 percent of the respondents were unhappy with the role of the administration during the conflict and 8 percent can say nothing. Only 3% felt that the administration did something and they are satisfied. Those who are dissatisfied include 100 percent of the Karbi and Kuki and 68 percent of the rest. In the last group 25 percent said nothing and 7 percent were satisfied with the administration. Group discussion showed that the

main reason for people’s dissatisfaction was what they considered the divide and rule policy of the ruling party responsible for it. It repeated the propaganda of the ASDC (U) - KNA (MOU) at the peak of the conflict.

Table 12: When Can Karbi-Kuki Relations Improve?

	Total	Karbi		Kuki		Other	
		M	F	M	F	M	F
a) People’s Peace Initiatives	57%	52%	38%	63%	51%	68%	72%
b) Youth Work for Peace	12%	15%	29%	10%	11%	4%	3%
c) If Administration Tries	31%	33%	33%	27%	38%	28%	25%

Table 12 shows that 57 percent of the respondents feel that Karbi-Kuki relations can improve if common people take steps towards peace. More Kukis than Karbis feel that common people can improve relations between the tribes. But a significant section of the “other” respondents think that the Administration has to try to bring about a permanent solution to the problem. A third each of the Karbi and Kuki respondents said the same.

Main Findings and Suggestions

One can summarise the findings by showing the similarities and differences in the response of each community. Before the conflict the communities had friendly relations with one another but the relations were based mostly on business. The Karbis bought ginger from the Kuki who grew it but did not socialise much with them. That is the main reason why a majority of all three groups feels that the people themselves have to take peace initiatives. That looks like a sincere suggestion because though their relations did not go beyond business most respondents were sad when the conflict began. That has to be seen also in the context of most non-Kukis

believing that the KRC demand was a major cause of the conflict while a majority of the Kuki believe that the ASDC (U)-KNA MOU had nothing to do with it.

Whether they blame the MOU or not, a majority of the respondents believe that the militants are at least partly responsible for this conflict while others believe that also the common people and political parties have to accept responsibility for it. The Karbi and the Kuki respondents were dissatisfied with the work of the administration and the police during the conflict. While a majority of the Karbi respondents and some respondents from other communities did not take the Kukis as a part of their society, a majority of the Kuki respondents believed that they are part of the Karbi society and that they have a right to demand the KRC. There is difference of opinion also on the follow up. A majority believed that ultimately the common people working together can solve the problem because the militants and politicians will use the issue for their own purpose.

An important finding is that the tribes were convinced that their identity as a community was in danger if they did not react fast. Five main causes for this identity crisis were found out through ‘Problem Tree Analysis (PTA)’ methodology. They were, non-recognition of Kukis as an indigenous tribe of Karbi Anglong, ethnic tension that followed, the UPDO-KRA feud, fighting for economic benefits and migration of Kukis into Karbi Anglong.

Main Findings through Do No Harm (DNH) Framework

The researcher used the Do No Harm (DNH) framework as a guide to draw the conclusions from the analysis of the data. The whole conflict was between two communities, Karbis and Kukis but the primary parties involved were not the common people but the militant groups i.e. UPDS (now known as KLNLF) and the Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA). Other secondary groups involved were political parties, social organisations, youth organisations, people in relief camps, students, the army and the police. Also

the involvement of bigger militant outfits like NSCN (IM) cannot be ruled out since a larger base can give them greater bargaining power in the peace negotiations with the Government of India and control over the militant groups in the region. Whether NSCN-IM is involved or not, many believe that this conflict would not have turned violent, had there been no extremist groups acting on behalf of both the communities.

The analysis also shows that there is not much difference in the perception of the conflict by the communities. One also most respondents struggling with the emotions of revenge, hatred, unity within their own tribe and the need for peace. Unity of the tribe becomes crucial in a situation of threat. Rightly or wrongly the Karbis feel the threat of becoming a minority in what they consider their own land. They feel hurt by this possibility. The Kukis, on the other side, feel the threat because they do not have their own administrative platform to raise their voice and feel the need to have it to fight for their rights. Thus, as Table 6 shows, both consider it a do or die battle.

### **Process**

There are three main phases in this conflict. The first phase is small and rare incidents of violence and conflict between the two extremist groups. In the second phase, violence reached the maximum level in which the extremist groups and common people of both the communities were involved. The third phase was the cooling down of violence. The conflict came under control. But the cooling down may not last long if a solution is not found when the conflict is in a dormant stage.

The whole process of political manipulation united the people of the same tribe but divided them from others. The role played by various political parties became clear when they tried to use the course of events for propaganda against the other parties. The common people too did not hesitate to spread rumours during the conflict. Militants of one community showed no hesitation in killing members of other communities. Also some unpredictable incidents

took place such as the protest rally and inter-community discussion leading to violence. The militants used violence because both of them wanted to resolve the conflict to the advantage of their own community. Revenge was writ large in all their actions.

### **Problems**

Efforts were also made to resolve the conflict. Different social, political and youth organisations took peace initiatives through peace rallies, presentation of memoranda at the administrative, state and central levels, conduct of peace concerts, peace seminars, group discussions, wall paintings and posters. Different NGOs took up peace programmes to resolve this conflict. But very few of them were effective because they were unable to solve the basic problems such as the search for economic benefits, employment opportunities, land for settlement and agriculture, administrative, social and political control. The militant groups too were trying to get control over the ginger business as well as military supremacy. The common people fought for the preservation of their 'Identity'.

Though the main cause of the conflict is one of "identity crisis" other reasons too led to it such as control over economic benefits, land, influx of immigrants. The UPDS-KRA MOU shows that each militant group involved in the conflict had its own interest. They were crucial in the spread of the conflict and in helping it to grow larger than it would have been otherwise. Besides, the demands of these two tribes often contradicted each other. For example, the Kukis wanted a territory of their own and the KAC as a platform to demand their recognition as an indigenous tribe of Karbi Anglong. The Karbi viewed it as a threat to their identity. Other communities got trapped in this conflict.

### ***Identifying and Analyzing Dividers and Connectors***

The main dividers were the different ideologies of the youth, political and social organisations. These institutions which

existed before this conflict, understood it differently. The Kuki Students' Organisation tried to hold peace talks with Karbi youth organisations but could not do it since there were many Karbi youth organisations. That continued the division.

In this context it was easy to rouse the emotions of the common people and many of them took part in the conflict. Different social and political students' groups took out protest rallies in Diphu town. They turned violent. Militant groups like UPDS and KRA clashed with each other. In the past the united ASDC, the main political party of Karbi Anglong was respected. But it split into two in 2000 due to ideological differences. New groups emerged and one of them signed the MOU. It led to factional fights.

On the other side, there are many institutions like schools, churches, markets, hospitals and the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council where different communities come together. For example, the weekly market of Manja town is a place where the Karbi and Kuki continue to buy and sell their goods in spite of the conflict. During the conflict and in the post-conflict period many NGOs and social and youth organisations took up peace programmes and developmental works to bring Karbi Anglong back to normalcy. They did rehabilitation work like construction of houses, giving books, fees and school uniforms to students. These and other works of civil society groups can help with peace and tolerance among common people.

### **Suggestions**

While a majority of the Kukis believe that the MOU had nothing to do with the conflict, most Karbis believe the opposite. Till The ruling party took up the MOU as an issue at the peak of the conflict, ASDC (U) had kept the MOU a secret. That made the people of Karbi Anglong feel that they were being treated unfairly. That itself became a divider in the conflict. But instead of criticising the political parties, it would be healthier for the people to find out why the MOU came into existence. That can lead to

a compromise on this issue. The parties in conflict should try to negotiate because they cannot achieve their objective through violence. That involves their coming together under a common umbrella to discuss the MOU and understand the needs and rights of the Kukis and Karbis. At present the MOU is dormant because of opposition from all sides. This silence is not a permanent solution because it can explode any time.

The militant groups started the conflict and then it spread to the community. These groups are fighting for their own community. So their sentiments have to be understood without accepting their methods. Peace is not possible until and unless steps are taken to understand the issues they raise. Popular pressure is required to get the KLNLF and KRA to work for a ceasefire agreement with the Government of India and get the Government to negotiate with them.

The common people participated in the conflict due to different reasons, the most important being an identity crisis. It is important to deal with it and bring both the tribes under one platform for a better understanding. Civil society groups may be able to bring their leaders together for an initial discussion at some spot away from the conflict area. Then follow steps to understand and respect the feelings and rights of other communities. Seminars, workshops, group discussion, street plays, etc. can assist in it. That may require a review of State policies on the settlement of other communities.

Many institutions like NGOs, social and political groups tried to solve the conflict but they failed due to differences in their ideology and understanding of the issue and also because some of them played a one-sided role. The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council can bring different communities together through its work. The land settlement policy of Karbi Anglong is different from that of other tribes and that needs to be reviewed.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The study was necessitated by the Karbi-Kuki conflict that has

to be solved if the two tribes have to live together. The militant groups were an important component in the conflict, so were political parties. The emotional climate they created against the other tribes sucked the common people into the conflict. The administration did not play its role in preventing or reducing the impact of the conflict. Very little was done to deal with the identity crisis. This process resulted in major differences in the perception of the conflict and in creating emotions such as revenge and hatred. During the conflict each tribe came together against the others, forgetting their political, religious or economic differences. Many common people took part in the conflict because of the feeling that the whole community was in danger.

The situation was brought under control with the intervention of different governmental and non-governmental agencies or church-based organisations. But the overall feeling that it is a conflict between two communities (Karbi and Kuki) to protect their identity has not died out. A majority on both sides do not see the involvement of the militant groups but blame the administration, political parties, youth organisations, social organisations, common people and the police for not playing their role well. They ignore the role of the militant groups though the origin of the conflict is to a great extent the effort of the UPDS and KRA to get the upper hand.

We have referred to the role of the political parties during the first phase or the beginning of the conflict. The second was the blowout phase. The small incidents of conflict between the militants had reached the ordinary members of the tribes. The third phase was the cooling down or dormant stage without any solution. The militants and the political parties tried to manipulate each phase. Many Karbi young persons realise that while respecting their identity crisis, they should not have taken the issue to an extreme. Now they see the need to initiate some peace moves. Every dark cloud has a silver lining. It is important for the church and civil society groups as well as for the administration to understand

these feeling and take them forward. Different organisations and individuals of both the communities had come forward for relief work. That can be used as the first step towards peace between the tribes. People trying to understand the core problem of the conflict is the first step towards peace.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Terang, Barelong, *The History of Karbi*, Publisher Unknown, Guwahati, 2003.  
 Lyall, Charles, *The Mikirs*, United Publishers, Guwahati, 1908.  
 Phangcho, Phukan C, *The Karbis of Northeast India*, Angik Publication, Guwahati, 2003.  
 Phangcho, Phukan C, *Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills*, Phangcho, Phukan C Publisher, 2001.

#### **Other Sources :**

*MoU between ASDC (U) and KNA*, Manja, 4th December, 2000.  
 Regional Newspapers like *The Telegraph*, *The Sentinel*, *The Assam Tribune*, *The Nagaland Post*, etc.  
 Local News papers like *The Hill Times*, *The Arleng Daily*, *The Thek-Kere*, *The Thekar*, etc.

#### **Websites on the internet :**

[www.geocities.com/klnlf](http://www.geocities.com/klnlf)  
[www.kukifourm.com](http://www.kukifourm.com)

---

## MEITEI-NAGA CONFLICT WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE TERRITO- RIAL ISSUE IN MANIPUR

*M. Dominic Maring*

June 2001 witnessed tension and violence between the Meitei and the Nagas of Manipur on the issue of extension of the ceasefire between the Centre and the NSCN-IM to all the Naga inhabited territories. Around a third of the population of Manipur belong to the Naga and other tribes. While the Nagas welcomed this move, other communities, especially the Meitei who are 60% of its population living mainly in the Valley felt threatened. That resulted in a conflict, death and arson. Today the Meitei commemorate June 18 as Martyrs' day since most deaths were on that day. This paper is an effort to understand the issues involved and search for possible solutions.

### **The Background of Manipur**

Manipur, one of the Seven Sisters of the Northeast, with an area of 22,327 sq.km. is situated in the extreme corner of the country bordering Myanmar in the east, Nagaland in the north, Assam in the west, and Mizoram in the south. Geographically, Manipur is a region with a very fertile valley of 1,834 sq.km. and difficult hill ranges of 15,154 sq.km. It lies between Longitude of 93.03E to 94.78E and Latitude of 23.83N to 25.63N. Due to such geo-topographical factors, the State was relatively unaffected by wider socio-economic, political, and cultural cross currents. So its interaction was confined to the neighbouring areas of Cachar, Nagaland, Tripura, Assam, Mizoram, Myanmar and the adjoining hills.

Manipur is the abode of various ethnic groups of which Meiteis and Meitei Pangals, who reside in the valley, are the largest.

The hillmen, dwell in the surrounding hill ranges. 'Historically, the origin of the people of Manipur is uncertain, but as tradition goes, they are an amalgamation of several hill tribes, the Koomals of the East; the Moirangs of the South; and the Meitei and Looangs of the Northeast.'<sup>2</sup> According to the 2001 census, its total population is 23,88,634 of whom 12,07,338 are males and 11,81,296 are females. The estimated increase of population in the decade 1991 to 2001, is 5,51,845 (30.04%). The density is 107 persons per sq. km and the sex ratio is 978. The literacy rate of the state is 68.87% i.e. males 77.87% and females 59.70%. The decennial growth, sex ratio and literacy rate are thus higher than the national average.

In the olden days Manipur was known to the neighbouring states by different names such as 'Mecklay', 'Cassey', 'Kase', 'Kathe', 'Makeli', 'Magli' and 'Moglan'. It is also believed that Manipur derived its name, because there was much 'Diamond Ore' in the ancient times; 'Mani' meaning 'diamond' and 'pur' meaning 'place'.<sup>1</sup> Manipur was also one of the oldest independent kingdoms of Southeast Asia. It had its own civilisation, traditions and cultural heritage. The puyas (a traditional written record) give an account of its pre-historic and proto-historic period which starts with the accession of 'Nongda Lairen Pakhangba' in 33 A.D. He and his successors started the process of nation building by conquering all the clans in the valley. It was completed in the 15th century. With it, Manipur became a full fledged nation under the banner of the Ningthouja dynasty. With the conquest of the Kabow Valley, the boundary of Manipur crossed the hill ranges and extended upto the Trans Chindwin (now in Myanmar) basin.

In the first half of the 18th century, the power and prestige of Manipur reached its zenith under the leadership of King Pamheiba. Through his undaunted spirit, he carried his victorious armies upto the imperial city of Ava. He also effected a successful religious reformation. In the second half of the century, Burma retaliated

for its defeat through several onslaughts. That is when Manipur sought the help of the British stationed in Assam. But in the last part of the century, Manipur regained peace and prosperity under the initiative of Rajashree Bagyachandra. At his death Manipur entered its ‘Dark Age’, due to wars of succession among his sons. Taking advantage of the situation, the Burmese invaded it in 1819 and occupied Manipur from 1819 to 1826. The atrocities that resulted from it are remembered as “Seven Years Devastation”(Chahi taret khuntakpa). The British then made Gambhir Singh the ruler of Manipur by driving the Burmese out of Manipur.

Then came the Yandaboo Treaty of 24 February 1826. Through it the Burmese emperor ceded all his territories to the East India Company and recognised Gambhir Singh as an independent ruler of Manipur. The East India Company then began to interfere in the internal affairs of Manipur and that led to the “Anglo-Manipur War of 1891.” After its defeat, the fate of Manipur was in the hands of the British. After the Indian Independence in 1947, Manipur was merged with the Indian Union on 15th October 1949, under the “Manipur Merger Agreement”. It became a full-fledged state in 1972.

**The Population of Manipur**

The ‘Meitei’ who are also commonly called ‘Manipuri’, is the dominant ethnic group of Manipur, living mostly in the valley. There is a sizeable Muslim population called Meitei-Pangals (Meitei Muslims). There are also Scheduled Castes such as Dhupi (Dhopi), Lois, Muchi (Ravidas), Namasudra, Patni, Sutradhar and Yaithibi. The Meitei number 13,61,521 (57%). The Meitei Pangals (Manipuri Muslims) are 1,67,201 (7%). Thus, 64 percent of the population is Meitei.

Most tribes live in the hills. Among them, Senapati District has the highest population with 3,79,214, followed by Churachandpur, 2,28,707, Ukhrul,1,40,946, Chandel,1,22,714

and Tamenglong,1,11,493. The tribal population totals about 7,13,813. The Naga tribes of Manipur are the Tangkhul, the Zeliangrong (Ze - Zemei, Liang - Liangmei, Rong - Rongmei), Mao, Maram, Poumai, Maring, Anal, Lamkang, Monsang, Mayon, Thangal, Chothe, Tarao, Chiru, Angami and the Sema. The Zeme and the Liangmei are the Kacha Nagas.

The Tangkhuls live in Ukhrul District and most Zeliangrongs live in Tamenglong District and in some pockets of the Imphal valley. The Maos, the Marams, the Poumais, the Thangals, the Angamis and the Semas live in the Senapati District bordering Nagaland. The Marings, the Anals, the Lamkangs, the Monsangs, the Moyons and the Taraos are concentrated in Chandel District bordering Myanmar. The Chirus are scattered in Tamenglong, Churachandpur and Senapati District.

**The Meitei-Naga Relationship in the Past & Present**

Table 1 shows that 38.36 percent of the Nagas feel that there was ‘cordial relationship’ before the June 18th 2001 Uprising. But 51.88 percent of them feel that it was not so cordial’. On the other side 49 percent of the Meiteis feel that their relationship was ‘cordial’ before the June 18th 2001 Uprising and 33 percent say strongly that it‘was not so cordial’. 31.58 percent of the neutral group feel that Meitei-Naga relationship was cordial but 57.89 percent of the same group strongly felt otherwise.

**Table 1:TheRrelationship Between the Meiteis and the Nagas before June 18th 2001 Uprising was (119 responses)**

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Nagas</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Meiteis</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Neutral Gruop</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Cordial	51	38.36	64	49	42	31.58
Not so cordial	69	51.88	44	33	77	57.89
No Comment	13	9.76	25	18	14	10.53

1 L. Jeyaseelan, Impact of the Missionary Movement in Manipur (New Delhi : Scholar Publishing House (P) Ltd., 1996, p2.  
2 Ibid, p8

According to Table 2, 17% of the Nagas say that the relationship between the Meiteis and the Nagas in the post June 18th 2001 Uprising has ‘improved’. 47 percent of them say that it ‘got worse’ and that it ‘will never improve’. In the same manner, 47.89 percent of the Meiteis state that the relationship has ‘improved’ but 31.09 percent state that the relationship ‘got worse’ in the post June 18th 2001 Uprising and 12.61 percent of the Meiteis suggest that it ‘will never improve’. While 21.01 percent of neutral group feel that the relationship has ‘improved’ in the post June 18th 2001 Uprising, 53.78 percent say that it ‘got worse’.

**Table 2: The Meiteis think that the Nagas are (based on the interview responses of 265 persons)**

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Nagas</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Meiteis</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>NeutralGroup</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Improved	20	17	57	47.89	25	21.01
Got worse	56	47	37	31.09	64	53.78
Will never improve	30	25	15	12.61	16	13.45
Will get worse	13	11	10	8.41	14	11.76

**Social Relationship**

In Table 3 one finds that 44.15 percent of the Nagas strongly feel that the Meiteis think that the Nagas are inferior to them. In the same spirit, 40.38 percent of Meiteis state that the Nagas are inferior to them but a third of the Meiteis (33.58 percent) feel that the Nagas are superior to them. On the other side 33.96 percent of the neutral group state that the Nagas are inferior to the Meiteis and 26.42 percent object to this view. They say that the Nagas are superior to the Meiteis. Of importance is the fact that none speaks of equality. the question is of one group being superior or inferior to the other. This attitude is basic to a conflict.

After superiority and inferiority comes the issue of likes and dislikes (Table 3). 25 percent of the Naga respondents dislike the attitude of the Meiteis. 40.38 percent of them feel strongly that

the Meitei attitude is one of intolerance. On the other side, 45.19 percent of the Meitei feel that the Nagas dislike them against 28.84 percent who state that they are intolerant. In the same spirit 45.19 percent of the neutral group feel that the Naga attitude towards the Meiteis is one of dislike and 19.24 percent speak of intolerance.

That there are differences in the Naga-Meitei relations is obvious. The Naga social structure is different from that of the Meiteis. The Naga woman’s status is better than that of her Meitei counterparts. Differences exist also in their history because of the Hinduisation of the Meitei. The Nagas continued to be Animists. Thus two peoples who were closely related were divided. Then came the Kingdom in the 18th century that came to be viewed predominantly as Meitei. The process was completed with the Christianisation of the Nagas. A major divider was the purity-pollution that came with Hinduism that the Nagas did not have. Because of it the Meitei do not allow the Nagas or the tribals in general, to enter their house or eat with them. The exclusive tribal tendency complements it on the Naga side. The exclusive tendencies are still found among some have been strengthened by their religious conversion and recent political developments. Thus, the present is built on the past.

**Table 3: Attitude Towards the Nagas or Meitei (104 responses)**

<i>Responses</i>	<i>Nagas</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Meiteis</i>	<i>(%)</i>	<i>Neutral Group</i>	<i>(%)</i>
Dislike	27	25.96	47	45.19	47	45.19
Toleration	25	24.04	20	19.24	26	25
Intolerance	42	40.38	30	28.84	20	19.24
No Comment	10	09.62	7	06.73	11	10.57

**Economic Relations**

Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of both the Meiteis and the Nagas. But the hill tribes practise jhum cultivation and a few are involved in terrace farming. The Meitei being a peasant community in the plains, practise wet cultivation.



Traditionally the hill people used to bring agricultural produce like plaintain leaves, bamboo shoots (Usoi or Soibum) vegetables, tea leaves, firewood, charcoal and fruits down to the plains for sale in its open bazars/markets. In return they used to buy essential commodities like Ngari (fermented fish), fish, dal, salt, onions, oil, mustard leaves, potatoes and clothes. The internal trade dealt chiefly in food items. It was carried out essentially by women. The existing trade, both external and internal is small in scale and is essentially to meet the local demands.

Thus, the economic ties make the hill and valley people inseparable. Any disturbance to them can result in a major economic crisis. Both the hill and plains people would suffer because of it. National Highways 39 and 56 are the State's lifeline. Recent tensions have resulted in their blockade and that has affected the commercial life in the capital Imphal. Thus, while economic relations are crucial, these actions based on social tensions have led to strained relations between the two communities.

### **Ethnic Relations**

Even though both claim that they belong to the Tibeto-Burman family, there are wide ethnic and cultural differences between them. Traditionally the Nagas were warriors and head-hunting tribes while the Meitei were perceived as conquerors. Of course there have been some inter marriages in the past and they continue even now. But they are exceptions rather than the rule.

Over time, they have developed ethnic relations of intolerance and mutual distrust. Each group wants to outdo the other. The Meiteis live in a compact area in the valley, speak the same language and follow the same traditional cultural practices. Therefore, they wield power in the valley. The Nagas on the other hand, are scattered all over the hill districts, speak different dialects and follow different cultural practices. The Meitei and Nagas living in the valley show signs of friendship but in their hearts they are a confused lot<sup>2</sup>. They do not feel at ease with one another.

### **Cultural Relationst**

Today these two communities profess different faiths. The Meiteis feel that Hinduism is superior to Christianity while the tribals feel the opposite about Hinduism. On the other side one cannot say easily that Christianity unites the Nagas. There have been many conflicts between them though they belong to the same religion. Their tribal identity gets precedence over their religious belonging. However, on many issues their religion becomes a strong basis for Naga unity.<sup>4</sup> The difference is much greater with Hinduism. So religion has become a divisive factor.

However, some practices that link the Meitei and Naga cultures have come down from the past. For instance, when the Meiteis celebrate the *Lai Haraoba* (act of worship), a Tangkhul costume should be represented in *Nongpok Ningthou* and *Panthoibi Lai-haraoba*. The *Kanglei Haraoba* cannot be completed without it. Formerly, before the Raja laid the foundation of a palace, a ritual prayer had to be said by a priest of the Kabui Naga tribe. It was done, for instance, when the Langmangdong, the Langthabal (1709) and Sangaiprou palaces were constructed.

The Nagas and the Meitei followed a common tradition also while building a house. Generally, the houses of both faced the east and have a wooden cross on top of the house. The traditional kitchen or fire place of both of them stands on three stones (Phunga Nungdum in Meitei). Both store water in a pitcher to the left of the house or kitchen. There are other similarities between individual Naga tribes and the Meitei for example, the manner in which the Marings and the Meitei propitiated the spirits. The Marings practice *Kannathui* to chase away the spirits during illness, pestilence and drought. The Meitei practised *thou-thouba*. Both keep household deities like *Chimthrai* and *Sanamahi* of the Meiteis. The *Lainingthou phunal Ningthou* is worshipped by both Meiteis and the phunal Marings. The Morung (Dormitory) system is found among both but the name differs. These and other instances show

deep cultural linkages between the two but of late divisions have arisen among them.

The Political Relationship

Table 4 shows that 31.07 percent of the Nagas feel that the ‘Indian Government’ plays a divide and rule role and 45.63 percent blame the politicians for it. On the other side, 36.80 percent of the Meiteis feel that ‘politicians’ play this role and 46.61 percent blame the ‘Indian Government’ for it. 35.92 percent of the neutral group state that the Indian Government plays the dividing policy.

Table 4: Who is Dividing the People? (responses of 103 persons)

Responses	Nagas (%)		Meiteis (%)		Neutral Group (%)	
Politicians	47	45.63	38	36.80	45	43.69
Student Unions	0	54.85	0	54.95	07	6.79
Outsiders	0	32.92	10	9.70	08	7.77
Indian Govt.	32	31.07	48	46.61	37	35.92
Militants	16	15.53	02	01.94	06	5.83
In the past, Nagas have played an important role in the political development of the State. For example, Sameirong (518-						

568) who ruled Manipur in the 6th century is said to be of the Tangkhul tribe. Mongyamba (1562-1597) and Garibniwas (1709-1748) are said to be from the Anal and Thangal tribes respectively. Thus, in their tradition they showed some political unity. Kabui Salang Maiba played a prominent role in the legend of Khamba Thoibi. Many Tangkhuls, Thangals, Kabuis, Marings and Anals participated in the campaign against the Burmese. But today the Nagas feel that the Meitei officers posted in the hill districts are not committed to Naga or other tribal interests. That causes suspicion among them.

Traditional Way of Conflict resolution

Table 5: Is There an Indigenous Way of Solving Conflicts? (274 responses)

Responses	Dialogue	Negotiation	Symbols	Traditional resolution
No. of pers.	160	111	03	00
Percentage	58.39%	40.52%	1.09%	0%

Table 5 shows that 58.39 percent of the respondents feel that ‘dialogue’ is the only means to resolve a conflict while 40.52 percent want ‘negotiations’. They also feel that there is no existing symbol to address the problem of conflict or peace. There is no traditional practice of resolving conflicts. Others are of the view that traditionally conflicts were resolved through negotiations and dialogue. Dr. Gangte feels that emotional bonding and renewal of trust are among tools of conflict resolution. Whether traditional systems existed or not, today the best way is to accept and respect the rights, traditions, culture and religious practices of each other. The traditional bond of a ‘co-existing spirit’ can contribute to a solution. During the cease-fire declaration in 2001 between GOI and NSCN (IM), Nagas used the ‘White flag’ as a symbol of peace, while the Meiteis used ‘Black flag’ as a sign of protest. A grievance is that the State’s natural and other economic resources are not distributed equally. One may need to look at this grievance. That requires dialogue.<sup>5</sup>

In the past some have tried to promote peace in the region through music. For instance, a song was composed on unity and respect for others called, “Ogri”. The Meitei sang it in the Mao Naga area to strike a chord of unity and forgiveness and not to revolt against Maharaja Kirti Chandra Singh. Also Bhupen Hazarika of Assam sang a song of love and forgiveness to the Nagas at Kohima in 1964 in the midst of bloodshed. Some suggest that Nagas wearing Meitei clothes and Meiteis wearing Naga clothes once a fortnight can become an external sign of the two accepting each other. Others want clubs and unions to be organised areawise, rather than by community.”<sup>6</sup>

The Question of Territorial Integrity

Ultimately, however, one cannot deny that the ‘Question

of Territorial Integrity’ has become crucial to the conflict. The agreement between the Government of India (GOI) and NSCN-IM extending the ceasefire “without territorial limits” caused a turmoil in Manipur in June 2001. Such an extension makes the Meitei believe that territorial integrity is at stake. On the other side, the tribals believe that for centuries the hill areas have been neglected by the Meitei rulers. Psychologically, tribals have developed an inferiority complex in spite of the political power they have gained. They feel that most development schemes are centred round Imphal and the valley and that the hill areas are neglected. The schemes meant for the hills are often manipulated by the hill politicians and leaders themselves. Therefore, Naga people and their areas remain undeveloped. Money meant for developing the Naga areas gets into the hands of the Meitei leaders. Besides, the Meitei as well as Naga underground movements create a lot of disturbance in the developmental work. They take contracts for works and submit completion reports without completing the work.<sup>1</sup>

Table 6: Whom is Responsible for the Conflict? (75 responses)

Responses	Nagas (%)		Meiteis (%)		NeutralGroup (%)	
The Naga people	05	6.67	05	6.66	05	6.66
The Meiteis	20	26.66	08	10.66	20	26.67
The Indian Govt.	25	33.33	25	33.34	35	46.67
The ext. of Cease-						
Fire into Manipur	15	20.00	31	41.34	07	9.34
Militants of Manipur	05	6.67	01	1.34	05	6.66
Club and Associations	05	6.67	05	6.66	03	4.00

33.33 % of the Naga respondents say that the Indian Government is responsible for the conflict, but others feel that the Meitei opposition to the extension of ceasefire is its real cause. On the other side 33.34% of the Meiteis feel strongly that the Indian Government should be held responsible for it and only 41.34% say that extension of ceasefire led to the conflict. They feel that its root cause is that Muivah, who hails from Manipur has been

unwilling to accept the state of Manipur as it exists. The activities of the Naga Club founded in 1918 spread to the neighbouring hills of Manipur gradually and ‘Manipur Pan Club’, (1939) spread its cultural activities even to Guwahati. These groups were influenced by the alliance between persons like A.Z. Phizo and Hijam Irabot of Manipur. They met in Burma in the 1950s but failed to reach China despite the assistance of Thakin Ahan Tun, the Chief of the Communist Party of Burma.

The two leaders failed also to achieve their political objectives but embraced cultural Revolution for their people. The political events around the Partition moved so fast that neither the Meitei nor the Nagas could cope with the sudden change. Meiteis did not make an issue of it initially since they were told that being Hindus they belonged to India. The Nagas, being neither Hindus nor Muslims, did not know where they belonged in this religion-based Partition. They watched with apprehension the territorial consolidation of the Indian Union accomplished by Sardar Patel, the Iron Man of India.

Amid this uncertainnty came the integration of Manipur with India and the consolidation of the Manipuri State. The Nagas felt that they were taken for granted in the process of assimilation. Slowly a feeling grew among them that their destiny did not co-exist with that of the Meiteis. They were apprehensive of the leadership of Manipur dominated by one ethnic group.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the conflict between the two began slowly but has got intensified in the recent past. The Centre’s decision on the ceasefire widened the emotional gap between them. The state government’s policy of trying to extend the Manipur Land Revenue (MLR) Act 1960 to the hill areas is resented by the hill tribes. They feel that it is an effort to alienate their land. The Meitei feel that the tribes who are 40 percent of the population are occupying 60 percent of the land leaving only 40 percent for them while the tribes feel that the

Meitei are monopolising all the jobs.

These and other instances result in accusations of discrimination. The Nagas claim that the Meitei at times call them “Hao” (a low status tribal) or consider them “Amangba” (Unclean). These terms devalue their social and cultural systems and create a binary opposition between the Meiteis and the hill people. They carry within them an ideology of purity and pollution, which is the very foundation of the caste system while the tribes are casteless societies.

Thus, tension existed between the two for some decades. The Centre seems to have been ignorant of this situation and took a decision based purely on party political considerations and extended the ceasefire beyond Nagaland to the neighbouring areas wherever the Nagas lived. That was a mode of telling Manipur that the Centre considered the Naga Hills a part of Nagaland. The Meitei considered it a threat to the territorial integrity of their State because they needed both power and land in the hills. That intensified the conflict of June 2001. Its flashpoint was the killing of people on June 18. The Meitei observe it as Martyrs’ Day and it has become a symbol of division between the two.

Table 7 shows that 32.19 percent of the Nagas feel that the ethnic conflict is due to non-practice of morals and ethics against 47.27 percent who think that it is because of rivalry between their communities. Similarly, 38.35 percent of the Meiteis feel that it is due to non-practice of morals and ethics against 53.43 percent who attribute it to rivalry between the two. Both blame also the Centre for it.

Table 7: Other Causes of the Ethnic Conflict (146 responses)

Responses	Nagas	(%)	Meiteis	(%)	NeutralGroup	(%)
Family breakdown	30	20.54	12	8.22	0	0
Non-practice of morals & ethics	47	32.19	56	38.35	57	39.04
Rivalry between						

different comm. 69 47.27 78 53.43 89 60.96

Since it became clear that an identity search was integral to this conflict, they were questioned also on this issue. 65.66 percent of the Nagas **feel** that it is due to the growing ethnic identity issue against 34.34 percent who **disagree** with it. On the Meitei side 54.82 percent **agree** with it against 45.18 percent who **disagree**. An identity search is not destructive in itself. But in Manipur and in much of the Northeast it has lapsed into “ethnicity construction” which has in it the seed of social division . Till about a century ago, the hill tribes were known only as Anal, Maring, Kabui, Tangkhul, Mao, Thangal, Maram, Chiru and so on. Today this identity is combined with their Naga belonging.

It is a social process that the Meitei are unable to deal with. They too are struggling with a similar crisis. It has sub-consciously prompted the Nagas to demand territorial integration and the Meiteis to demand the territorial integrity of Manipur. There is no provision in the Indian Constitution to deal with such developments because they are social and psychological issues, not legal. So the State tends to take recourse to a purely law and order approach. That is what happened in Manipur when the initial political move failed. In the context, the Naga feeling of neglect became integral to their identity search. A political solution has been found to the question by allotting 20 out of 60 seats in the legislative assembly to the tribes. But they feel that it does not solve the problem of their perceived or real discrimination. All these issues came together when the extension of the ceasefire was announced and polarised the two sides.

The Meitei Stand

\_\_\_\_\_The Meiteis are united in their thinking that Manipur should never be divided. They do not recognise any Naga, Kuki or Meitei area. All land belongs to all people. To some extent it is a positive development. Some Meiteis do not even want to use the word ‘Kangleipak’ as it can give the impression that it is Meitei land

and antagonise the tribal and other communities. They want all to show their solidarity for the preservation of their territorial integrity. They are prepared to hear all views, even dissent, but ultimately they impose their view. Some of them state that if the Nagas want 'Greater Nagaland' they should leave Manipur and go to Nagaland but not take their land with them. They claim to be against no community in particular, but only against the NSCN (IM) but they give the impression that they are not serious on the issue of political autonomy to the tribals, such as implementing the provisions of the 6th Schedule of the Constitution. They say that no discrimination is practised in Manipur against the Nagas and add that for many years, tribals were the Chief Ministers of Manipur. They want to know why the tribal areas were not developed during their time.

They add that the hereditary Rajas ruled over the hills as kings of all i.e. tribes, Meiteis and Meitei Pangals, that they are not against an honourable settlement of the NSCN-IM demand, but that it cannot be at the cost of Manipur whose suzerainty once ranged from the Kabow Valley to the Surma Valley.

For the NSCN (IM) negotiations to be successful, both they and the Union Government should jointly declare that there will be no breaking up of Manipur. All efforts should be made towards a holistic solution and the interests of every group should be taken into consideration. It should be clear to the Union Government and to the NSCN (IM) that the Manipuris will not stand in the way of peace as long as the territorial integrity of Manipur is maintained. They are afraid that if the Naga areas disintegrate; **Churachandpur, Tengnoupal and Moreh** may make similar claims to join Mizoram. They say that the Nagas expanded their ideology from independent villages to statehood. Now they are dreaming of a sovereign nation. They consider it Naga expansionism and a threat to peace and territorial integrity.

### The Naga Claim

The Nagas claim that the Meiteis always discriminate against them, that their areas are not developed that the developmental schemes are centred only in and around Imphal and the valley. They add that their areas were artificially integrated by the king and then by the British to serve their colonial interests, that they were never ruled over by the Meitei Rajas. They discard the claim of the Meitei assimilation of the hills areas through conquests and add: "We are not asking for anyone's land; it is our land and it should be returned to us. The rule of the kings extended only to the valley. The Nagas were ruled by the Vice President of the Durbar directly during the British occupation. It is substantiated by history. We now want to unite Naga inhabited areas under one administrative unit. Failure to integrate these areas into Nagalim (Greater Nagaland) would result in a waste of efforts of the last 50 years." A minority among them feels that they were never one nation but consisted of various warring tribes. Many who live close to the Imphal valley want no division. They see their future here and do not want to leave the place. They fear that they may not be treated well in the proposed new Nagaland.

One may add that it is to a great extent an issue of land and territory. The political identity of the Nagas, has reached the national level from the village or tribal polity. It is a major achievement of the 'Naga National Movement.' Today they have developed a psyche of belonging to a nation of their own and are fighting for their collective rights through their nationalist movement, based on a great desire to live together as a family, free from alien interference or imposed desire of "Self Rule." This is how they define the 'Naga Movement for freedom and feel that very often it is misunderstood and misquoted. They have claimed for half a century that they are not of Indian origin like the Aryans and Dravidians but of the Mongoloid racial stock. They are a casteless society that is different from the Indian caste-based society.

### The Naga Nationalist Struggle

Since the independence of India, the Naga people have challenged the nation building process and what they consider imposition of its single administrative system on their ancestral land. They feel that the historical roots of the Naga political movement are as old as colonial expansion in the Naga Hills, that they fought against the British colonialists for intruding into their “way of life.” Eventually, the struggle became an insurrection in the early 1950s. The armed wing of the Naga National Council (NNC) emerged as the ‘Naga Army’. One may add that the Naga Nationalist ethos emerged in the 1940s through the war against Japanese invasion. Thus, the Naga political movement is one of the oldest struggles in the sub-continent.

The first ever round of Naga Peace talks was held in the 1960s under Indira Gandhi but the talks failed. This failure divided the Naga society politically. A section of the Naga leaders endorsed the Shillong Accord of November 11, 1975. Discontentment with the Accord spilt the germ of sectional rivalry, leading to the formation of another militant movement called the ‘National Socialist Council of Nagaland’ (NSCN). The sad episode of the 1960s and the Naga Peace talks continue to be a bad memory to many Nagas. The NSCN itself split into two factions during the 1980s but political unity continues on the nationalist issue. So the Nagas feel humiliated by the developments of the 1960s and 70s and the split because these events are at the basis of the present socio-political divide among the Nagas.

The present GOI-NSCN (IM) ceasefire talks are conditioned

---

1 An interview with A. Mangolijao Singh, dated 20-05-04 at Khurai.

2 An interview with Madam Cecilia, dated 12-06-04 at Nepali Basti.

3 An interview with Dr. Benedict Morung, dated 02-04-04 at Minuthong.

4 An interview with Sir Benjamin Gangte, ex-principal, D.M. College Arts, dated 28-05-04 at Chingmeirong.

5 An interview with Dr. T.S. Gangte, dated 03-07-04 at Old Nambulane, Imphal.

6 An interview with RS Jassal, dated 07-05-04 at Chingmeirong, text published in ‘The Sangai Express - Newspaper’, 29 June, 2004.

by these developments. They are unconditional talks at the highest political level carried on at a venue outside India. The leaders visited India in December 2004 and in January 2005 and held talks with the Government of India to speed up the peace process. But the talks are continuing with very little hope of success. The Nagas feel that Nagalim is essential for their identity and that it is integral to the peace talks. The NSCN (IM) has dreams of establishing a Nagalim carving out portions of the territories of the neighbouring states. The outfit claims a total area of 1,20,000 sq. Km as their Nagas natural territory. That is the reason for extending the ceasefire to all the Naga inhabited areas. The Naga-Meitei conflict that followed forced the Union Government to withdraw this order. That became a major setback to the negotiations so the stalemate continues.

### **The Government’s Response**

The Central Government wants to bring peace but does not know how to go about it. They want to settle the Naga issue, but not at the cost of the Meitei interests. Some think that it wants the talks and the ceasefire agreement to go on only to wear them out since it thinks that the militants will be reluctant to get back to the arms again. It cannot afford to alienate either the Nagas or the Meiteis so it may opt for the status quo by giving some sort of local autonomy to the Naga inhabited areas. The State Government wants the status quo to be maintained. No member of the legislature or Parliament of Manipur wants the State to be divided but the pressure groups are in the forefront of the Nagalim demand.

As far as the present theme is concerned, the Government consists of three constituents, the politicians, bureaucrats and the security forces. The last play an interventionist role of security force deployment, relief services and organising meetings for dialogue.<sup>10</sup> Officially the remaining wings of the Government do not have a definite role in conflict management. Where they have power, they have been cautious. Article 3 of the Constitution after

the 18th Amendment gives power to the Parliament to form new States or Union Territories, uniting or dividing parts of existing units. The Government is also supposed to find ways of pacifying the parties in a conflict through well defined economic policies that also solve the unemployment problem and maintain and improve the social and economic condition of the hill areas. It has taken some initiatives by recruiting the youth in the security forces. The reservation policy is resented by the Meiteis.

Because of the fear of antagonising one or the other party, in practice the Centre has done nothing substantial to manage the conflict. A Five point ceasefire agreement was signed in continuation of the ongoing peace process, during a meeting which was held on 13 and 14 June, 2001 in Bangkok , Thailand , between the representatives of the Government of India (GOI) and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM). Article (I) of the agreement allowed the extension of the ceasefire “without territorial limits”. By first extending the ceasefire and then withdrawing, the Centre anatagonised both sides. The people perceive it as delay tactics and that has a bad effect in the relations between the two. Its role has to be to find compromises that can bring it to a logical conclusion without either side losing face.

**The Present Conflict Situation**

Table 8 shows that 34.55 percent of the respondents feel that the 18th June, 2001 uprising was an immature reaction while 28 percent state that it was totally unexpected. On the other hand 23 percent think that it was necessary and 10.55 percent say that it was totally unnecessary. The extension of ceasefire into Manipur was its main cause. The Meiteis feared that it would disturb the territorial integrity of Manipur. The then Home Minister Shri L. K. Advani explained “without territorial limits” as not touching the territory but the Meiteis were not convinced and vowed to protect their territory.

*Table 8: The Cause of the Present conflict (260 responses)*

Responses	No. of persons	Percentage
Meitei Domination	25	9.62
Naga Domination	16	6.16
Rise of Militancy	54	20.76
Failure of the State Government	73	28.08
Unemployment or Poverty	28	10.76
Practice of injustice towards hill people	64	24.62

As Table 8 shows, 28.08 percent speak of the ‘failure of the State Government’ as the main reason of the conflict while 24.62 percent state that it is due to the ‘practice of injustice towards the hill people’. 20.76 percent think that it is due to the ‘rise of militancy’ in the state and only 10.76 percent state that it is due to unemployment and poverty. They perceive the Government’s handling of the problem and the rise of militancy as the main reasons for the ongoing tussle but ignore other causes.

The Naga desire of integration with Nagalim and the Meitei determination to preserve the territorial integrity of Manipur thus contradict each other. But the major reason of the uprising is the growing ethnic identity on both sides and the efforts for its preservation.<sup>2</sup> Accusations such as neglect by the Meiteis and irresponsible behaviour of the Nagas follow from it. The wrong handling of the process by the Centre completed the vicious circle. Some also hold the State’s politicians responsible for it because instead of addressing the State’s problems, they have been looking for their personal benefits and gains. Others say that the non-implementation of the ‘Sixth Schedule’ in the hill areas is its root cause. Some view the uprising as a sudden provocation, not a conflict. These issues have to be seen in the context of lack of development and the resentment following from it.

**Table 9: How Do People of Other communities Perceive the Uprising? (275 responses)**

Responses	was necessary	Totally	Totally
An immature	No comment		

No. of persons	66	29	77	95	8
Percentage	24%	10.54%	28%	34.55%	2.91%

Nature and Impact of the Conflict

The conflict that began with the extension of the ceasefire, was violent. It caused damage to public property, bandhs, boycotts, blockade etc. and culminated in the violent protest of June 18, 2001. When protestors from all directions gathered in front of the Raj Bhavan. After overcoming security barricades amidst the lathi charge and tear gas shells, they turned violent and burnt down the Manipur Assembly Secretariat, offices of political parties, 9 MLA quarters and the Chief Minister's office. Two MLAs, namely, K. Tomba and N. Bihari suffered serious burn injuries and the Manipur Legislative Assembly Speaker Shri. S. Dhananjoy was caught and beaten up by the protestors. 18 persons died when the security forces opened fire. The violence was not directed towards the Nagas, though in some cases their properties in and around Imphal were damaged. The fear psychosis it created remains even today. Some of them left the Valley. A few of them returned after some time and others remained for a long time in the relief camp at Senapati. Some Nagas have sold their plots and houses.

Every conflict affects normal life. The socio-economic life gets affected. This section will examine some of its effects. The first is polarisation. The conflict remains alive in the minds both of the Nagas and the Meiteis. It has caused distrust among them. They dislike each other but show outward tolerance and speak against the other when they are among their own. One cannot blame one or the other side for it. The study of people's movements, like that of the Nagas is not free from criticism. In the effort to achieve their goals, they have created controversies and have indulged in a war of arms and words. Now, among

them exist doubts, apprehensions and fear. Passion and emotions have blurred the vision on both sides. The Meitei are determined to safeguard territorial integrity and the Nagas are committed to Nagalim.

The conflict has thus reached the “critical democratic way of political bargaining”. It has brought to the fore allegations made in private about the “rise of militancy and injustice towards the hill people”. The two parties have not challenged each other physically but have exchanged harsh words. Emotions have been roused. A wrong move can ignite the spark that can turn into a conflagration. Arrogance and disgust have grown on both sides. The Naga feel frustrated but it has also brought new life to their struggle.

The respondents were also asked whether some had benefited from the conflict. As Table 10 shows, 66.06 percent believe that the economic situation and living standards have deteriorated. 27.37 percent add that the conflict is solely responsible for the backwardness of their society. But 46.35 percent feel that the politicians have benefited most from it. 17.88 percent feel that under the politicians' shadow, business people have got its benefits. 7.15% feel that the militant groups too get its benefits. But there is near unanimity in saying that the general public and civil society have suffered.

Table 10: Who Benefited the Most from the Conflict (274 responses)

Responses	No. of persons
Percentage	
The politicians	127
46.35	
Underground Groups	47
17.15	
Educated persons	13
4.75	
Government servants	8
2.92	



Meira paibis	8	2.92				
Business people	49	17.88				
No comments	22	8.03				
In other words, the ceasefire is a watermark and its impact is beyond measurement. It claimed 18 precious lives and hundreds of persons were maimed. One woman, Smt. Sorokhaibam Sobita Devi, 39 was injured in the firing incident and had her right leg amputated. 54 vehicles were damaged. All these add to the loss that the general public has suffered. To this should be added the loss of public property.						
Table 11: What will the conflict Bring to Manipur (274 responses)						
Responses	Independence for Manipur	Greater Freedom/Autonomy	Greater Nagaland	None	Any other	No comment
No. of persons	20	25	25	128	62	14
Percentage	7.29	9.13	9.13	46.72	22.63	5.10

46.72 percent of the respondents feel that the conflict will bring nothing to Manipur and 22.63 percent did not want to give an opinion. Most people are confused and support their respective political movements unsure of whether they will bring any positive result or not.

<b>Table 12: What has been the Contribution of the conflict? (274 responses)</b>	
Responses	Percentage

To strengthen the bond between Meiteis & Nagas

Brought about unity among Nagas	25	9.13
Strongly divided the people of Manipur	72	26.28
Intensified plain and hill people rivalry	92	33.58
Any other	20	7.29
No Comment	15	5.48

Far from uniting the people, 26.28 percent feel that it will divide the major communities of Manipur. Normal relationship will be difficult. But 33.58 percent feel strongly that it has strengthened the bond between the Meiteis and Nagas. Its impact is felt in various fields. It has displaced people both in the hills and the valley. Some Naga families settled in the plains, have gone to the hills fearing violence. Some Meitei families settled in the hills came back to the plains. The fear psychosis has grown both among the Nagas in the plains and the Meiteis in the hills. As a result, Meitei officers do not want to be posted to the hills and the Nagas do not want to be serve in the Valley.	
---	--

The biggest casualty is common people’s welfare. Because of the conflict, the Government is concerned more with law and order and less with development. With so many groups and leaders calling one form of protest or the other, ordinary people are unable to earn a livelihood. Prices have risen, schools and colleges are closed, children lose their education, in short, there is utter chaos. As a respondent said “The sooner we realise our situation and bring peace, the better for all of us. Otherwise, we are all doomed” .

Suggestions for Conflict Resolution

Manipur is typical of States in conflict. Its problems are genuine but difficult to address under the existing constitutional provisions. However, one cannot stop trying. Problems vary from political to

economic to education that can prepare one for employment, rights and duties of the State and citizens and territorial integrity.

In this context we asked the respondents what means should be adopted to solve these problems. Of the 274 persons who replied to this question, 49.27 percent feel that the best way of solving the Naga-Meitei conflict is a heart to heart dialogue between the two parties. On the other side, 33.57 percent feel that it is important to live in undivided Manipur in order to solve the problem and bring peace. Dialogue should be with this understanding. But 31.74 percent of the respondents feel that the solution to the conflict lies in the hands of the Government of India against 31.37 percent who state that it should be left to the peace makers. Only 15.67 percent of those who replied to this question think that it should be left to the politicians.

Will it Happen Again?

Whether there can be peace or not depends on whether the people feel that the conflict will take place agin. Most people think that the June 2001 conflict took them by surprise and that it will not happen again. A feeling spread that the Centre was not sensitive to Meitei feelings when they extended the ceasefire. The conflict has, therefore, created discontentment in both the communities. Today they live in mutual distrust. Sections of both have been displaced. The conflict has led to chaos and put the clock back.

Table 13 : What is the Solution to the conflict? (274 responses)

1. An interview with Mr. Benjamin, dated 15th Sept. 2004, at Palace Gate.  
2. An interview with RS Jassal, dated 07-05-04 at Chingmeirong, text published in ‘The Sangai Express - Newspaper’, 29 June, 2004, p. 2.  
3. Ksh. Imokanta Singh, “The Sangai Express Newspaper”, dated 6th February, 2004, p-2.  
4. RS Jassal, op, cit, p-2.  
5. Mr. Benjamin, interview.  
6. Source : AMCTA, Manipur Fact File, 2001, p-22  
7. Ibid, dated 15th Sept. 2004.  
8. Ibid, p-23.  
9. Ibid  
10. Ibid, p-3

Responses	Politicians	Underground Group	Indian Govt.	International Community	Peace Makers	None of above	No Comments
No. of persons	43	10	87	16	86	23	9
Percentage	15.67	3.63	31.74	5.82	31.37	8.50	3.27

The graph (p. 143) shows that 35.77 percent of the respondents feel that many were forced to support the agitation and 22.99 percent say that ‘people were not supportive of the conflict.’ On the other hand, 20.80 percent are of the view that they were supportive while 6.06 percent were indifferent. Their attitude depended very much on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the demand for Nagalim, the feeling that the hills are neglected and the statement that the Nagas have a right “to intervene until the Indian Government takes the proper decision”<sup>1</sup>. Thus, the overall feeling among the people is that the conflict is based on claims and counterclaims by the two contesting parties. It is important to deal with the perception of neglect, the feeling that development is possible only through integrity or Nagalim. It cannot come from claims and counterclaims but through efforts made to help the Nagas to feel that they belong to Manipur. For that to happen, they have to develop a stake in territorial integrity and control over economic resources. It is also important to identify some connectors. So the respondents were asked who could help with the solution (Table 13)

Table 14: Who Has so far Played a Major Role in Solving the Problem? (274 responses)

Responses	The Govt.	The NGOs	The Clubs	The Meitei UGs	Any Other	No Comment
No. of persons	72	110	27	0	80	17

Percentage	26.28	40.15	9.86	2.9	20	14.59	6.20
------------	-------	-------	------	-----	----	-------	------

Table 14 shows that 40.15% think that the non-Governmental Organisations have played a major role in solving the problems and 26.28% feel that the state has not taken much interest in solving the problems. Therefore, the solution to the ongoing conflict lies in the hands of impartial peace makers.

63.83 % feel that in order to solve the Meitei-Naga Conflict, both the Meitei and Nagas have to follow the policy of give and take. 26.65% disagree with this statement. In any conflict resolution, the contesting parties have to change their position in order to achieve meaningful solution, ensuring a win-win situation							
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Realistic Options

Table 15: What if Nagas Continue to demand Nagalim and Meiter Don’t Yield? (274 responses)

Responses	No. of persons	Percentage
Lessen the conflict	08	2.92
Further increase the tension	101	36.87
Will become a cause for another uprising	153	55.84
No comment	12	4.37

Table 15 shows that 55.84 percent of the respondents feel that if the Nagas continue to demand Greater Nagaland and Meiteis do not yield, it will lead to another uprising and 36.87% think that tension will grow. Thus, the people realise that the Meiteis and Nagas cannot go on taking the same position. They want a pragmatic solution but are not clear on what it is. So they were questioned on the major causes.

Table 16: Is Land the Bone of Contention (269 responses)

Responses	Yes	No	No comment
No. of persons	165	67	37

Percentage	61.34	24.90	13.76
------------	-------	-------	-------

61.34 percent observed that land is the bone of contention against 24.9 percent who disagreed and 13.76 percent who had no comment to make. Thus most feel that even those who want the merger of the ‘Naga-inhabited areas’ with ‘Nagalim’ is a realistic option should work it out through negotiations and not imposition others. It is because both the sides have some doubts about the merger of Naga-inhabited territories.

Hence, the first option is probably not realistic. On the other hand, one cannot deny that the Nagas of Manipur do not get their just share of what is their due from the state and even of what comes from the Centre in their name. Secondly, Muivah, a Tangkhul and several other important leaders of the NSCN - IM hailing from Ukhrul would find no place in the dispensation of Nagalim unless the territories are merged!			
---	--	--	--

Thus, the situation is complex. What, then, are realistic options? One cannot expect the Meitei to give the Nagas what they feel is their due. On the other side, one cannot put all the blame on the Meitei alone. The present state of affairs could not have continued without the direct or indirect cooperation of the Naga political leaders. A way out of this dilemma has to be found of ensuring justice to the Nagas without posing too much of a threat to the Meitei and others. What is the way out?

- 1. A Union territory status for the ‘Naga districts’ might be a possibility, but would that be easy or feasible once the ‘integration’ option is discounted?
- 2. Another option could be the Bodo land model or the Bodo Territorial Council. Though it will be preceded by long negotiations, both sides may ultimately accept this solution.
- 3. A third option is to revive the 6th schedule with the district autonomous councils and remove once and for all the power of the state Government to supersede and dissolve these councils. What

is due to the hills should go directly to the districts that would continue to belong to the state of Manipur, but its minimum needs would be attended to.

4. To satisfy the prestige and needs of the leaders and negotiators of Nagalim, the two districts, namely Tirap and Changlang of Arunachal Pradesh could be fully merged with Nagalim.

5. The integration that is possible among the Nagas would be in the style of what exists in Belgium. For a small population of about 10 million people, there are four Governments - a Flemish one, a French one, a third for the city of Brussels and the fourth, the national government. The Flemish government looks after all the affairs of the Flemish areas, in addition to all the cultural matters of the Flemish wherever they live. The French government looks after all the affairs of the Walloon area and the cultural matters of all the French speaking people no matter where they live. If we copy that model, the government of Kohima will look after all the matters within Nagaland, and the cultural matters of all the Nagas, no matter where they live. This could give emotional and cultural integration to all the Nagas.

### Conclusion

\_\_\_\_\_In this study, the cause of the conflict between the Meiteis and the Nagas has been analysed. It is happening due to many reasons such as lack of Government policy to deal with the problem, communication gap between the two groups, rigid stand of the groups and so on.

The impact of the conflict really cuts one off from the other. This conflict has led to chaos and confusion. It is a sensitive matter and the Nagas are put to the test. The Meiteis have lost the trust of the Nagas and the Nagas have been displaced and feel neglected and discriminated against. Hence, in course of time, a desire of the Nagas to unite under one umbrella became inevitable. The conflict cannot be pinned down to a definite time, but it has been there for a long time.

The Meiteis are not prepared to allow the Nagas to form Greater Nagaland as it will mean slicing up the territory of Manipur. It would create economic imbalance and reduction in the size of the state. Many people of Manipur desire an honourable solution even while keeping Manipur's territory intact.

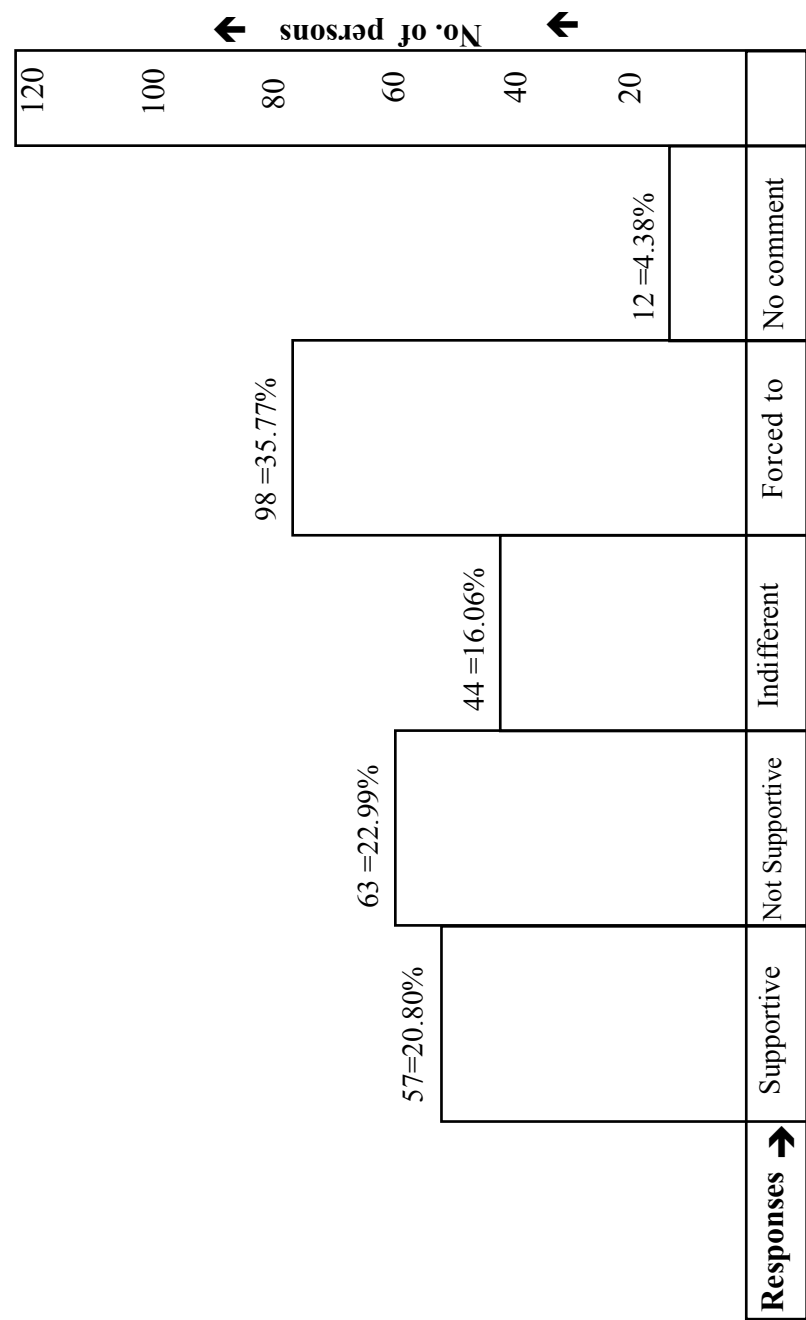
The people in the valley, the Meiteis, in the hills, the Nagas and Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribes, have time and again demanded a reconsideration of this reality in one form or the other. Years of neglect, poor communication facilities and lack of motivation for growth have worsened the situation. Amidst the confusing instability, plagued by years of insurgency, exploitation by politicians and contractors, the deterioration of law and order etc, industrialists are reluctant to invest in the state. With frequent bandhs, strikes and social tension, peace and stability in this "paradise on earth" seems to be a distant dream. In the end, an honourable solution has to be found keeping the sentiments of the Meiteis and the joint demands of the Nagas in mind.

---

1..Manipur Fact File, 2001, pp 1-2.

2 An interview with Prof. Gangmumei, dated 15th May 2004, at Majorkhul.

3 Ibid.



**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**A. PRIMARY SOURCES :**

- 1. Private Individuals, Group of School teachers and Govt. Officers.
- 2. Reports of interviews held with various sections of people like elders, club leaders and government servants of the state of Manipur.
- 3. Local social institutions.
- 4. Reoports of Field Study Survey, observation and consultations.
- 5. Unwritten, Unrecorded oral History.
- 6. Reports of questionnaire and scheduled questionnaire.

**B. SECONDARY SOURCES :**

**1. Books**

- a) Jeyaseelan L., *Impact of the Missionary Movement in Manipur*, Scholar Publishing House (P) Ltd., New Delhi, 1996.
- b) Dun E.W., *Gazetteer of Manipur*, Vivek Publishing Company, Delhi, 1981.
- c) Roy Jyotirmoy, *History of Manipur*, 1958.
- d) Singh Lokendra N., *Unquiet Valley*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1981.
- e) Tarapot Phanjoubam, *Bleeding Manipur*, Har-Anand Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 2004.
- f) Horam Ringkahao, *The Genesis of the Naga Political Movement*, Tangkhul Avenue, 1998.
- g) Ao A Lanungsang, *From Phizo to Muivah*, A Mittal Publication, 2002.
- h) Hodson T.C., *The Naga Tribes of Manipur*, Low Price Publications, Delhi, 1982.
- i) Hodson T.C., *The Meitheis*, Low Price Publications, Delhi, 1982.
- j) All Manipur College Teachers' Association (AMCTA), *Manipur Fact File*, 2001.

**2. News Papers**

- a) Jassal R.S., The Sangai Express, 1st July, Imphal, 2004.
- b) Newmai Willubou, The Sangai Express, 23rd November, 2004.
- c) Singh Ksh Immokanta, The Sangai Express, 6th February, 2003.
- d) Anand R.K., The Telegraph, (Northeast), 8th January, 2003.

1. Ibid.  
2. An interview with Fr. MC George, dated 13the Nov. 2004, at Chingmeirong.



## KUKI-NAGA CONFLICT IN SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE CHANDEL DISTRICT OF MANIPUR

*D. Michael Haokip*

Manipur, one of the “Seven Sisters” of the Northeast is described as the ‘Land of Gems’, ‘Jewel of India’, ‘A Little Paradise’, ‘A Flower on Lofty Heights’, and ‘The Switzerland of India’<sup>1</sup>. The State has also experienced major ethnic conflicts, the one between the Nagas and Kukis being among the best known among them. This paper is an effort to understand it.

### 1. The Land and the People

Manipur constituting less than 1 percent of India’s landmass has an area of 22,327 sq.km and a population of 23,88,634 (2001 census)<sup>2</sup>. It has an international boundary of about 350 km with the Kabow Valley and Chin Hills of Myanmar on the east and southeast. The rest of the boundary is shared with Nagaland in the north, North Cachar Hills and Cachar District of Assam to the west and Mizoram to the south<sup>3</sup>.

The state is divided into two tracts namely, the hills and the valley. The valley lies in the central part of the state. The hills that are an offshoot of the Himalayas surround the valley. The average elevation of the valley is about 950 MSL and that of the hills is between 1,500 and 1,800 metres<sup>4</sup>. Manipur has a number of rivers, such as the Imphal, the Thoubal, the Iril, the Nambul, the Lockchao and the Chakpi. All the rivers have their source in the hills lying to the North and Northeast of the valley. They run from north to south except the Khuga which runs from south to north into the Loktak Lake, the biggest natural lake in Eastern India. The Barak is the

biggest river in Manipur<sup>5</sup>. Administratively the state is divided into nine districts, of which Imphal East, Imphal West, Thoubal and Bishnupur are in the valley. Chandel, Churachandpur, Senapati, Ukhrul and Tamenglong are in the hills.

Manipur has 32 recognised scheduled tribes and the non-tribal Meiteis. They belong to various ethno-linguistic traits but can be divided into three broad categories of Meiteis, Naga and Chin-Kuki-Mizo. All of them belong to the Mongoloid stock. Most of the Meiteis, the dominant ethnic group also commonly called Manipuris, live in the valley. They speak a Tibeto-Burman language but differ culturally from the surrounding hill tribes. They are non-tribals and follow Hindu customs<sup>6</sup>.

The Naga tribes inhabiting Manipur are: (1) The Anal, (2) The Chiru, (3) The Chothe, (4) The Karam, (5) The Koirang, (6) The Lamkang, (7) The Mao, (8) The Maram, (9) The Maring, (10) The Monshang, (11) The Moyon, (12) The Poumai, (13) The Puimei, (14) The Tangkhul, (15) The Tarao, (16) The Tangal, (17) The Zeliangrong<sup>7</sup>.

The Chin-Kuki-Mizo tribes living in Manipur are : (1) The Kom, (2) The Purum, (3) The Gangte, (4) The Paite, (5) The Simte, (6) The Thadou, (7) The Vaiphei, (8) The Sukte (Tetim-Chin), (9) The Hmar, (10) The Zou, (11) The Ralte, and (12) The other Mizo Lushai Tribes<sup>8</sup>. Contrary to this claim, a Kuki author claims the following tribes also as the Kukis: (1) The Anal, (2) The Aimol, (3) The Baite/Beite, (4) The Chiru, (5) The Chonghang (Chongloi and Hangshing), (6) The Chothe, (7) The Doungels, (8) The Guite, (9) The Gangte, (10) The Hmar, (11) The Haokip, (12) The Kom, (13) The Kolhen, (14) The Kipgen, (15) The Lhungdim, (16) The Lamkang, (17) The Lunkim, (18) The Changsan, (19) The Lenthang, (20) The Thangneo, (21) The Lhangum, (22) The Lhanghal, (23) The Milhem, (24) The Muzon-Monshang, (25)

The Mate, (26) The Maring, (27) The Paite, (28) The Simte, (29) The Sitlhou, (30) The Lhouvum, (31) The Singsit, (32) The Touthang, (33) The Tarao, (34) The Vaiphei, (35) The Zou<sup>9</sup>. When we compare the two lists, we can see a repetition of 8(eight) tribes namely: (1) The Anal, (2) The Chiru, (3) The Chothe, (4)The Lamkang, (5) The Maring, (6) The Monshang, (7) The Moyon, (8) The Tarao, who are included in the list of Kuki tribes. The territorial distribution of Schedule Tribes in the districts of Manipur is given below:<sup>10</sup>

Origin (Migration and Settlement)

It is believed that the Imphal Valley was under water or was swampy and not fit for human habitation. “Though the sea receded from that area, the valley portion of Manipur remained under water for a long time. The Manipur Puranas also refer to this fact, where it is found that in the beginning everything was under water”<sup>11</sup>. Writing about the origin and distribution of the Nagas, R.R. Shimray says: “Most of the Naga tribes have more or less the same story that they came from the hole of the earth. As to their origin and dispersal, the various tribes of the Nagas have now accepted ‘Makhel’ as their original place from where they dispersed themselves. There are many historical facts such as stone monoliths and sacred trees planted at ‘Makhel’ when they were about to disperse themselves to different directions. One distinct practice of the Nagas is that they erect stone monuments and also plant sacred trees wherever they settle”<sup>12</sup>.

The Kukis, according to the oral information collected by William Shaw, trace their origin from the bowels of the earth, known as ‘Khul’ or called “ The Thadou Kukis live in a large area of hilly country bounded by the Angami Nagas of the Naga hills district in the north, the province of Burma in the east, the Chin hills and Lushai hills in the south and the District of Cachar in the

west. Mainly, it may be said that they occupy the hills of the state of Manipur on all sides of the Imphal Valley”<sup>13</sup>.

Tribes of Manipur

Sl.no. Name of District	Name of Communities
1. Manipur North (Redesignated as Senapati District)	1. Mao (Major Group) 2. Maram (-do-) 3. Thadou Kuki (-do-) 4. Kabui (Minor group) 5. Tangkhul (-do-) 6. Maring (-do-) 7. Chiru (-do-) 8. Kom (-do-) 9. Koireng (-do-) 10. Vaiphei (-do-) 11.Kacha Naga (-do-) 12. Sema (-do-) 13. Keirao (-do-)
2. Manipur West (Redesignated as Tamenglong District)	1. Kabui (Major Group) 2. Thadou Kuki (Minor Group) 3. Gangte (Minor Group)
3. Manipur South (Redesignated as Churachandpur District)	1.Hmar(MajorGroup) 2. Paite (-do-) 3. Thadou Kuki (-do) 4. Anal (Minor Group) 5. Chothe (-do-) 6. Kabui (-do-) 7. Kom (-do-) 8. Vaiphei (-do-) 9. Zou (-do-) 10. Mizo (-do-) 11. Gangte (-do-)

says: “Erection of stone over dead bodies and making village gate was very common and important among the Nagas in olden times though not very prevalent now-a-days, but some people of Maring tribe continue it even today. In marriage, the Anals had a belief that Masum and Machal were their progenitor clans from the cave, and marriage between the same clan is forbidden even today. Whereas, among the Kukis it had been a custom to marry their maternal uncle’s daughter or distant relatives of their maternal side or grandmother’s side”<sup>14</sup>. Many similarities exist in festivals too. Almost all the tribes of Chandel district celebrate the Chavang-Kut, which the Kukis claim as their most important post-harvest festival. According to Kothar Monsang: “It was the Monsang tribe who first celebrated it in a big way, no doubt, it had been celebrated at village levels in olden days, before the Manipur Government acknowledged it as a state festival and fixed November 1<sup>st</sup> as the Chavang Kut day”.

In relationships, there was a system of ‘Mangai-Shabah’ an ‘inter-tribe family friend’. According to Mr. Wungreiyo: “It was a customary practice to have a family friend of the other tribe. As villages were close-by, special home grown vegetables, fruits, etc., were always given to the ‘Mangai’ family. The system became so close that sometimes when property is sold, it has to go through the *Mangai*”. Many similarities and dissimilarities exist between the Kukis and the Nagas. In fact nothing distinct demarcates their traditions, cultures and customs. Both of them are clusters of different tribes. Hence, what one Naga tribe practises, cannot be called the tradition of all the Nagas. The same holds good for the Kukis. Differences exist in the Naga and Kuki languages. Naga administration is democratic. They elect their village chief, whereas the Kukis have hereditary village chiefs.

2. Traces of the Conflict in the Past

Conflicts are not born suddenly. Grievances accumulated over a period of time become a source of conflict. The enquiries

12. Simte (-do-)

13. Ralte (-do-)

14. Salte (-do-)
4. Tengenoupal District (Redesignated as Chandel Dist.)

1. Anal (Major Group)

2. Maring
- (-do-)
3. Thadou Kuki (-do)
4. Lamkang (Minor Group)
5. Zou (-do-)
6. Gangte (-do-)
7. Moyon (-do-)
8. Monshang (-do-)
9. Aimol (-do-)
10. Chothe (-do-)
11. Purum (-do-)
12. Mizo (-do-)
13. Tangkhul (-do-)
14. Kom (-do-)
- 5 Manipur Central (Redesignated and bifurcated into three districts as follows:

(i) Bishnupur District

(ii) Thoubal District

(iii) Imphal District

small number.
1. Kabui (Major Group)
2. Representatives of most of the tribes are found in
- 6 Manipur East (Redesignated as Ukhul District).

1. Tangkhul (Major Group)

2. Thadou Kuki (Minor Group)

Many persons whom the author interviewed, found it difficult to ascertain the cultural differences between the Nagas and the Kukis. However, traditionally each tribe had a different name. The Anals called the Kukis ‘Makhe’ and themselves including Moyon, Monsang, Lamkang and Maring as ‘Pakan’. The Kukis called themselves ‘Eimi’ and the Anals ‘Khowl’. These varied from place to place, e.g., the Kukis in Senapati district called the Nagas ‘Milong’. Regarding the old tradition Mr. Kothar



made, show that a few incidents indicate certain conflicting situations that existed in the Chandel district.

The earliest written agreement between different tribes in Chandel district is traced back to 10-05-1942<sup>1</sup>. Six tribes participated in that meeting held at Monbi village. They are (1) Anal, (2) Khongjai (Thadou-Kuki)<sup>2</sup>, (3) Kom, (4) Lamkang, (5) Moyon, and (6) Zou. The agreement signed by Mr. SP Thampan (possibly the only educated person in those days) stated that the six tribes had agreed to accept each other as siblings of the same mother, and not to wage wars or use the sword against each other. To mark the occasion, they killed a mithun<sup>3</sup> had a customary law of oath taking ceremony followed by a common meal. 256 delegates who attended the meeting hailed from 69 villages. There are several customs practised during a common meal. For example Mr. Leo Kamchinthang says: “After killing the animal usually they take out the heart and liver of the animal and cook it separately. When the organs of the animals are cooked the eldest of the different tribes eat first, after making a promise. They usually cut the tail of the animal with a knife while making a promise symbolising that if they don’t follow the agreement they will be like the tail of the animal”<sup>4</sup>. Some leaders are of the opinion that the meeting at Monbi village was not because there was a conflict or a war but was a precaution taken by the leaders of those days to stand united against the British or Allied armies<sup>5</sup>.

The Lamkangs also have their own story of some misunderstanding with the Kukis. Mr. Michael Bepaul says: “Probably around the year 800 A.D, Haika the only village of the Lamkang was attacked by the Kukis without any prior information and it was this incident which led to the scattering of the Lamkang tribe”<sup>6</sup>. According to the Kuki version: “One Kuki lady went to the village cemetery to pay respects to one of her kin who died a few days back. As she was crying over the tomb, a man shot her with an arrow. The assailant while being chased, ran in the direction of the Lamkang village. The Kukis thought that it was a Lamkang

man who shot the lady, so they called together all their kins and prepared a meal to avenge the death of their daughter and they attacked the village”<sup>7</sup>.

Mr. Sumpi Modal says: “The Anal tribe was also attacked by the Kukis or Kamhao group, around 1865 A.D., many killings and burnings of houses took place in those days, as we were told by our forefathers”<sup>8</sup>. Regarding another incident, a Kuki says: “Only Anal Khullen was not attacked as it had a nice fencing around its village, The Anals and the Meiteis believed that the fencing was put up by ‘Vangbrel Lai’ (name of a deity)<sup>9</sup>. Once an entire village was butchered, but the attackers were from the Chin state of the present Myanmar of the Sukte tribe. They also have killed and chased the Kukis of present Manipur”<sup>10</sup>. Another report says: “The Longja chief was also killed and his daughter was also kidnapped by this tribe from Myanmar. The folk tales and songs of the Kukis describe how this invading tribe from Myanmar mistreated them”<sup>11</sup>.

Recalling the relationship between the two tribes during his younger days Mr. Zilngam says: “In those days Lonpi (Monbi) and Longja were big villages and had many youth who were often very unruly. Moreover, they had a belief that if they touch the bosom of the Anal damsels they will have lots of chickens for eating. So the youth from the two villages tried to touch the bosom of the Anal damsels, whenever they met them on their way to their jhum fields, much to the embarrassment of the young ladies”<sup>12</sup>.

According to a confession: “When we were small we used to challenge whenever we saw children of a different village, even though we were of the same tribe; there was no love and solidarity between people as it exists today. There was a war, as we were told by our forefathers, which we called the ‘Khongjai Lan’. But it was not a particularised war and it did not affect the other Naga tribes. Those days fights were very common even among the same tribes of different villages. Reasons for the fights are very difficult to analyse now and not very clear. But the Kukis played a great

role in the inter-tribe rivalries”<sup>13</sup>.

According to Mr. Shokhothang (a Kuki): “There were also many killings and maltreatment throughout the history but we come to learn that there was no direct war between the two tribes. There was no direct war between the Kukis and the Nagas but very often they used to take revenge on each other over the killings and maltreatments. Nagas were the first settlers of Northern Manipur and even in the past, they lived in big villages but they were very disunited and even the Tangkhuls didn’t have a common language of their own. Every village spoke a different dialect even though they were of the same tribe. Conflicts were purely between villages to villages. And the defeated villages usually asked the help of another village. Many times it was the Kukis who helped the defeated villages to avenge, and they were always successful because they knew ‘*Gallou Thu*’ (a black magic used during war). But some of the Kukis were not very good to the Nagas as they used to mistreat them, especially those whom they caught as ‘prisoners of war’; but, some got mixed up with the Kukis and became ‘Behpa’ (a very close family friend) to them”<sup>14</sup>.

Regarding the reason as to why the Kukis, especially the Haokip clan migrated to the Northern side of Manipur, Mr. John Thangjalet has this to say: “After migrating from Myanmar, one of the Meitei kings caught one Haokip chief, whose name was Pu Nehlam and mutilated his body while killing him (his skin was taken off). It angered his people very much; so his descendants planned to attack the Meiteis after circling the valley where the Meitei kingdom was established. They knew that Manipur kingdom was surrounded by the hills and if they could encircle the valley, the Meiteis could be easily defeated, but much to the disappointment of the Kukis, the Britishers arrived and it spoiled their plan”<sup>15</sup>. Dr. Khuplam commented that: “There had been a strong subjugation of the Nagas by the Kukis from the 19th century. But the Kukis strongly believed that the Kukis, the Nagas and the Meiteis are descendants of the same mother and Kukis are the eldest, Nagas

the middle and Meiteis the youngest”<sup>16</sup>.

The 19th century brought Christianity to the region. The same century also brought the colonisers with their divide and rule policy. The first missionaries of Manipur were Rev. William Pettregrew and Rev. Robert Watkins. The former worked in the Naga inhabited areas of Manipur with the permission of the British but the latter worked in the Kuki inhabited areas, without their permission. So he had to leave Manipur even though he was very popular those days. An example of the open divide and rule policy is of 1917: “When they (the Tangkhuls) heard that the Kukis were waging war against the British, on 10th October 1917, they made a pledge to assist their Kuki rulers by killing a buffalo. But, in order to reverse the 10th October decision of the Tangkhuls, Mr. Higgins and Mr. Pettigrew called a meeting with the Tangkhul leaders at Phadang. The Tangkhuls renegaded on their commitment to the Kukis and submitted to the British who persuaded them with provisions of salt, oil, sugar, etc”<sup>17</sup>.

Because of their divide and rule policy: “The recent ethnic conflict of the Kukis and the Nagas could be considered as the third one. About the first one, it has been narrated to us by our elders and about the second, I cannot remember, clearly as I was still very young, but I remember guarding the village with our village youths and the third is the recent Kuki-Naga ethnic conflict”<sup>18</sup>. Regarding the second Kuki-Naga conflict, some Kuki elders say: “It was the Kuki and the Khul rivalry which took place during the early 50s. In those days the Kuki society was divided into ‘Kuki siki and Kuki makhai’ (25 paise Kukis and 50 paise Kukis) as it was propagated by the Kuki intellectual circles of those days. They branded some of the Kuki clans as superior and others, inferior. This happened because of the lingua-franca of the tribe. The majority of the Kukis spoke the present Thadou-Kuki language; so, the intellectual circles called the small clans as Kuki siki (25 paise Kuki) because they were not able to speak the Thadou-Kuki language. Those in the inferior group started avoiding the use of the name Kuki as their

tribe and called themselves as ‘Khulmi’ (people of cave origin ). As a result, there was a conflict within the Kuki tribe. No Kuki clan was exempted; everyone was involved in that conflict and it was from this incident that the Old Kuki tribes changed the name of their tribe”<sup>19</sup>. Recollecting about the Kukis and the Khulmi rivalry, Mr. Warngam says: “It was started by Mr.S.P. Thampan as he wanted to contest the Manipur Territorial Member election (before Manipur got statehood); he was defeated. But it was not a particularised war between the Kukis and the Nagas like the recent conflict. It was a war which affected all the clans of the Chandel district”<sup>20</sup>.

The NSCN-IM<sup>21</sup> and the KNA<sup>22</sup> has this to say in their books regarding the ideologies of the two tribes. “At the international level, the Nagas had the opportunity to participate actively in the two world wars in support of the allied forces. In 1919, 4,000 Nagas joined the Labour Corps and reached France. A few of them are still alive. In 1944, the Naga people extended their fullest support and cooperation to the allied forces providing food, shelter, guides and other essential services inside and outside Nagalim. The same had been duly acknowledged. In the words of Field Marshal Sir William Slim (cf. “Defeat into victory”): “The gallant Nagas whose loyalty, even in the most depressing times of the invasion had never faltered. Despite floggings, torture, execution and the burning of their villages, they refused to aid the Japanese in any way or betray our troops. Their active help to us was beyond value or praise.... They guided our columns, collected information, ambushed enemy patrols, carried our supplies and brought in our wounded under the heaviest fire, and then, being the gentlemen they were, often refused all payment. Many a British and Indian soldier owes his life to the Nagas. No soldier of the 14th Army who met them will never think of them, but with admiration and affection”<sup>23</sup>.

It is just the opposite of what the Kukis did as they fought the British (1917-1919) because they did not want to go to France as Labour Corps. They thought that the British rulers were intruding

into their kingdom and they joined the Axis forces during the First World War. They attacked and burnt down the villages who sided with the British forces sparing none. During the 2nd World War, they sided with the Japanese, joining the INA (Indian National Army) of Subash Chandra Bose.

*With regard to the past conflicts, these are some of the things propagated by the two organisations:*

“From (1840-1918) there was a wide-scale destruction of lives and property and forcible occupation of village lands by the Kuki nomads with British support, following “Colonel McCulloch’s policy of planting Kuki settlements on exposed frontier”<sup>24</sup>.

***On the other side, the Kukis say:***

“Due to the challenge posed to their supremacy the Kukis of Zale’n-gam, held meetings at various places in the hills, to organise a concerted campaign against the British. They fought the British as early as 1845-1871, in order to drive them out from Zale’n-gam. The account of the great war has been chronicled by the British themselves who recorded it as ‘The Great Kuki Invasion of the 1860s’. In The ‘Military Report on the Chin-Lushei country’, Col E.B Elly, Asst. Quarter Master General, writes: “In 1845, 1847-1848, 1849-1850-1851 there were raids, culminating in what is called the Great Invasion of the 1860s where 15 villages were burnt or plundered, 188 British subjects killed and 100 carried into captivity. In 1864 raids recommenced and were continued in 1866-1867, 1868-1869, 1869-1870 and in 1870-1871”<sup>25</sup>. These and other instances show that the relationship between the Nagas and the Kukis was not very cordial.

### **3. Reasons for the Present Conflict**

Many persons whom the author met, think that the Kuki-Naga ethnic conflict flared up at Moreh. The events that led to it and its aftermath will be discussed in this section.

#### **A Kuki perspective**

According to Mr. Tongkhohao: “There had been an undercurrent of tension between the Kukis and the Nagas long before the conflict started ..... as the Naga militants started killing some of the prominent leaders and civilians of the Kuki community and a fortunate few were spared their lives after being beaten black and blue”<sup>1</sup>. The NSCN-IM also collected house tax from the Kukis. According to one account: “From each household they demanded Rs. 400 to 500. In our village we managed to collect Rs. 1,500 but they wrote Rs. 6,000 in the receipt which they told us not to lose”<sup>2</sup>. Ms. Teresa Hoilam adds: “There were various types of taxes levied on the Kukis especially in the Moreh area. They divided people into different categories. Some of them had to pay more than Rs. 3,000. Those who did not pay were either killed or tortured and some businessmen’s trucks were burnt down. Cutting and selling of trees was also prohibited. Even if trees were to be cut, we had to inform the militants and had to pay money as its price. The militants notified tax deadlines. As the Kuki leaders considered it unconstitutional and were not able to pay the money, they requested the KNA (Kuki National Army) to come to Moreh”<sup>3</sup>.

Most of those whom the author met could not deny that the selection of 80 council teachers at Chandel in 1992 was one of the main causes of the tension. Peter Senpu, who was involved in the incident says: “Vacancies for 80 council teachers were advertised when Mr. T.N Haokip was the Minister of State for Tribal Development. It was agreed then that the selection will be done when Members of the District Council were elected. It had been superseded by the Government of Manipur in 1988-89 for Chandel District. But when Morung Mokunga became the Minister of Tribal Development, he hurried up the process in spite of the earlier agreement. The Kukis could not agree to the selection of the council teachers and so, the Kuki Students’ Organisation (KSO) called a bandh in Chandel district. Ignoring the bandh, the Nagas came in big numbers and a scuffle took place at a village called Zionhang. I was also caught by the Naga volunteers and handed

over to the militants. I was blindfolded and taken to the forest area, most probably to be killed, but the Moyon leaders negotiated my release and I was freed”<sup>4</sup>.

Also two prominent Kuki militant groups came out strongly saying that land was the core issue. They want Chandel district, Sardar Hills, some parts of Ukhrul and Tamenglong and the Churachandpur district, in short the Kuki dominated areas of the hill districts of Manipur, to be designated as Kukiland.

### The Naga perspective

Nagas think that the Kukis worked hand in glove with the Indian Army in checking the Naga underground movement. According to Ringo “Mr. Holkhomang an ex-MP with some of the Kuki leaders went to the Indian Army and told them that they had been harassed by the Naga UGs, so they would form their own UG (Underground) group to help the Indian Government in checking Naga UGs”<sup>5</sup>. A Magazine published by the Nagas during the conflict says:

“The collusion of Kuki militants and the Indian Armed Forces is an open secret now. The news report as published in *The Telegraph* dated 24<sup>th</sup> March 1993 reads, “The president of the Kuki National Organisation (KNO) of which the KNA is the military wing, Mr. Hanglen, admitted to this correspondent that the organisation was in touch with certain army cantonments in the region. He even claimed that he was invited for talks in New Delhi with the Chief of Army Staff Gen. S.F Rodrigues on Christmas Eve last year”<sup>6</sup>.

Most Nagas think that no land issue was involved in the conflict. It started because of clashes between the militants in Moreh. Mr. Kothar Monsang says: “The UG level war between the KNA and NSCN-IM started in Moreh. It was because of tax collection and monopoly of the town by the NSCN-IM. Feeling insecure, the KNA started chasing away the Nagas. Muivah did not know about the conflict because during the conflict we sent a representative to

Muivah to control the conflict and his response was, “I can control the Nagas but who is going to control the Kukis?” The conflict stopped when Muivah directed the Home Ministry to let the innocent Kuki people free. Regarding territories, the Nagas will not find it difficult to negotiate because the Nagas will not claim as their own areas, for example Dingpi that are inhabited mostly by the Kukis”<sup>7</sup>.

Another source says: “The recent conflict was started by the Kukis and the Marings of Tengenoupal area over the appointment of 80 council teachers”<sup>8</sup>. Regarding taxes, an excerpt from the Naga Students’ Federation says: “Some of the Kukis living in the villages of the region had apparently refused to pay taxes to the NSCN on the ground that they did not subscribe to Naga nationalism. NSCN has been collecting this “house tax” from every household in the Naga areas since its inception. Nagas have been paying it willingly. Kukis living in the Naga areas were also paying this “tax” till then. However it seems that some of the Kuki villagers of Moreh region had decided to stop paying this “tax” to NSCN. What motivated them to change their position we do not know, but this decision made it clear that a section of the Kukis were prepared to take on the NSCN. There were reports that the Kuki National Army and the Kuki Federal Council have been campaigning that Kukis should not pay this illegal tax to NSCN any longer. Some of the Kukis also complained that NSCN was forcing the Kukis to pay more than what was charged from the Nagas. They also claimed that the NSCN were threatening to evict those Kukis who were refusing to pay this illegal tax”<sup>9</sup>.

*Some Nagas also think that the conflict was a proxy war:*

“Resorting to proxy war is no game of one upmanship in the national and international game of politics. Ironically, helplessness and desperation is no secret now among the policy makers of India, when it comes to dealing with the rising tide of Naga Nationalism and the menacing growth of National Socialist Council

of Nagaland (NSCN-IM); India turned a blind eye to all norms of international political ethics to tread on the immoral path of setting to war between Nagas and Kukis backing the Kuki militants to the hilt to tackle the Naga militants of the dreaded National Socialist Council of Nagaland led by Isak Swu and Th. Muivah. The proxy war of India against Naga nation is continuing with no end in sight. For obvious reasons, Indian media fight shy of terming the current Naga-Kuki war as proxy war”<sup>10</sup>.

According to a confession made by an Anal Naga: “There was a lot of politics within the Naga society, even before the conflict started. Prior to the break up of the NSCN it seems everybody in the organisation knew the inevitable but the Anals were kept ignorant of the impending break up. So when they broke up, Anals were on both sides, some were with the IM group and the others with the K group. In the Chakpikarong area it was the Khaplang group who came first. So, whenever the IM group came to our place they will do lots of things which we hated but we are helpless in front of the guns. Even after the Thingsan village incident where the IM group killed 26 men, they did not guard our villages. So we can say that, they are indirectly inviting the Kukis to attack the Anals. The main reason of the recent conflict was purely because of the past rivalries between the Haokip clans of the Kukis and the Tangkhul Nagas”<sup>11</sup>.

### **The Moreh Incident That Began the Ethnic conflict**

According to a reliable opinion: “The people of Moreh heard that KNA from Myanmar had reached Manipur and were staying at Laiching Hill (a hill near Moreh) and some Kuki leaders used to send messages to the KNA using the KSO (Kuki Students’ Organisation) leaders namely Mr. Onkholet and Mr. Haopao to carry the messages. On one such trip, the two youth leaders were caught by the NSCN-IM cadres after they returned from the KNA camp, and on being searched they found a letter from the KNA. So, IM cadres tied their hands and took them back to their camp. When they reached the top of the hill, they were threatened to be shot

if they did not tell them about the location of the camp. Feeling caught between the devil and the deep sea, they pointed to the opposite direction and they ran in different directions. But they were fired upon and Onkholet was killed. His friend Haopao escaped and was helped by a jhum cultivator who untied his hands and he informed others of the situation. After he reached back Moreh, many people from the town went in search for the dead body. That night KNA entered Moreh<sup>12</sup>. Remembering the sentiment of the people during those days, Mr. Jamthang says: “Onkholet being a student leader, everybody felt that he died for his tribe and people were very annoyed towards the Nagas. There was a public protest in Moreh with his dead body being carried in procession in the town”<sup>13</sup>.

#### **How the Nagas Fled from Moreh**

As soon as the KNA entered Moreh there was a meeting with the leaders. Thangkholun (KNA leader) was not in favour of staying together with the Nagas in Moreh as he felt that they were aiding the IM group. So they called an emergency meeting with the Naga leaders and told them not to aid and entertain the IM group any more. They expressed their inability to abide by this order because though they did not want to do it, the IM group forced them to act. Even though there was no formal warning to leave Moreh, the Nagas started fleeing that same night.

On KNAs view of the Nagas, Mr. Kampu says “Mr. Thangkholun was not in favour of having a war with the NSCN”. Quoting him he said, “In fact when we came back from Kachin, they sent us with rupees one lakh and eighteen guns and on the way we were looked after by our Naga brethren for 3 full months. We are fighting for a common cause and there is no point of fighting with them. Even when they started firing at us we did not fire back as we thought that they mistook us and we shouted the name of their leaders but when they did not stop, we returned the fire back”<sup>14</sup>.

Thus what began at Moreh, a fight for dominance between the Naga and Kuki militant groups spread to the other parts of

Manipur. Both the communities suffered.

#### **4. Spread of the Conflict**

According to some of those affected by the conflict, “Soon after the Nagas fled Moreh, some Nagas from the Mao area came for an excursion to Moreh. When some youth of Moreh learnt that they were Nagas, they challenged them not knowing from which place they came and why they had come. So a scuffle broke out and those innocent Mao Nagas were beaten up severely by some Kuki youth from Moreh. When the affected party reached Mao, they started pulling down Kukis at the Mao gate”<sup>1</sup>. “Mass killings started when one captain of the NSCN-IM heard from some sources that the KNA was going to have a meeting at Leisan Tegnoupal (a Kuki village). So he went there to ambush them on the way. He waited for them for two days but nobody turned up. At last he came upon a group of people. On further enquiries he became frustrated and killed them. They were innocent villagers who had come for a customary get together with their families at another village”<sup>2</sup>.

It was a clear case of misunderstanding. According to a personal account: “My village Chehjang is just near a Kuki village. We had been living together for many years. One day the IM cadres came to our village and they were not treated well by our villagers so they got wild, went and killed some people of our neighbouring Kuki village. Our neighbouring villagers thought that they were sent by us, as they saw them coming from our village. So suspicion and hatred started growing between the two villages”<sup>3</sup>.

Another person narrates: “The way the conflict came into the Sugnu-Chakpikarong area of Chandel district was a little bit different. When killing and looting started, we had a meeting of the village chiefs comprising all the tribes. We agreed not to help any UGs, not to guard the village and not to make any village fencing. But during those days, there was a great rivalry between the IM and K group of the NSCN. Near Chakpikarong, the IM had

a camp, called Bulloh-camp and this camp was attacked by the K-cadres. While running away from their camp, one of the cadres ran towards Tuinou (a Kuki village). This particular village was guarded by their villagers, and one of the guards shot dead one IM cadre. The IM cadres got angry and burnt down the whole village. This particular village later shifted to Thingsan but they were attacked again by the IM cadres in November 1994. 26 persons were killed in the attack. There was strong condemnation of this incident even in the Naga circles but the IM cadres said that this particular incident was not related to the ethnic conflict but was to avenge the death of their slain cadre”<sup>4</sup>.

According to Zilngam, a Kuki chief, the beginning of the conflict was a little bit different. He says: “The recent conflict started with a small problem. Some elders of the Nagas (Anals) hated some of the Kuki leaders, so they used the Naga UGs for making them collect taxes and they used this money for partying and drinking. I don’t think it would reach the top leaders. Some Kukis who had monetary problems with the Nagas and started instigating the people against the other (one example is Nehthang, who started the first Kuki UG group, had some monetary problems with Suiza (a Naga) and this problem remained unsettled). When we talk about the Naga tax, it is very confusing because the Nagas never collected taxes in our village. It could be because of the past relationship between the Baites and the Nagas when the former started the Chin Liberation Movement, they once had an agreement not to trouble each other but to help and support each other. The recent conflict is about fighting for power. The Nagas control all the district headquarters and most of the sub-divisions are also under them. The Kukis cannot move freely in most of the offices. Whenever money is drawn from any government source the Naga UGs are there to demand a percentage cut. Another conflict is possible if things are not solved properly”<sup>5</sup>.

In some places it was a different scenario. The author was told that: “Orders were issued by the UGs as well as the respective

tribal organisations to guard the villages. People started making bunkers and village fences. Many rumours spread in the beginning. There was a wide circulation about the Kuki UGs preparing to burn the Naga villages and vice-versa. Many of us believed the news because we saw the Kuki villagers making their village fences. Pictures and news of killings and burning, were always reported in the newspapers. It brought more communal feelings and enmity towards each other. Others told us that the sons and relatives of our Mangai (close family friend) had joined in burning the villages. That broke all our trust and confidence towards the other tribes. In our area, we all lived close-by. There was one incident where these neighbouring villagers attacked each other. Mongneljang (Kuki) and Thawai (Naga) villagers were just one and a half kilometers apart. One day the Kukis came and challenged the villagers. Running out of patience, they started chasing the Kukis. As a result there was firing between the two. Near the Naga village was an Indian Army outpost. As soon as they heard the sound of the gun the soldiers started firing towards the place. The Nagas were unable to proceed and some got wounded from the Army bullets but the Kukis were safe because there was a small hillock in between them. So many of us thought that the Army sided with the Kukis”<sup>6</sup>.

In the midst of the conflict, the Church has been one of the most trusted and respected institutions. But what was its role during the conflict? According to a report: “At first, it was the Nagas who attacked us and killed us one by one. Our leaders who spoke against them said that we were just defending ourselves. We never attacked them first. Even in the KCLF (Kuki Christian Leaders Fellowship) meetings, during the conflict, we openly discussed the methodology we used. Some scholars went a little further to say that we need to change our strategy from defence to attack. When we thus changed our strategy the Nagas stopped attacking us. Also the World Baptist Alliance came once to settle the conflict between us. The meeting was held at Asoka Hotel. Most prominent

pastors and evangelists of both the tribes came for the meeting. But nothing concrete came of it. Instead, we almost used our fists against each other. I was told that the Tangkhul Nagas are still angry with us because some of their forefathers were maltreated by our forefathers. It is an open secret that the Tangkhuls used to act out how their forefathers were maltreated by our forefathers. That has been recorded in a video and shown to various Naga people. I was really shocked when I first heard about it. The first NGO who received foreign aid for victims of the conflict was the VVD (Volunteer for Village Development). But its director, the husband of a Tangkhul lady, showed a lot of partiality towards the victims while giving relief materials. The Naga UGs stole the packed food items, from the MBC (Manipur Baptist Convention) godown and the empty packages were found near the Kuki villages which were burnt down”<sup>7</sup>.

Many persons could not believe that they could be simply attacked by their neighbouring villages. The Kukis thought that their neighbouring Naga villages would never attack them. The Nagas thought the same about their Kuki neighbours. One also believes that there was third party involvement in spreading the conflict. According to Mr. Moshel “Political leaders influenced the people very much. They instigated their people against the other for their own benefit. The conflicting tribes never attacked Meiteis. They were free to move anywhere they liked. Many a time, when the villagers ran away from their villages they asked the Meiteis to guard their property. It turned out like making the monkey guard the paddy. They never got it back. So many people suspect now that the Meiteis had a hand in instigating the two communities to fight in order to weaken tribal unity. The Meitei Organisations remained silent during the conflict and none of them came forward to help the victims and refugees. The government too neglected the people and did not bother about their needs and aspirations. The conflict was not tackled in the early stages. They made statements but no action was taken so it could not solve any problem”<sup>8</sup>. Mr.

Ngamsei has this to say: “The Anals or Lamkangs or any other Nagas of Chandel would never attack the Kukis, unless they were forced by the Tangkhuls of Ukhrul”<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, many Nagas are of the view that it was the Indian Army that made the two communities fight against each other.

Peace initiatives were not effective during the conflict. According to a leader: “In 1994, under the ADC of Chandel, some leaders were selected for the formation of the peace committee. We had peace talks but it was useless. Nobody came up with a concrete solution. They did not find out why the Kukis and Nagas fought. So people continued to be killed and houses were burnt everyday. People keep on taking revenge on each other. Once, Mr. Arthur (a Tangkhul) came to Moreh for a dialogue and peace with the KNA, and everything was discussed. Pigs were killed and meals were prepared for a community celebration. But unluckily on that day itself, some IM-cadres killed 3 persons from Mangkang (Kuki village). Mr. Thanglun (KNA leader) got so upset with that incident that he was determined to kill all the Naga leaders who came to Moreh on their return journey. We persuaded him not to kill them, knowing that the people will have to face the consequences. The whole night we pleaded with him for the safety of the Naga leaders and at last he agreed. Then we went and dropped all of them with the SDC of Moreh. We took many steps for peace but nothing good came up, so I resigned from the peace committee”<sup>10</sup>. According to the KNF (Kuki National Front), they started joining the conflict after their operational area was touched. Their founder Lt. Mr. Nehlun was also not in favour of the conflict. According to him, the Nagas cannot give what the Kukis want and vice-versa. So each and every person favoured his or her own tribe against the other during the conflict”<sup>11</sup>.

## 5. Impact of the Conflict on the Present Society

We have just seen how the conflict in the Chandel district between the Nagas and Kukis got intensified and reached a point



of no return. Even today as a researcher, “The wounds are healed but not the scars”.

A question was asked: “Whose community was the worst affected in the conflict?” For this, we have two opinions from the two tribes and each of them tries to claim more casualties. Mr. Chumrhing (Anal Naga) says: “In Chandel district, the Nagas were more affected during the conflict, especially, the Anal community was the worst affected, 39 people died in the clash and 8 of them were women”<sup>1</sup>. The KNO (Kuki National Organisation) claimed that 112 people died in Chandel District alone in the conflict out of the total 888 victims<sup>2</sup>. But a social worker in the FGC-VVD (Fraternal Green Cross- Volunteer for Village Development) says: “According to our survey, the Kukis were more affected comparing to the Nagas, more people killed and more of their houses torched, the conflict was really horrible and when it ended the Kukis started observing it as ‘Black Day’ in remembrance of those who were killed in the conflict. This type of occasion will bring more hatred in the future than unity. Rehabilitation of the affected victims did not take place properly. The valley people took great advantage of the conflict and most of the relief materials went into the pockets of the valley people, and out of 100% only 10-20% reached the people. The Manipuris know that if we leave Manipur, most of the forest resources will be gone forever, so they want us to fight more, so that we will not have peace. The few inter-marriages we had between us were put asunder by the UGs. Orders were issued by the UGs to get divorce and the few women from other tribes who remained back with their husbands, took great risk in helping the husband’s side by either joining or helping in the killing, in order to show their loyalty. Even buying of Phaneks (a cloth wrapped around the waist by girls) and the use of other community shawls were prohibited”<sup>3</sup>. But disagreeing with the above opinion Mr. Moshel a Naga, has this to say: “During the conflict those who married a Kuki or its family clans like Chins, Paites or Hmar went to Churachandpur and stayed there peacefully during the conflict”<sup>4</sup>.

With the intensification of the conflict, more problems were added. To quote Mr. Ronglo, a social worker: “The conflict brought in more UG groups to our land. The government seems to have been involved indirectly in helping them. Almost all the employees contribute a percentage of their salaries to the UGs. It is an open secret now that almost all the politicians have links with them. Even during the conflict the then President of India Mr. R. Venkataraman relying on the Governor’s report accused the then C.M of Manipur, Mr. Rishang Keishing of being involved directly in the conflict. Because of the employees’ contribution, the UGs have regular way of getting money from every department. Again this system of collecting money has affected the people indirectly. For example, an IAS officer from the South was transferred to Chandel. At first, he was scared of the place because of the UG problems. So he stayed in an Imphal Guest House for two months and ran the office from Imphal. Then he went to Chandel and the UGs started demanding money from him. To recover the money he had contributed, he started taking bribes from the common people. After seven months, he was transferred as the public complained about him. By that time, he had become fully corrupt trying to adjust to the situation. The MLAs used the UGs during the election campaign. When they failed to get a ministerial berth, they caused a fear-psychosis among the people who did not vote for the candidate supported by the UGs. At the same time, whenever we visited the other tribal villages we were not feeling at ease”<sup>5</sup>.

Agreeing with the comment, a Kuki says: “We are not scared of each other now. We know we will not be killed when we are in their villages, but there is always a fear in the minds of the people. For example, recently one Anal family came for *Ki-inlut*<sup>6</sup> to our village. Observing them, I didn’t find them roaming freely in the village. Nobody threatened them but at the same time, nobody wanted to talk to them. So there is uneasiness among ourselves even now”<sup>7</sup>. After the conflict, the Nagas accused the Kukis of coming closer to the Meiteis forgetting the past relationships. A

Mr. Zilngam says: “We talk and wish each other whenever we meet on the road but being scared we do not disclose anything to each other. For persons who lost their family members in the conflict, it is very difficult to make friendship. Personally I don’t hate them, but I don’t like them either. I hate them more than liking them, because Nagas have developed a superiority complex towards the Kukis after the conflict”.

Land and properties which were abandoned by the Kukis during the conflict are yet to be recovered. In some places, people went back because they have *pattas* for their land. In some places plots were sold at a low price and in some other cases, the owners never got back their land or money. One thing is clear now. The Nagas as well as the Kukis live in more or less compact areas. They are not mixing any more. The situation in Chakpikarong continues to be very confusing and is different from that of other places. We see many Kukis living together with the Anal Nagas. They have become refugees in their own land because of the clashes between the UKLF (United Khulmi Liberation Front) and the UNLF (United National Liberation Front) in recent months. Most of them are from the Dingpi area (near the Indo-Myanmar border). The Kukis had been living together with the Anal Nagas for the last three years after the conflict. About their relationship, a Kuki chief says: “Our relations with the Anals are very cordial in Chandel District. Sometimes I used to wonder what other people of our own tribe living in different districts would say. They can even accuse us of siding with the Nagas. One example is the coming up of the United Kuki Liberation Front (UKLF), a Kuki underground group which is working closely with the NSCN-IM”<sup>8</sup>.

Regarding the status of the UGs (militants) in their society, Mr. Thenthang says: “The Nagas had a long history of insurgency and they had attained an international status. They are internationally enlightened in politics and they want the Kukis to accept Naga nationalism. The Kukis have a long history of their own, but the conflict occurred suddenly. The people are not yet prepared to

accept it psychologically, so we have many UG groups belonging to our tribe. Some groups are behaving like gangsters. They collect taxes in the name of the tribe and use them for their own purpose. During the elections, they work for candidates who hire them. When their candidates are elected they will be found in the quarters of the MLAs”<sup>9</sup>.

With regard to the woes and sufferings of the Kukis Mr. Francis Baite says: “Because of the conflict, the Kuki society is not free from conflict till now. A big tension erupted in Moreh soon after the Kuki-Naga conflict, and soon after there was a Paite-Kuki conflict in Churachandpur. Many people got killed and many houses were burnt down. Even though the leaders of the KNA and ZRA (Zomi Revolutionary Army) have reached an understanding now, the plight of the victims is still miserable. Now they are calling the conflict a small family feud, but the Kuki and Paite conflict has sharpened the distinctions in the Kuki family. When the conflict subsided, some UGs who sided with the Nagas like KRA and UKLF have returned to the Kuki fold. During the conflict there was a great enmity between them and they killed each other. The Kuki National Front (KNF) is also divided into many sub-groups now and rivalry between them is very strong. Recently, there was a propaganda that whenever we have a common enemy our UGs are united. Now people are scared whether the UGs will start another war with other communities. Again in the Dingpi area (near Indo-Myanmar border) there are many valley militants operating now. The UKLF has been trying to chase them out but they are not successful. Some Kukis genuinely fear that there is a big possibility that the valley people will encroach on Kuki land slowly in the years to come”<sup>10</sup>.

The Nagas have a different perspective on the Kukis. Mr. Moshel says: “Kukis too will join us one day. They will benefit more in joining us than by going away from us. In some areas, like Marimchi block, the IM leaders and the KNA leaders have already reached an understanding. They used to come together and have

common meals. The first one was in Marimchi and the second one was in Moreh. A very unique incident happened during one of these fixed meetings. Mr. Ngamjatong (KNA leader) was on his way for the meeting with the IM leaders and an assailant shot him and ran away. If Ngamjatong had died in that attack, it would have surely led to the second conflict. The IM leaders got so angry with the act that they passed an order to kill the potential assassin. He was caught and brought to the court of the NSCN, interrogated and was about to be shot but he pleaded his ignorance about the planned meeting and in the presence of Ngamjatong, he was forgiven and set free”<sup>11</sup>.

The million dollar question is whether the Naga and Kuki hopes and aspirations will be realised when there is lack of trust between them. Only time will tell. To live in peace there is no alternative other than to reach mutual understanding and resolving all the differences amicably.

## 6. Conflict Resolution in the Past

Regarding the past conflict resolution system, Mr. Leo Kamchinthang says: “Our forefathers certainly had some formalities to settle the inter-tribe conflicts. But with the coming of Naga UGs and modernity, it is not applicable any more. Naga UGs directly or indirectly solved some cases by taking decisions on their own. Local leaders and chiefs are left out. Of late, when we have to settle inter-tribe cases, people prefer to go to the government courts instead of the tribal courts. After the conflict, Kukis too imitate the Naga UG. In the olden days, people used to come together to solve cases involving two communities”<sup>1</sup>.

According to the records of S.P. Thampan at a meeting on May 10, 1942 the 256 delegates from 69 villages comprising all the chiefs and elders of 6 different communities in Chandel district, took an oath and agreed that, whenever they had a problem area they would meet and discuss it in the presence of three elected persons: (1) S.P Thampan (Anal), (2) Ngul Khup (Kuki/Khongsai),

(3) N.H. Kanlun (Anal). They also resolved that in case of a war, theft, or changing sides, etc., the culprits should be fined with a Mithun. These cases should be settled either in Monbi (Kuki village) or Anal Khullen (Anal Naga village). Inter-tribe cases were to be solved in the presence of these three persons.

The researcher found no written document but learnt that each tribe was able to solve its own problems including murder cases without referring them to courts. Mr. Holkhojam (a Kuki) says: “Every tribe had its own ways of solving its problems. The Kukis had their own customs. We have no written rules and regulations but we judge according to our traditions and customs. In the past, a complainant brought rice-beer (now tea is okay) to the village chief, who gathered all his ministers and together they heard the case. Dates were fixed for the second hearing of the case wherein the chief also invited the defendant. In all the cases, the chief is the main judge and if they cannot come to a conclusion, the next step is called ‘Twilut’ (entering water). A priest (thempu) usually conducts this ceremony. Before he allowed the complainant and the defendant to enter the water, he would call on God and the spirit of the water to help them in identifying the wrong and speak the truth. It is believed that whoever is wrong, cannot stay inside the water for long even though they may know swimming. Those who are right, even though they may not know how to swim, will be able to stay in the water for a very long time. The wrong fellow is supposed to feel hot or a burning sensation as soon as he enters the water. If that does not help, the last resort in solving problems is taking an oath. For example, if the problem is about claiming the ownership of a Mithun, the person who claims the ownership has to take an oath. For this particular ceremony three things are necessary: (1) Dust to symbolise the earth, (2) Charcoal to symbolise fire and (3) a little blood of the animal. The person making a promise has to drink the mixture of all these three things. A stipulated time is usually given. The oath taker has to say: “If I lie, let me turn to dust and die with fire within 6 months”. If

the time both the groups agree is 6 months, then after the drink, the oath taker bites the tooth of a tiger, to signify that if he had lied, the tiger should bite him when he goes out to the jungle”<sup>2</sup>. Agreeing with the above circumstances, Nicholas Thumpum (an Anal Naga) has this to say: “The above ceremonies are practised in the Anal community even now. Last year, two elders died, while entering in the water for a case in Chakpikarong. Many people have died in the past while taking an oath. Sometimes even their children have died. Oath taking ceremonies are usually done outside the village”.

Many of these customs have been modified in the recent past. According to Mr. Chumshing: “An application to settle a case with a court fee of Rs. 100 should be first submitted to the chief. Then the chief with his ministerial colleagues will start the enquiry about the case. After knowing fully the case and the opinions of both the parties, dates are fixed for the hearing when both the complainant and the respondent are present. The main idea is to make them compromise on the case as far as possible. The Anal community also has Chief Associations to look into the overall administration in the area. Penalties are imposed on the people who lose the case”<sup>3</sup>. Agreeing to the similarities and the differences between the two tribes, John Thangjalet says: “Complaint against a chief was unheard of in the past, because if the villagers were not happy with the chief, they left the village and shifted to another village. In the Kuki society, a villager owns a plot as long as he enjoys the pleasure of the Chief. Kuki Chiefs are very powerful and even murder cases are solved in the village courts”<sup>4</sup>. According to Mr. Phungreiyo, the Tangkhuls have village courts at the grassroots level. There are 4-5 sub-divisional courts in a region and there are four regions namely eastern, western, northern and southern and above all these regions, they have Tangkhul Naga Long, as their apex body. Whatever is not solved by the village or regional courts is brought to the apex body, whose decision will be binding”<sup>5</sup>.

## 7. Towards a Peaceful Solution

From our study, we learnt that a majority of the people blame the UGs for flaring up the conflict and bringing up communal tension because they control everything and the government has no real control over the situation. Mr. Ronglo says: “In 2002, a Kuki UG group demanded Rs 5 lakhs from our organisation. We did not have so much money and were scared because if we give to one group, others will start demanding the same as more than 30 insurgent groups are operating in Manipur. So we took the issue to the Kuki leaders of the area. They called a big meeting inviting the UG group too. As we could not come to a conclusion, they arranged another meeting and pleaded with them not to demand any money and to take back their demand letter. We highlighted the difficulties and hardships we faced. They understood us and we were exempted”.<sup>1</sup>

Talking about the decision makers Mr. Wungreiyo says: “At the village level, chiefs usually take decisions and in the area level, it is often rich people who had interest in politics and in tribe level (among the Nagas) those who had strong supporters and having a link with the politicians (on most occasions it is the Government employees). These people work hand-in-hand with the UGs”<sup>2</sup>. Ms. Kim Gangte (Ex M.P) says about future interventions: “Government according to me is the selected few. It is not something divine. The decisions of the Government are of a few and not the wish of the people. The Government’s action in any field is to stop nepotism and favouritism in giving jobs and Government sanctions. Political leaders should be the guardians of ordinary people and they should sacrifice their life for the people. NGOs, including Church organisations and Unions should work together for the unity of the people. They should act as a pressure group on the government. There should be a networking system between these groups. These organisations should join hands for the cause of the people. UGs should abstain from interfering in any type of elections held in the state”<sup>3</sup>.

Regarding perceptions of the people these days, Dominic

Lamkang says: “The other day one of my friends rang me up and informed me of a situation in Bangalore where a Mizo student stabbed one Monsang boy. He was asking me whether we should forgive him, because the Mizo students made an apology for the incident. When we look at the situation, we should know that there is no need to communalise the issue as the matter involved just two students. In these days, everything is taken on a communal basis. This type of communalising against each other is the greatest setback towards the building up of a peaceful society”<sup>74</sup>.

As for the churches’ role in helping the victims in conflicts, Mr. Dongkhokai says: “In the Kuki society, during the conflict, some Churches came up with their relief materials to popularise their Church and mission. Those motives are wrong, although what they did is right. This is also one of the reasons why we cannot trust each other and why our society is divided. Peace involves everybody, everyone’s involvement is necessary. With regard to the Naga UGs, if they still include Sardar Hills, Chandel as Naga inhabited areas and wish to include it in their demand for Greater Nagalim, it can become a source of conflict in the future too. But if the Nagas really want peace, they should do it through negotiations and each group should be faithful”<sup>75</sup>. Regarding the role of the UGs, Mr. Moshel says: “UGs should be neutral. They should catch or punish people after proper enquiry. They should not threaten or frighten people simply; warnings should be given before they take any drastic action. I have seen them doing all sorts of unnecessary things. Now we feel like laughing about the Kuki – Naga clash that took place in the recent past”<sup>76</sup>.

People feel that the militants have a role to play in the peace initiatives. For example, Mr. Chumrhing says: “As the conflict got worsened, we met Paolen (KNA leader) and appealed to him for peace. On May 15, 1997 with Paolen’s permission and under the MLA Mr. Hangkhanpao’s leadership, we killed two cows and had an exchange of gifts and other items in Chakpikarong. It was after this event that the conflict started cooling down. It was

because of the initiative taken by many people that we embraced peace”<sup>77</sup>. With regard to future interventions, Mr. Ronglo has this to say: “Large sections of people are afraid of war now. They don’t want to have civil war again for the second time. What we can do now is to create a platform for the people to share their woes and problems of the conflict. And meticulously arrange cultural exchange programmes for lost Mangais to meet and share their past relationship. We have also come to learn that in some places like Litan, UGs of both groups stayed together, they don’t have any exchange of fire, till now”<sup>78</sup>. This shows that mutual trust and understanding is always possible.

Mr. Thenthang says: “The Kuki-Naga imbroglio is a delicate matter. It should be addressed after knowing the historical background. It covers many subjects and agendas, even though there was no agenda or any specific point when we started fighting. Now each tribe should discuss the real problem and ask itself what it was fighting for. Conventions should be held and unanimous decisions should be taken first. We should have peace with each other, resolved by the representative of each tribe. Then alone we can have lasting peace. There is no way for peace except through dialogue promoted by religious leaders”<sup>79</sup>.

Most leaders whom the researcher met agree that the peace committees formed at the initiative of the then MLA Mr. Hangkhanpao in Chakpikarong should be activated. They did not last for long. Some of the problems, according to Mr. Chumrhing are that: “There was lack of money for conducting camps and seminars and as most of the volunteers were elders, there was nobody to run the family or see to the financial problems of the family. Some of the volunteers were also not sincere. Sometimes when they were entrusted with the task of meeting the UGs, they came back with a lot of excuses”<sup>80</sup>. However, the yearning for peace continues from both the communities.

## 8. Conclusion

Peace making is not an easy task especially when the parties in dispute do not wish to undertake the journey towards it. This study showed two different opinions with regard to 'peace'. According to Mr. Nehmang: "Peace is the need of the hour for the Kuki society. During these years, I have spent my time in propagation of peace and unity in our tribe. I have met almost all the Kuki UG leaders. I have told them of the necessity of a common platform for a national movement. All of them agreed, but in practice it is difficult to follow it. In our society, we lack leaders and each UG group is infested with corruption and division on the basis of clans. Unless we come together and carve out our own State there won't be any lasting peace in our society"<sup>1</sup>. Mr. Kothar (a Naga) confirming the need for Naga unity says: "Until the Nagas achieve sovereignty or Southern Nagaland, the conflict will continue. In the beginning we were all made aware that till we stand united we would not get even the basic human rights. So for us, unity is the main priority. Though divided, we respect our leaders and that's the secret of Naga unity"<sup>2</sup>.

Mr. Osteen has this to say: "High-handedness of the UGs in diverting public development funds for their own organisations can also be checked if the people are aware of how and for what purpose the funds came in. In this type of a situation, unless the public takes the initiative, the law-enforcing agencies like the police and army can do nothing. The public has also the right to know how funds are spent. If the people are aware of these things, corruption can be checked in our society"<sup>3</sup>. About the task of the future, Mr. Chumrhing says: "A number of workshops for peace should be conducted to awaken our people. The people now don't even know the meaning of a workshop. For them workshop is a place where we repair jeeps and other machines. Soon after the conflict, I organised one workshop for all the chiefs but nobody turned up. On enquiry I learnt that they don't have any machines and vehicles. Church visits too are necessary, because we are all Christians and we can make the best use of this platform. And the

UGs should be made aware of the religious compulsions of seeking a peaceful resolution to the conflict"<sup>4</sup>.

As for indulging in counter violence and conflict Mr. Francis says: "If the UGs really want territory, they should take the advice of the public leaders and should work hand-in-hand with the NGOs, who can play a mediatory role. The problem of Manipur cannot be solved through an army operation to tame the militants. Negotiation is what we require. After sending the army, if the government scrutinises its activities, they will learn how the army plays a double game"<sup>5</sup>. Kim Gangte adds: "Where there are humans there are conflicts. But solutions are always there. Women can play a great role in conflict resolution. Compared to men they are by nature peace-loving. As Bill Clinton said, "If Women were there in Camp David, Camp David would not have failed"<sup>6</sup>.

According to Mr. Leo Kamchinthang: "During the conflict, the government did nothing for the people. When the conflict escalated the government did not do anything to stop it. At that juncture, some NGOs came to help the people, but people did not believe them. They suspected them and some even threatened them and told them not to come to their area anymore. The NGOs were afraid and retreated. If the NGOs from outside could involve some local people, it would be good. After knowing the real intentions of the NGOs, the local people will trust them. The people in general did not understand their true motive since Manipur has a very big number of NGOs, most of them only getting money from donor agencies and doing nothing for people's welfare. So people have a wrong perception of NGOs. When it comes to a government undertaking, we hardly see sincere people taking up the job of enabling peace"<sup>7</sup>.

On the importance of frequent meetings of the leaders, Mr. Lakshmi Prasad says: "Frequent meetings of leaders will bring understanding among the different tribes. These days when we see young persons we suspect them to be UGs. If we have a

platform where we can meet frequently, naturally we will know each other's problems and will come closer to each other. Because of the conflict, we cannot visit each other because there is a big gap between us. If we can solve this communication gap we can come closer to peace"<sup>8</sup>. On the importance of communication, Mr. Francis adds: "If we can have contacts with our friends every now and then, we will be able to know each other better and share our problems more. But now, we don't have any phone connections in the villages, forget about electricity and the telephone, the inter-tribe friendship cannot grow between us, especially for people living in the interior regions. The government is not ignorant about this, but what can we do?"<sup>9</sup>.

Also addressing the problem of underdevelopment is a key issue in establishing peace. This study has shown that both the Naga and Kuki communities have reached a crucial stage in their identity assertion. The Nagas want to be united under one umbrella. The Kukis remain divided. Some are supporting the territorial integrity of Manipur, while others wish to have a separate Kukiland. The division of the land according to the wishes of the Nagas, Meiteis and Kukis is the bone of contention. These three entities need to sit together, hear and understand each other, with respect and see what each one can give and take. They need also to look at the practical aspects of safeguarding the territorial integrity of Manipur. The question today is whether it is possible after the estrangement that one sees in the State today. Fixed ideas and obstinate stands will not help in reaching an honourable solution in the near future. NGOs and voluntary and welfare agencies can play a mediatory role in helping out the communities in conflict to arrive at peace based on justice to all.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### ENDNOTES

**N. B. The numbers concern the sections of the paper.**

1. 1. B.K Ahluwalia and Shashi Ahluwalia, *Social Change in Manipur* (Delhi-1984) p.1; cited in L. Jeyaseelan, *Impact of the Missionary Movement in Manipur* (New Delhi : Scholar Publishing House, 1996), p.2.
2. RESEARCH REFERENCE AND TRAINING DIVISION, PUBLIC DIVISION MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, *INDIA 2004* P.789.
3. T. S GANGTE, *THE KUKIS OF MANIPUR* (NEW DELHI : GYAN PUBLISHING HOUSE, 1993) P.28.
4. L. JEYASEELAN, *IMPACT OF THE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT IN MANIPUR* (NEW DELHI : SCHOLAR PUBLISHING HOUSE, 1996) P.2.
5. T. S GANGTE, *IBID.*, P.28.
6. L. JEYASEELAN, *OP.CIT.*, P.1.
7. *The Nagas Perspective*, published by the United Naga Council Working Group, p.5.
8. JYOTIRMONY ROY, *HISTORY OF MANIPUR* (IMPHAL : 1973), P.189 CITED IN L. JEYASEELAN *OP.CIT.*, P.11.
9. P.S HAOKIP, *ZAL'N-GAM THE KUKI NATION* (KUKI NATIONAL ORGANISATION), PP.31-62.
10. T.S Gangte, *op.cit.*, pp 34-35.
11. J. ROY, *OP.CIT.*, P.3. SEE ALSO OF N.TOMBI, *MANIPUR: A STUDY*, PP24-25 AND L. IBUNGOHAL SINGH, *INTRODUCTION TO MANIPUR*, 1963, P.55 CITED IN UNITED NAGA COUNCIL WORKING GROUP, *THE NAGA PERSPECTIVE*.
12. R.R SHIMRAY, *ORIGIN AND CULTURE OF THE NAGAS*, (NEW DELHI : MRS. PAMLEIPHI SHIMRAY, 1985) P.26.
13. William Shaw, *The Thadou Kukis*, 1929, pp 11 and 24.
14. An interview with Mr.Kothar Monshang, Monsangpantha Village, dated July 10, 2004.
2. 1. Dates are not clear, in one page it is entered 10-05-1942 and on two pages it is dated 10-07-1942.

2. THADOU KUKIS WERE ALSO KNOWN AS KHONGSAI IN THE PAST.
3. TRIBAL WAY OF DESCRIBING THE YEAR OF A MITHUN OR ANIMAL. IT MEANS THE MITHUN HAD FIVE YOUNGER SIBLINGS.
4. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. LEO KAMCHINTHANG, SUGNU, DATED 03-07-04.
5. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. JOHN THANGJALET HAOKIP, K. SABI VILLAGE, DT 17-08-04.
6. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. MICHAEL BEPAUL, CHANDEL, DATED 09-07-04.
7. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. ZILNGAM BAITE, K.SABI VILLAGE, DATED, 09-09-04.
8. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. SUMPI MODAL, CHAKPIKARONG, DATED 18-10-04.
9. A MEITEI DEITY WHO WAS BELIEVED TO HAVE MARRIED AN ANAL LADY.
10. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. NGAMSEI BAITE, SUGNU, DATED 19-09-04.
11. An interview with Mr. John Thangjalet Haokip.
12. An interview with Mr. Zilngam Baite.
13. An interview with Mr. Wurngam, Chandel, dated 10-07-2004.
14. An interview with Shokhothang, Moreh, dated 4-06-2004.
15. An interview with John Thangjalet Haokip.
16. An interview with Dr. Khuplam, Moreh, dated 5-06-2004.
17. P.S. HAOKIP, ZALE'N-GAM THE KUKI NATION (KUKI NATIONAL ORGANISATION – 1998), P.84.
18. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. SUMPI MODAL, CHAKPIKARONG, DATED 18-10-2004.
19. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. NGULKHUP, MR. JOHN THANGJALET AND MR. ZILNGAM, SUGNU, DATED 17-08-2004.
20. AN INTERVIEWN WITH MR. WURNGAM.
21. NSCN-IM (National Socialist Council of Nagalim, Isak-Muivah).

22. KNA (Kuki National Army).
23. Ministry of Information and Publicity, Government of the People's Republic of Nagalim, 50 years of Resistance, p. 7.
24. MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY, IBID., P.98.
25. P.S. Haokip, op.cit., p.74.
3. 1. An interview with Mr. Tongkhohao Haokip, Moreh, dated, 25-05-04.
2. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. J.K. MATE, IMPHAL, DATED, 17-07-04.
3. AN INTERVIEW WITH MS. TERESA HOILAM, MOREH, DATED, 02-06-04.
4. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. PETER SENPU, IMPHAL, DATED, 17-07-04.
5. An interview with Mr. Ringo, Prawllawn village, dated 10-07-04.
6. *INDO-NAGA CRISIS* (PRESS REVIEW AND COMMENT) DELHI, DECEMBER 1994, NAGA INTEREST GROUP (NIG), P.3.
7. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. KOTHAR MONSANG, MONSANGPANTHA VILLAGE.
8. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. CHUMRHING ANAL, CHAKPIKARONG.
9. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ETHNIC PROBLEM IN MANIPUR AND A REPORTAGE ON THE NAGA-KUKI CLASH: A PROSE IN COUNTER-INSURGENCY, NAGA STUDENTS FEDERATION, KOHIMA: NAGALAND.
10. Indo-Naga Crisis, op.cit., p.2.
11. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. WARNGAM, CHAKPIKARONG, DATED SEPTEMBER16, 2004.
12. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. KAMPU GANGTE, MOREH, DATED, 02-06-04.
13. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. JOSEPH JAMTHANG BAITE, MOREH, DATED, 01-06-04.
14. An interview with Mr. Kampu.



4. 1. An interview with Mr. Tongkhohao Haokip, Moreh.
2. An interview with Mr. Kothar Monshang, Monsangpantha village.
3. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. MICHAEL BEPAUL, CHANDEL.
4. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. CHUMRHING, CHAKPIKARONG.
5. An interview with Mr. Zilngam, K. Sabi village, dated 09-09-04.
6. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. WUNGREIYO, IMPHAL, DATED 15-07-04.
7. An interview with Rev. Mangsei Baite, Presbyterian Church, Sugnu, dated, 15-08-04.
8. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. MOSHEL, PALLEL, DATED, 11-09-04.
9. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. NGAMSEI BAITE, SUGNU, DATED, 19-09-04.
10. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. KAMPU GANGTE, MOREH.
11. An interview with Mr. Dongkhokai, Churachandpur, dated, 24-06-04.
5. 1. An interview with Mr. Chumrhing.
2. P.S HAOKIP, OP.CIT., PP., 207-258.

3. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. WUNGREIYO, IMPHAL, DATED 15-07-04.
4. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. MOSHEL, PALLEL, 11-09-04.
5. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. RONGLO, IMPHAL, DATED 16-07-04.
6. A Kuki customary practice of paying the Bride's price.
7. AN INTERVIEW WITH DOULUN, SUGNU, DATED, 10-09-04.
8. An interview with Mr. Ngamsei Baite, Sugnu, dated 19-09-04.
9. An interview with Mr. Thenthang Haokip, Moreh, dated, 07-06-04.
10. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. FRANCIS BAITE, MOREH.
11. An interview with Mr. Moshel, Pallel,. Dated, 11-09-04.
6. 1. An interview with Mr. Leo Kamchinthang, Sugnu, dated, 02-07-04.
2. An interview with John Holkhojam, Moreh, dated, 29-05-04.
3. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. CHUMRHING, CHAKPIKARONG.
4. An interview with John Thangjalet.
5. An interview with Mr. Phungreiyo, Imphal, 18-05-04.
7. 1. An interview with Mr. Ronglo, dated, 16-07-04.
2. An interview with Mr. Wungreiyo.
3. AN INTERVIEW WITH MS. KIM GANGTE, IMPHAL.
4. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. DOMINIC LAMKANG, IMPHAL.
5. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. DONGKHOKAI, CHURACHANDPUR, DATED, 24-06-04.
6. An interview with Mr. Moshel, Pallel, dated, 11-09-04.
7. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. CHUMRHING, CHAKPIKARONG, DATED, 16-08-04.
8. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. RONGLO.
9. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. THENTHANG, MOREH, DATED, (7/6/04)
10. An interview with Mr. Chumrhing.
8. 1. An interview with Mr. Nehmang, Moreh, dated, 06-06-04.
2. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. KOTHAR.
3. AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. HENRY OSTEEN, MOREH, DATED,



## THE KUKI-PAITE CONFLICT IN THE CHURACHANDPUR DISTRICT OF MANIPUR

*Rebecca C. Haokip*

1949 marked the merger of Manipur with the Indian Union. In 1972 Manipur became a full-fledged State with a 60-seat Legislative Assembly 19 of its seats reserved for the tribals and one for the Scheduled Castes. Manipur elects 2 members of Parliament to the Lok Sabha and 1 to the Rajya Sabha. Churachandpur is one of its districts. Its headquarter Churachandpur, also called Lamka, is the second biggest town in Manipur. It lies 62 km Southwest of Imphal and 56 km from the Indo-Myanmar border to the extreme south of Manipur. the tri-junction of Imphal-Lamka, Lamka-Singngat-Tidim Road and Lamka-Sugnu Road on the slopes on the West bank of Tuitha River.

Churachandpur is located between 92°59" and 93°50" longitude, 23°55" to 24°30"N latitude at an altitude of about 914m MSL. The district enjoys a fair seasonal pattern of hot and cold, wet and dry weather with a maximum temperature of 37°C and a minimum of 1°C. The highest and lowest annual rainfall recorded is 308 mm to 597mm and a maximum and minimum humidity of 100 to 61 p.c.

Though officially known as Churachandpur the local residents call the district Lamka, which means the confluence of Tedim Road and Tipaimukh Road. The Lamka town once belonged to Pu Semthong Haokip, Suongpipa. Teisieng became the twin village of Lamka. In 1930, Pu Zenhang Valte bought the Churachandpur Old Bazaar area from the Teisieng village chief for a pot of rice wine. Since then Lamka has grown from a small twin village to a sprawling town. It is one of the fastest developing towns in Manipur. It is inhabited by the Chin-Kuki-Mizo or CHIKIM which is a synonym for Paite, Hmar, Thadou, Zou, Gangte, Simte, Vaiphei and Mizos. All of them are Christians. So cross-topped churches adorn the town. As different tribal communities rush to the town,

there is keen but healthy competition between them especially in education and employment. Lamka, also a tourist spot has produced many central and state government officials. It also has an amazing number of arts and crafts products. The languages or dialects spoken in the district are: Paite, Hmar, Thadou, Vaiphei, Zou, Gangte, Lushai/Mizo, Simte, Kom, Kabui, Manipuri, Hindi, Bengali, Nepali, Punjabi and Assamese.

Love of art and beauty is inherent in the people. It is difficult to find a Chin-Kuki-Mizo who cannot sing or dance. Their artistic and generally creative nature has found expression in the colourful handloom and handicraft products that are world famous for their designs and colour. Each ethnic group has its own distinct culture and traditions deeply embedded in its dances, music, dresses and customary practices. Food habits tilt heavily towards non-vegetarianism. Women's dresses are artistic. A young person may be a football player, a social leader, a choir leader, a guitar strumming singer, an agricultural labourer and a love-lorn loner rolled into one. Churachandpur is also known as the "Land of Presidents" who head different Christian denominations.

Chavang Kut is an autumn festival of the Chin-Kuki-Mizo ethnic group. They understand one another's dialect because they share a common origin and folklore. Their festivals are given different names in different places, but the spirit of their celebration is the same. It is a happy occasion for food-stock-laden villagers to make merry after a year's hard labour in the fields. It is also a thanksgiving festival in honour of the giver of an abundant harvest. The modern Kut is observed on 1<sup>st</sup> November.

### Origin and Settlement of Kukis and Paites in Churachandpur

'Kuki' is a Bengali term, applied to various hill tribes such as the Lushais, Rangkhols and Thadous. It seems to have been known at a comparatively early period.<sup>1</sup> Hill people living in the Northwest of Myanmar and Northeast of India are known as

Kuki to the Bengalis. The earliest use of this name in English was found in 1792. Bengalis found them culturally backward, because Kuki literally means 'wild hill people.' The Burmese call them Chins.<sup>2</sup> New Kukis are also called 'Thados' whose Meithei name is to be Kongjai or Khongjai. The latter is also reported as the Arakanese name for Lakher. None of the Old Kuki groups are numerically significant, but several (Aimol, Chawte, Purum, Kom, Vaiphei) have been subjects of modern ethnographic or theoretical studies. Other Old Kuki groups are the Anal, the Baite, the Chiru, the Kolhen (Koireng, Koirao), the Hrangkhoh, the Hollam, the Lamkang and the Hmar. Khawthlang is also reported as a name for the Thados or New Kukis.

Some of the Kuki groups are the Lushai or Lusei, the latter originally the name of Silo-speaking dialect called Duhlien.<sup>3</sup> The Thadous<sup>4</sup> predominantly settled throughout Manipur are also found in Assam, Nagaland and Mizoram. Formerly the Thadous inhabited the Chin and Kachin states of Myanmar and the Sylhet district of Bangladesh. The Thadous migrated to Manipur en masse from different regions during 1600-1660 in the reign of King "Paikhomba". The brethren of Maharaja Touthienmang, the Meiteis who had already settled in the Manipur valley failed to recognise their identity though they were descendants of Touthienmang. So they simply called them 'Khongjais.' J. W. Edgar the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar (Kachar) wrote in his Memo No. 170 dated 16<sup>th</sup> April 1870 to E.B. Simson, Chief Commissioner of Dhaka that, "Thadous are called as Khongjai by the Meiteis in Manipooree".

In the 1792-1799 survey of the Manipur Hills the British Ethnological Research Officers Rawlins and Dalton, identified the following tribes as Cucu/Kuki. In 1886, Capt. E.W. Dun recorded in the first Gazetteer of Manipur, the Anal, Aimol, Chothe, Chiru, Lamgang, Moyon, Monsang, Kom, Koireng, Koirao, Maring, Purum, Ralte, Simte, Gangte, Paite, Hmar, Thadou, Vaiphei, Zou and Lushai.<sup>5</sup> In 1903, these 21 tribes were affiliated to the Kuki

nomenclature according to Dr. Grierson, Chairman of the Linguistic Survey of India. So the word 'Kuki' is a generic term and not a separate or independent tribe.

The Thadous were called by different names by communities living around them. The Burmese call them Thadou Chin, the Lushai - the Lushoung Thadou, the Meitei - Khongjai, the Tangkhuls - the Khongchai/Kachami, the Maos - the Kusamei, the Anals - Makheng, the Kacharis - Thangkamsa, the Bengalis - Cuci/Kuki and the British - New Kuki. Tribes living in the Chin Hills of Myanmar continue to settle down in Southern Manipur. It is interesting to note that the meaning of Paite, one of the important tribes of Kuki-Chin family is "a people in the process of going or migrating". Thus their tradition is nomadic.

The early Thadou settlements in Manipur have a long history. They played a vital role under the Maharajahs of Manipur. The Paite are known to have entered Manipur from the Chin Hills, much later than the Thadous, only after World War II. In Myanmar the Paite are also known as Sukte. The Thadous and the Paite share a common origin and folklore and minor differences in dialect. They understand each other. According to an oral tradition, all the non-Naga tribes were of one family, children of their progenitor 'Thadou' who migrated from Khul/Sinlung/Chhinlung.<sup>6</sup> What is clear is that both the Thadou and Paite are a migratory race who occupy a village for 2 to 4 years at a time and move to a new place where they find fresh land fit for cultivation. Their staple food is rice produced through jhum cultivation. They prefer to build their villages on hilltops. Their houses are small. They pay great attention to their genealogy. They pay bride price, its amount depending on the reputation of her family. Bride price is paid in the form of domesticated animals like buffaloes, mithuns, ammunition, beads and money or through personal bondage.

In recent times, as the other ethnic groups broke away from the Kuki nomenclature, only the Thadous retained the Kuki identity. It does not satisfy all of them so the community is polarised on this

issue. It has created a schism among the Thadou with a centrifugal movement of a group of political, social and church leaders trying to win others back to the Kuki fold. People using the Kuki nomenclature are labelled as a scheduled tribe with a derivative of any other Kuki tribe or as an unspecified tribe. This ‘any-Kuki’ identity has further confused the common people and has played a role in the Kuki-Naga or Kuki-Paite conflict. Thus, they are passing through an identity crisis. Lately, the Thadous/Kukis in Manipur and Mizos in Mizoram have been trying to prove that they are the descendants of Manasseh/Manmasi, the Lost Tribe of Israel.<sup>7 1</sup> It is creating its own ripples in their society.

### **Denominational Division Among the Kuki and Paite**

Christianity came to the Southern districts of Manipur on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1910, propagated by the Welsh Presbyterian missionary, Robert Watkin of Aizawl. Till date, 7<sup>th</sup> May is observed as “Missionary Day” all over the district with church services as on Sundays and beautiful choirs singing in every church. Robert Watkin with his two interpreters Pu Thangkhai and Pu Lunpao preached the Gospel in Senvon, a Thadou village bordering on Mizoram and baptised Pu Kamkholun Singson, chief of Senvon village. With his conversion the whole village was converted to Christianity within a short period. With their conversion the Christian community of Senvon founded the “Thadou-Kuki Pioneer Mission” (TKPM). This mission made a lot of progress with the conversion of all the tribes of Churachandpur district to Christianity. As the TKPM has the name only of the Thadou tribe, in 1942 its name was changed to North East India General Mission (NEIGM).

### **The Root of the Conflict between Kukis & Paites**

The Kuki and Paite conflict has a long history, some of which has been mentioned above. The 21 tribes of the Kuki nomenclature founded the Kuki Company in 1948, with the Kuki Inn as its office at Imphal. All the affiliated Kuki tribes contributed in cash or kind in the construction of its office. But the notices and resolutions of

the meeting were recorded and printed only in the Thadou dialect. Moreover, most of the prominent leaders of the Kuki Company belonged to the Thadou tribe. So, within a short period of the formation of the Kuki Company, the 14 tribes: the Anal, the Kom, the Aimol, the Chothe, the Purum, the Chiru, the Lamkang, the Maring, the Hmar, the Paite, the Moyon, the Monsang, the Koirang, the Koirao, demanded that the meeting notices and resolutions be circulated either in Manipuri or English as the others could not understand Thadou fully. Others insisted on retaining the Thadou dialect as the sole Kuki language because of their large population and the positions they held in society. Some Kuki leaders demanded that the other Kuki tribes should be able to speak and understand the dialect<sup>8</sup>. In reaction to this attitude of the leadership, the other tribes left the Company and formed a new group known as the “Khul Union”. Today the Kuki nomenclature stands alone with the Thadous.

Around this time some Kuki tribes seem to have made a transition of affiliation from the Kuki to the Naga family, as the ‘Khul Union to a Naga Tribe.’ “Originally, the Moyon, the Monsang, the Lamkang, the Maring, the Anal, the Purum, the Kom, the Chothe, the Koirao, the Koirang, belonged to the old Kuki tribes. But they have changed their affiliation and are now included in the Naga sub-nation.”<sup>9</sup> From 1950, the Khul Union moved ahead successfully and in a short time these 10 tribes were converted to the Baptist Church by the Tangkhuls and later, affiliated to the Naga family. After it, the Hmar, Paite, Simte, Zou, Vaiphei, Gangtes and a few Thadou tribes stood on their own till 1995 with no Kuki or Naga affiliation. But as no political or social activities could be carried out as an individual or minor tribe, a new organisation, “The Seven Tribes” was founded at the initiative of the Paite.

### **A New Nomenclature**

In 1995, the name of the ‘Seven Tribes’ in Churachandpur district was changed to “Zomi Re-unification Organization (ZRO)”

at the initiative of the Paite. Its formation day is observed every year on 20<sup>th</sup> February as ‘Zomi Nam Ni.’ The Zomi and its tribes are Hmar, Zou, Vaiphei, Gangte, Simte, Zomi and Paite. Some believe that the formation of the Zomi identity or nomenclature was initiated by the Paites with a political motive of getting the minor tribes to capture the stronghold of the town where they are dominating and are trying to make it their homeland with its new name Zogam (which means ‘Land of Zo’s’).

With this objective of forming an autonomous area for a recognised nomenclature and to ensure the political security for the unified tribes, the Zomi Revolutionary Army (ZRA), a militant wing was installed as the Zomis opposed their inclusion of the Kuki nomenclature. This development made the Kukis feel uneasy. The formation of ZRA opened a way for the young Paite or Zomi tribes to become more patriotic and take up arms to defend Zomi against its enemies. There was an allegation that the ZRA was trained and supplied with arms and ammunition by the NSCN (IM). There was also an allegation that the Paites have affiliated themselves to the Naga tribe.

This development widened the differences between the Kuki National Front (KNF) and the ZRA. The KNF a militant group formed in the 1990s with the objective of establishing a homeland in Manipur for the non-Nagas, got the Thadou-Kuki speaking tribes to pay all social taxes paid till then to the Thadou/Kuki speaking tribes. In the changed situation, the KNF demanded more money and levied taxes also on other tribes. The non-Kuki tribes felt harassed and the ZRA appealed to the KNF not to tax the persons affiliated to the Zomi group. That added to the tension based till then on denominational differences. Many Kukis felt that the use of the Zomi nomenclature without their consent was instigated by some external forces and played into their hands.

### **The Conflict in 1997-1998**

From 1997 to early 1998 was the zenith of the Kuki-Paite

ethnic conflict that resulted in killings, bloodshed, abductions and burning of houses. What was friendly relationship between the two turned inimical. The flashpoint was the killing of a Thadou-Kuki teenager, a class IX student of Blue Star Academy by his Paite classmates. With it, the simmering differences were transformed into anger and hatred. Real violence that started on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1997 was followed by many gory incidents.

**24<sup>th</sup> June 1997:** Tuesday around 8 p.m., 10 ZRA cadres were killed by the KNF at Saikul, a Paite village in Churachandpur district. 4 villagers were killed in the shoot-out.

**25<sup>th</sup> June 1997:** In retaliation, a group of Paite youth armed with sharp objects attacked D.Phailien, a Thadou-Kuki dominated locality in Churachandpur town, at 6 in the morning. After it the branch office of Thadou Student Association (TSA), Churachandpur College, I.B. Road near New Bazar and Municipal Office chowkidar, Mr. Jamthang’s house were burnt down. Later that day, the residents of Bungmual, a Paite dominated locality in the town, attacked D.Phailien with guns killing 8 people. Mrs. Niengkholhing (33) w/o Mr. Thongsat Haokip, pregnant and in child labour was killed brutally. Later in the evening, a group of armed Kukis attacked the Old Churachandpur Mission Compound and burnt down 15 houses. These two incidents paved the way for the Kuki-Paite conflict or ethnic clashes. Here is a Chronology of some major incidents recorded between 1997 and 1998.

**8<sup>th</sup> July 1997:** Tuesday, KNF and ZRA signed the 1st Ceasefire Agreement that was later breached.

**18<sup>th</sup> July 1997:** Friday, KNF and ZRA signed the second Ceasefire Agreement but that too was breached.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 1997:** T. Singtam village under Singngat sub-division was attacked by the ZRA for the second time killing 12 people and burning down 30 houses. This village belongs to the Simte tribe whose sub-clan is Taichom who speak Thadou as they were

neighbours of the Thadous. This was the sole reason for the second attack.

**7<sup>th</sup> Sept.1997** The Kuki burnt down 4 Paite houses, 2 in Pangjol, a locality 1 ½ Kms from the town and 2 in Mission Veng, a locality in Churachandpur town mainly occupied by the Paites.

**8<sup>th</sup> Sept 1997:** Through the initiative of Dr. Chaltonlien Amo, a Peace Committee was formed and the two groups signed a ceasefire agreement again.

**17<sup>th</sup> Sept.1997:** 13 houses in Tuithapi, a Paite village were burnt down by the Kukis.

**28<sup>th</sup> Sept 1997:** Towards the evening, K.Phaicham, a Thadou-Kuki locality in the town was attacked by the ZRA cadres who retreated after a strong defence and retaliation by the local sentinels.

**5<sup>th</sup> October1997:** ZRA attacked M.Lhahvo, a Kuki village near the town, killing 5 people and burning down 17 houses.

**24<sup>th</sup> Oct.1997:** ZRA attacked Santing I&II, a Gangte twin village burning down 91 houses. Another 188 houses were burnt in the neighbouring villages, Muolhoicheng, Pamjal and Sinjaang.

**25<sup>th</sup> Oct.1997:** At 11.45 p.m., ZRA cadres attacked Sielmat, a Hmar locality in the town and Bijaang Vaiphei Veng, burning down 5 houses in Sielmat and 18 houses in Bijaang. In Sielmat, a pregnant woman ready for delivery and her daughter aged 4 were burnt to death. In Bijaang, the local caretaker Mr. Letngul Touthang (a sub-tribe of the Thadou) and Mr. Siehkhohun Neisiel (a clan of the Vaiphei) were also shot dead.

**30<sup>th</sup> Oct.1997:** Around 12.00 noon, Tuibuang was attacked allegedly by ZRA in collaboration with the IRB (Manipur). No news of death, damage or destruction was recorded. Towards the evening 5 Kuki villages between Lamka and Sugnu (a village in Chandel district bordering Churachandpur) were attacked by the ZRA burning 31 houses, 11 in Phaizawl village, 9 in Leijaang

village, 8 in L.Muolhoi village, 3 people were also shot dead.

**31<sup>st</sup> Oct. 1997:** Around 2 there was an attack on Heinglep, a sub-division centre on the Northern side of the town, burning down 98 houses. In the counter-attack 13 ZRA cadres were killed.

**9<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1997:** Towards morning, 24 houses in Haijaang and 15 houses in Tuipiphai, Kuki villages under Thanlon, a sub-divisional centre on the Western side of the district, were burnt down.

**10<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1997:** Sumchinvum, a Zou village and Haijaang, a Kuki village near Singngat, a sub-divisional centre on the Eastern side of the district, were attacked. 6 houses were burnt down at Sumchinvum and 20 houses in Haijaang. In the counter attack 17 ZRA cadres were killed.

**13<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1997:** At night Geltui and B.Tuallian, Vaiphei villages on the way to Singngat were attacked and all the houses in both the villages were burnt down, so also 2 Shaktiman trucks in S.Geltui village. There is no record of the number of houses burnt.

**15<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1997:** At night Songpeh, a Kuki village on the Sugnu Road was attacked. In the encounter that followed, 10 ZRA cadres were killed. Simultaneously, the KNF attacked Tangnuom, a Paite village near New Lamka. 2 villagers were killed.

**16<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1997:** Around 11 pm, Thingchom, a Hmar village and Lajaangphai on the bank of the Tuitha River, were attacked. 7 houses were burnt down. 4 members of a family, 5 ZRA cadres and 5 cows were killed in the encounter. That very night, Lamjaang, a Paite village was attacked by KNF burning 14 houses, killing 1 person and wounding 2.

**26<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1997:** In Sielmat, a Peace Banquet was hosted by Mr. Rishang Keishing, the then CM of Manipur. Meanwhile, Phaicham and Lhaangjol, a Kuki locality in the town were attacked.

**27<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1997:** Tuibuong Kamdou Veng was attacked but the attackers retreated because of strong defence. 53 ZRA cadres died

when K. Phaicham was attacked.

**5<sup>th</sup> Dec 1997:** At Tuibuong checkpoint by the CRPF, 4 AK47 Rifles with 6000 bullets and other foreign-made ammunitions were recovered by the CRPF from some vehicles belonging allegedly to the IRB and the ZRA and the Evangelical Convention Church (ECC). At 9.30 am that same day, 8 IRB vehicles carrying relief material for the Paite in Thanlon sub-division were ambushed near Santing village allegedly by the KNF. 20 IRB riflemen and 17 Paite civilians in the vehicles were killed and 17 IRB men were injured.

**6<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1997:** At night around 11.35 p.m., the IRB post in Saikul, a Paite village in Churachandpur district was attacked and 27 houses were burnt down.

**10<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1997:** Around 3.00 am 4 villages under the Saikul police station were attacked by the joint cadres of NSCN (IM) and ZRA. The villages are: Saichang, K.Suongphel, L. Muolnuom and Chaningpokpi. More than 150 houses were burnt, 7 people died and more than 10 injured.

**12<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1997:** 48 houses in Kamusaichang, a Kuki village were burnt down at noon. Around 2 pm 2 buses with Paite passengers coming from Imphal were halted at Tuibuong at the CRPF checkpoint and some arms and ammunition were recovered from them.

**13<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1997:** 7.30 pm, Paangjol, a village near Thingkangphai, a Mizo locality was attacked allegedly by the KNF burning 2 houses.

**16<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1997:** United Front Manipur (UFM) government was formed under the Chief ministership of W. Nipamacha Singh and 26 ministers were sworn-in.

**24<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1997:** 3.00 p.m. 2 villages in Tuilaphai area, T. Thenjol and Tuikot were attacked allegedly by the Paites burning 18 houses in T. Thenjol and 8 houses in Tuikot. Mr T. Henkom of T. Thenjol taken hostage. Because of violence, people were not in a mood to

celebrate Christmas. So Christmas and New Year services were conducted in a hurry with high security. Every locality of the town is silent because of fear of pending attacks.

**29<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1997:** In the morning, Khuongjaang, a village in Thanlon sub-division was attacked and 22 houses burnt down allegedly by the Zomi National Volunteers (ZNV) formed by the Paites to defend Zongram, the area they dominated

**30<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1997:** N. Maokot a village in Singngat sub-division was attacked and 25 houses were burnt allegedly by KNF.

**31<sup>st</sup> Dec. 1997:** Muoljen, a village in Singngat sub-division was attacked and 23 houses were burnt down allegedly by the KNF.

**03<sup>rd</sup> Jan. 1998:** 2.00 pm L. Phaimuol, a Kuki village in Singngat sub-division was attacked allegedly by the ZRA. 2 persons were killed and more than 50 houses were burnt down.

**09<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1998:** P. Munlien, a village on Tipaimukh Road was attacked allegedly by KNF. 33 houses were burnt down 2 villagers were shot dead and 1 was wounded seriously.

**12<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1998:** Vokbual, a Paite village was attacked allegedly by the KNF and 70 houses burnt down.

**15<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1998:** At 11.35 am there was an attack and exchange of fire at Lhaangjol on persons involved in social work. Mr. Chinkholian, Editor, Manipur Express was wounded by a stray bullet. There was a second attack at night on Zo Veng but the Indian army intervened. In the encounter Mr. Gospelthang 26 years of New Lamka was shot dead and 1 AK47 Rifle was recovered.

**17<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1998:** The Churachandpur Police Station was attacked and ammunition taken away from the artillery room of the station.

**08<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1998:** Sainoujaang, a Simte village in Thanlon sub-division was attacked and 40 houses burnt.

**11<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1998:** At 2.30 am D.Phailien was attacked, 5 persons were killed, 4 wounded and 52 houses were burnt down.

**Agreement of the Kuki Inpi and Zomi Council**

What started as an attack and counterattack between the Kukis and the Paites on 24<sup>th</sup> June 1997, led to much violence and loss of lives and the burning down of hundreds of houses. So, the State Government brought the leaders representing both the communities to the negotiating table. It led to a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed on March 26<sup>th</sup> 1998, followed by a ceasefire Agreement which was extended thrice. As there was no serious violence during six months, real negotiations took place at the end of September 1998. Peace talks were held under the leadership of the Chief Minister Nipamacha Singh helped by his cabinet colleagues and the district administrator. In these talks it was recalled that the attack on Saikul Village on June 25, 1997 in which 10 Paites were killed was the turning point. After hearing the Paites, the Kuki Inpi leaders apologised to the Paites and arranged an apology banquet on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1998, by killing a cow. It was according to their tradition of making peace. The KIC and ZC leaders shared the meal. In response the ZC leaders arranged a banquet by killing a pig on 30<sup>th</sup> September 1998 to show their acceptance of the apology.

After these gestures of peace, the KIC and ZC leaders signed a written agreement on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1998 in the presence of Chief Minister Nipamacha Singh. With it the town that was a battlefield changed once again into a peaceful place.

The points of agreements laid down by the KIC and ZC are:

- 1. That every individual or tribe should be given the freedom to be either Kuki or Zomi or have any other identity. No force should be used against those who make this choice.
- 2. Those who have during the conflict, occupied the property or houses of those who fled should return them to the rightful owner.

3. The Kuki and Zomi militant groups should not “levy taxes” on anyone other than persons of their own tribe. It includes government employees, the public in general, contractors and businessmen.

4. This MoU is meant for all tribes, individuals and organisations and to be followed by all was signed by the following on behalf of the Kukis and Zomis on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1998.

Sd/- Albert Gengoukhup President, KIC	Sd/- H.Thuomson President, PNC/Member ZC
Sd/-Khajialam Gangte Chief of Chiengkompang	Sd/- K. Vungjalian Chairman, ZC
Sd/- Nggamhao Touthang Advisor, KIC	Sd/- Thangkhangin ZC Member
Sd/- Paokholal Vaiphei Ex. Pre. VNO/Member KIC	Sd/- Khaipao Haokip Advisor, KIC
Sd/ S. Nengdoulia Pre. VNO/Member ZC	Sd/- Khupkholian Simte President SNC/KIC Member

**Witnesses:**

- 1. W. Nipamacha Singh, Chief Minister, Manipur
- 2. Dr. L. Chandramani Singh, Dy. CM, Manipur
- 3. V. Hangkhanlian, Minister
- 4. T.N.Haokip, Minister (Seri)
- 5. T.T. Haokip, Dy. Speaker
- 6. N.Songchinkhup, Minister (Transport)
- 7. Dr. Chaltonlien Amo, Minister
- 8. P.Bharat Singh, Special secretary, Home
- 9. Sriram Taranikanti, DC/CCPur
- 10. H.Kulla, Meitei Society President
- 11. Albert Renthlei, President, Mizo People Convention
- 12. L.B.Sona, Speaker, ZC
- 13. Paokhosei Kipgen, Social Worke



*Mapping of the armed groups which are involved in the conflict:*

### **Consequences of the Conflict**

The year-long ethnic clash caused displacement, killings and confusion. Many persons from the town migrated to safe areas. The conflict went beyond the Kukis and Paites and forced all tribes of the district to get involved. The Zomis themselves present a divided picture. Many Zomi tribes like the Simtes, Gangtes, Vaipheis and Zous were victims of the conflict as many of their members have marriage alliances with the Thadou-Kukis and some of them speak the Thadou-Kuki dialect. In a situation of conflict it was difficult to find out who is a Paite or Kuki. The conflict affected the economy, education, social system, religion, emotional and political life of the people of Churachandpur.

### **The Economy**

Even though 45% of the town dwellers are government employees, earning a livelihood was not a major problem to the remaining inhabitants. In the private sector, running schools and teaching in them, producing handloom and handicrafts provide employment to the young. Bamboo products are the source of income of many. The district is also known for its wild fruits, banana, jackfruit, pineapple, wild orchards. Some made charcoal. The town is a centre of trade with Burma (Myanmar).

The conflict damaged the economy of the district especially of the urban inhabitants. During the violence people were deprived of their basic needs. Villagers could not come to the town to sell their products. They had to stay indoors during the conflict unable to go to the fields or harvest their crops. Many cultivators lost their harvest since they had to flee their villages. Government employees could not get their salaries as banks and government offices were closed down in some part of the district. Self-employed persons had to remain jobless.

As a result, most had to depend on their savings and daily

wage earners had to borrow money. Money lenders gained a lot since they charged a high rate of interest during the conflict. The borrowers fell into the debt trap after the conflict. For survival many sold their clothes, furniture, television sets, refrigerators, jewellery, houses and even plots of land at a throwaway price. Mr. Lun, who owned a single-storeyed building in the heart of the town and sold it, said: "It was like selling ragged clothes, nobody knocked at my door or looked at my building. People were not ready to buy my building even for Rs. 30,000/-. In such a situation, land or house was not that important, preserving life was dear."

During the conflict there was an unequal distribution of supplies, goods and money. The businesspersons benefited from it since they had a good stock in their go-downs. Prices were hiked since people had no choice but to buy the goods. The benefit also went to the nearby Thadou-Kuki and Hmar villages, situated close to the town on the Tedim Road. People could enter the town only through this road. So the Paites were confined to the town. New markets were opened in the areas where most Thadou-Kukies refugees settled. Since the Paites were economically affected or even faced starvation, they were forced to make gestures of negotiations towards the Thadou-Kuki.

### **Education**

Educational institutions remained closed for a long time during the conflict in order to avoid being caught in the cross-fire. As a result, more than 65% of the college students and 80% of high school students could not pursue their studies and had to seek admission elsewhere even outside the state. Those who could not go out, remained without education till the situation improved.

Children of displaced families had to suffer a lot since they had to adjust to the new school environment. It caused emotional and mental depression. Poverty forced about 30% of the students to discontinue their studies in order to work and earn a living. Some young persons even joined the underground.

### Social Life

When the violence ended, the town was divided into two: the Paite dominated area of “zogam” and the Kuki dominated area called “homeland.” It affected the social fabric of the district in general and of the town in particular. Many people moved to the neighbouring districts or states for better job opportunities. Some became homeless and jobless as poverty grew. With so many people moving away from the villages, robbery increased. People began to make easy money by selling prohibited drugs, liquor and even through the flesh trade. The rise in drug abuse resulted in a rise in HIV/AIDS. The district is now occupying the second place in HIV/AIDS infection in the state.

On the other side, the consequences of the conflict opened the eyes of many tribal leaders. Some tribes withdrew from the Zomi alliance. Leadership change occurred on both sides. Persons with a better strategy, ideas and objectives took sides in the conflict and intensified the division. Many organisations exhorted their communities not to get involved in the conflict by taking sides. since both sides abducted those whom they suspected of being enemies. They rarely came out alive. The social fabric was destroyed. Good neighbours became enemies. Those who migrated away from the town created new localities or villages.

Families of mixed marriages with Paite-Kuki partners suffered the most. Although there was no serious domestic violence among them there were cases of such partners being harassed and forced to abandon the other. For example, a Thadou-Kuki doctor Dr Sei married Kim (true identity withheld) a Paite. They settled down in the town and had two daughters and a son. The children were fluent in both the dialects but after 15 years of marriage, when the conflict began Dr. Sei’s family asked him to stay out of town since they considered his in-laws fanatic Paite. He ignored the warning but knowing the seriousness of the situation, his wife left her house and took the children away with her. On 24<sup>th</sup> June 1997,

Mrs. Kim’s parents invited her and the children for dinner. Dr. Sei did not attend the dinner as he had night duty in the hospital. On the following day began the unexpected attack on a Kuki locality. Instead of going home Dr. Sei had to escape to his relatives’ place. That morning his house was burnt down. Some think that his own in-laws were behind the incident. He had to live alone without his wife and children. After three weeks Mrs Kim risking her life and that of her children ran away from her parent’s house. Her parents searched for them and thought that they have been killed. After a month they learnt that she and her children had moved to South India. Dr. Sei stayed alone in the government quarters and often visited his family in the South. They continue to live there and rarely come home. Cordial relationship between the Kukis and Paites that existed prior to the conflict is yet to be restored.

### Women

Because of the conflict many women have developed ailments like heart disease, respiratory problems, insomnia and palpitation. Many have fallen victims to alcohol or have entered the flesh trade. Among the ethnic groups of Churachandpur women enjoy many privileges and are enterprising. They are not bound only to their children and domestic chores but are competitive. However, many of them lost their livelihood, family and home because of the conflict. Many became widows, had to look after their children with no definite source of income. The number of widows is bigger among the Paite than among the Kuki.

Orphans have found support from their communities, because there is a traditional practice of the next of kin or grandparents adopting orphans. Their churches provided work to some widows. Both the communities also raised funds to help the widows and orphans caught in the conflict. Some social and philanthropic organisations provided help. Siamsinpawlpi, a Paite student organisation, opened a residential school for such children with funds provided by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. Teachers of this special school are employed on a voluntary basis without a salary.

Private schools like the Soikholal Ideal School, St. Paul Institute, Bethany, etc. provide them education free of cost or at concessional rates. Orphanages like Covenant Children's Home, Saikot; Sanggah Muon In, provide shelter to orphans. Zomi Mothers' Association and Kuki Mothers' Association were formed to assist these mothers and children.

### **Youth**

The conflict had an adverse impact on the youth, especially Paite. The Kuki youth seem to have been less affected because of their previous experience of the Kuki-Naga conflict. There were more deaths among the Paite than Kuki youth. A rumour spread during the conflict that the Paite death toll was rising and that many were buried in a common grave. Much after the conflict many mothers were crying for their sons who did not return home.

Some of them were dragged out of their homes and asked to take up arms in order to defend their community. Even after the conflict many Paite and Kuki youth joined the underground groups because they had lost someone in the family. There was a rise in alcoholism, drug abuse and trafficking among the youth. Some think that a cause of this rise is that the youth needed courage when they had to commit acts of violence. Prostitution too increased among the youth as they had no other source of income. It resulted in the spread of HIV/AIDS and it caused several deaths.

### **People's Emotional Well-being**

The conflict has resulted in a great amount of fear in people's minds. Many were diagnosed with cardiac and respiratory problems. Many promoted open hatred for the other group and developed anger and strong prejudices against those involved in the conflict. Mr. Doukholal, a resident of one of the villages in Churachandpur district lost his consciousness. He did not belong to either group involved in the conflict. As an elderly citizen, he played his part in looking after the village during the violence but the stress and tension took their toll on him. At present he is unable

to recognise anyone and remains silent most of the time.

### **Religion**

Various church denominations experienced serious problems because many families were displaced. Membership of some church denominations increased and it decreased in others. The conflict made all the ethnic tribes of the district think in terms of staying together or get united under their specific ethnic group. When people started moving out to their own settlements, some denominations got divided further according to their affinity. It also included clans or sub-clan alliances.

### **On Politics**

The peace agreement did not end the violence. Amid such uncertainty, many groups got involved in political processes in order to find a political settlement. When the conflict was suppressed, the divisions got stronger. New factions emerged with new leaders, objectives and strategies. Various political groups survived in the district with the support of the militant groups.

In the meantime, the Zomi nomenclature remains with the Paites alone and a few supporters from other ethnic groups joining them. Minor tribes who were dragged into the conflict are facing a predicament. They want to be left alone but those who wish to wield power are leaning heavily on militant support for political survival. That leaves the minor tribes with a dilemma.

### ***Mapping of Zomi tribe after the conflict***

Maites are a minor tribe and they speak the local language of the area where they settle down in different districts of Manipur. Most of them speak the Thadou-Kuki language and others speak the Zou, Thangkhal and Gangte dialects. Touthangs are originally a Thadou-Kuki sub-tribe. After the conflict they are affiliated to the Paite. The Hmar, Gangte and some others affiliated to the Zomi are leaving it to stand as individual tribes. They are looked upon as factions. Thus many of them feel isolated.

**Suggestions for Conflict Resolution**

One can thus see that even nine years after the peace accord normally has not returned to Churchandpur. Return of normalcy would require not only physical efforts, but also spiritual healing. As a Protestant pastor said, “without genuine forgiveness and reconciliation there cannot be true peace from the hearts of people. The greatest and lasting peace comes only from Jesus Christ, Son of God.” As the Kukis and Paites are Christians, there has been a lot of competition in church activities. Various activities of women, elders, youth and children in their respective churches have been a guiding factor. Conflict Resolution or Transformation programme should now become a part of the church activity. The division of the two began with denominational division. Both have now to create space for healing and reconciliation.

The second goal should be to change the rigid social ideas. The strong prejudices and stereotyping of other communities need to change, people have to be helped to explore and value diversity, respect, tolerate and accept the other. It would then enhance the people’s ability to see things from another’s perspective, break down stereotypes, inculcate tolerance and accept differences.

People in general, lack leadership skills and in the process they are misleading the less educated. Therefore, taking initiatives for an empowerment process on social skills will help people to move away from self-absorption to understanding other realities that make a community. It would be a step towards transformation and openness in relationships. Serious reconciliation process too would remove fear, anger and insecurity from the minds and hearts of the public. The district also has a small group of Local Capacity for Peace (LCP) that is operating in small units. Peace building has been attempted only by socio-political organisations in a very conventional manner. The NGOs in the district have been operating on gender based programmes, HIV/AIDS, globalisation, socio-economic and agro-business programmes. A participatory style of

peace-based programme can be one new way to help the people to see the positive aspects of the conflict. Eliciting participation has been appreciated because of its simple methodology. The programme should have a strong and creative follow up at the grassroots level. The next step could be imparting learning skills for peace building in order to bring together people of all tribes and denominations.

A family can no longer offer growing children a sure future in the present situation. Schools can play a vital role in helping children to be open to others and thus initiate the process of socialising. That can be a help in creating an environment of peace. For this, teachers should play an important role and get involved in the task of going beyond their traditional mission of teaching. Another positive intervention could be to provide opportunities for education through scholarships and concessions to many children whose parents are not in a position to support its expenses. Scholarships and fee concession can be one of its tools.

The next step can be promotion of self-employment and sustenance. This can be linked to agro-based development programmes. NGOs can take initiatives to help villagers who are by and large cultivators. Today, many young cultivators are either higher secondary or college dropouts. These young farmers can be helped to grow better crops through awareness on new farming methods. The self help groups in the district can be supported with loans and provided an opportunity to make a living. Training the unemployed youth in handicrafts, carpentry, sewing and weaving is another possible contribution.

Some big organisations are seriously involved in HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. This virus is spreading fast. Many men, women and children have lost their lives to it. Parents who know that their children are HIV/AIDS victims keep it a secret for fear of social stigma. Many girls or women who are infected do not know that they are infected. One possibility is to help this group to live together under the same roof and fight the

virus together emotionally and physically. It has to go hand in hand with people's education through the media. In fact, the activities around HIV/AIDS seem to bring different peoples together.

Another activity that brings all the tribes together is 'Chavang Kut', a harvest festival of all the tribes celebrated on 1<sup>st</sup> November each year with great pomp and show. On this day people from the villages and towns come together to enjoy the folk dances, songs and music. It can be used for peace promotion activities.

### Conclusion

Peace and communal harmony are central to a just society. Insurgency, corruption, killings and other social evils co-exist in the district of Churachandpur, home of at least 8 ethnic groups with a rich cultural heritage. It will not be an exaggeration to say that all the problems of the world are found in this tiny district, which once enjoyed a healthy social life and environment. The conflict does not seem to be ending. It is becoming a vicious circle and that hampers development. People keep expecting inter-ethnic conflicts and are physically and emotionally affected by it. All the tribes being Christians, they have to believe that "*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.*" (Gal 3:27-28) "*For in the one spirit we were baptised into one body-Jews or Greeks, slaves or free-and we are all made to drink of one spirit*" (I Cor 12:13). "*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*" (Jn 14:27).

It is clear that physical unity will not be possible without emotional and spiritual unity. Solidarity and oneness will be experienced only when we realise and respect the beauty of our differences. The outcome will naturally be peace. An observation that can be made about the district is that religious practices are superficial. Instead of helping people to seek liberation and peace, religion seems to become a centre of power, position and influence.

Its leaders dabble in politics in order to assert their sectarian mentality. This passive attitude has added to the conflict. Instead the churches and NGO's have to help the people to sort out their differences through dialogue and peaceful means.

### END NOTES

1. George A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India* (1904), p. 59.
2. DARCHHAWNA, *MIZORAM DISTRICT GAZETTEER* (GOVT OF MIZORAM: ART & CULTURE DEPARTMENT, 1989), PP. 23-24.
3. FRANK M. LEBAR ET AL, *ETHNIC GROUPS OF MAINLAND SOUTH EAST ASIA* (NEW HAVEN, 1964), P. 50.
4. THADOUS - THE SO-CALLED KUKIS WILL BE TERMED AS THADOUS IN THIS CHAPTER.
5. Thomas Menampampil, "A Glossary of Tribal Groups in North East India," *The Thinker* (May-August, 1975), pp. 37-42.
6. Khul/Sinlung/Chhinlung - a term for the Great Wall of China
7. *The Week* (September 12, 2004), pp. 12-13.
8. KUKI SIKI, KUKI MAKHAI IS A TERM IN THADOU DIALECT FOR 50 PAISE & 25 PAISE, LITERALLY TO MEAN NOT IN COMPARISON OUT OF 100%
9. Rama Chakrovartti, *People of Manipur* (New Delhi: BR Publishing Corporation, 1986), p. 18.



## YOUTH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE GARO-KHASI TENSION IN MEGHALAYA

*Amrit Sangma*

Meghalaya is one of the seven states of the Northeast, popularly known as ‘seven sisters’. Its total area is 22,429 sq.kms and its population was 2,306,069 in 2001. Its main tribes are the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia. The State is divided into 3 districts in the Garo Hills, 4 districts in the Khasi Hills and 1 in the Jaintia Hills. However, the people of Garo Hills and Khasi Hills have always been kept apart by the geographical features. Meghalaya is a high land region consisting of mountains, rocks and forests and the road communication between these two regions is poor. In the absence of a road connecting Tura and Shillong directly, people from Tura have to go to Shillong via Guwahati, the capital of Assam. Despite these differences there has been considerable cultural exchange between them through inter-marriage in the bordering villages and even in cities.

The Garos are of the Bodo Tibeto-Burman stock and have settled in the Garo Hills for the past 400 years after being ousted from the Koch territory of Cooch Behar. The Garo society was divided into 3 major exogamous, ‘kin-groups’ or *Kachis*, namely Marak, Sangma and Momin. They are further subdivided into groups such as Areng, Shirra and Ebang. Theirs is a matrilineal society in which the head of the family or *Nokma* is generally the youngest daughter. But her husband assuming the role of the headman acts in concert with the elders and administers the property. Thus, their society is controlled by men.

Also the Khasi belonging to the Mon-Khmer group are matrilineal. Property inheritance is through the daughter but it is for all purposes controlled by the males, particularly the mother’s brother. The woman owns the property. Children belong to the mother’s clan and whatever the husband earns becomes part of

the matrilineal property. The status of the woman has insured a favourable sex ratio. Jaintia is a generic term for the Syntengs (also known as Pnar) and other subgroups belonging to the land of the twelve *Doloi* (local governor). The Jaintias are said to have migrated to their present home from South East Asia. They too are matrilineal. Inheritance of the three traditional tiers of governance, syiem, doloi and headman is hereditary and passes from uncle to nephew.

In comparison there are more similarities between the Khasis and the Jaintias than between the Khasis and the Garos. The Khasis and the Jaintias have the same origin and are socially and linguistically linked with the larger group of Mon-Khmers. The Garos seem to have an entirely different background. However, these three tribes have three commonalities. 1. They belong to matrilineal societies; 2. They ascended into their present hills after temporary settlement in the Brahmaputra valley; 3. They lack a long recorded history or a script and lived in political isolation till the British integrated these areas in their colonial states.

### **The Research Problem and Objectives**

This study is about the relationship between the Khasi and Garo tribes. There is a general feeling of tension between them but there is no report of any communal riots up to now. Young people play a crucial role in a community and the future of any community is based on the development of and by the youth. Therefore, the study is on “Youth in the context of Garo-Khasi Tension in the State of Meghalaya.” The objectives of the study are:

1. To gain an understanding of the Khasi-Garo tension and its impact on the civil society in general and the youth in particular.
2. To identify factors that may lead to violence in the future.
3. To study the role of youth organisations in the conflict.
4. To suggest intervention measures to be adopted by youth

organisations and the civil society.

**A Brief History of the Problem**

Meghalaya was born as a result of the All Party Hill Leaders’ Conference’s (APHLC) struggle to preserve tribal identity. More specifically, it is a result of the struggle by the tribals to preserve their ethnicity and cultural identity. The APHLC meeting was called at Shillong with the assistance of Capt. W. A Sangma to discuss the grave situation arising out of the impending Official Language Act of the Government of Assam. The APHLC played an important role in bringing Statehood to the Hill people of Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills.

Though Meghalaya was created as a homeland of the Khasis, Garos and Jaintias on 21 January, 1972, at present the relation between these three tribes is becoming more and more tense. Today it looks as if nobody at that time realised it or it was out of focus that the three tribes of Garo, Khasi and Jaintia have their own identity and that this might create a friction in their relationship and consequently hamper the development of the state. It must have never occurred in the minds of the Hill Leaders, more specifically the Garo, Khasi Jaintia leaders that these three tribes may feel a political imbalance when it comes to sharing the state’s infrastructures and other resources, and that the state of Meghalaya may not be sufficient, to distinctly maintain the diversified identity of the three tribes.

**Background of the Conflict**

This section deals with the nature of the Garo-Khasi tension and gives the history of the student organisations of these communities. The tension revolves around two main issues:

- 1. Reservation Policy and
- 2. Greater Garo Land (GGL).

**The Reservation Policy**

The reservation policy of 1971 demarcates 40 percent of government jobs and seats in the educational institutions for the Garos and 40 percent for the Khasis. The Khasi quota includes sub-tribes like the Wars of the East Khasi hills, the Pnars of the Jaintia hills, the Bhoi of the Ri Bhoi district and the Marams and Lyngams of West Khasi. 5 percent is for other tribes and 15 percent for the non-tribals. This division of 40:40:5 out of 85% of reservation earmarked for tribals has been a bone of contention among developed and less developed communities.

Furthermore, objections about regional disparity and discrimination, mainly between the Khasi Hills and Garo Hills have been raised, leading to even a demand for a separate state within Meghalaya on ethnic and geographical lines. This is symptomatic of a combination of factors, mainly ethnic, political and administrative failures. the Garo complain of lack of access to the educational institutions most of which are in the Khasi majority state capital Shillong.

The Khasis feel that the reservation policy has to be reviewed and the three tribes should enjoy reservations equally under the same general quota of 90 percent. That can promote students and youth on merit basis rather than by caste or tribe. The other option the Khasis contemplate is to have a distribution of the reservations proportionate to the population of the tribes, i.e., Khasi-Garo at 60:30 ratio. The Khasis contend that the Garos are at times not eligible for certain posts as they do not have proper qualifications. As a result, the post lies vacant till a qualified Garo is found. It is pathetic to see an office unutilised because of it when other qualified people can manage it smoothly for the development of the state.

**Table 1: Reservation Chart, 1971**

Tribes	Population 2001	Reservation in %
Khasi-Jaintia1	4,43,596	40%
Garos	8,62,473	40%
Others		20%
Garos-Khasi Population difference	5,81,123	

Table 1 shows that in 1971 there were 14,43,596 Khasis in Meghalaya and 8,62,473 Garos. Thus, the distribution of seats was not proportionate to their number. Though the Jaintias maintain their own cultural identity, they come under the Khasi umbrella and get a share from their 40 percent quota. The Khasi Students’ Unions (KSU) says that the Garos were given the same quota despite the big difference of 5,81,123 in their population only because they were educationally more backward (*KSU Pamphlet 2003*). Now they want that to change.

The Khasi Students’ Union (KSU) demands that the combined Khasi-Jaintia-Garo quota be raised to 90 percent which the Garos have resisted as they feel that the better educated Khasis will make inroads into their entitlement. Garo recruitment in the higher echelons of government is less than their numbers warrant. This was reportedly among the factors that led the Garo National Council, hitherto a faction of the Hill people’s Union, to call for a separate Garo State (*Verghese 1996: 203*).

The Garo Students’ Union (GSU) feels that they have never enjoyed fully the 40 percent allotment of jobs. They have had not more than 15-20 percent of the quota. Unfortunately, there is no record of the portfolios held by the government officers. In the absence of any documentation on the implementation of the reservation policy it is not proper to cut down 10 percent from the Garo quota as they have been unofficially deprived of their 40 percent share since the inception of the Meghalaya state. Before reviewing the Reservation policy, it will be necessary to see how effectively it has been implemented (*GSU, Tura*)

As for the removal of the reservations and recruitment on merit, the Garos feel that Khasis may compete on the general quota, not for the Scheduled Tribe (ST) seats, if they think that they are qualified for them. Merit cannot be the basis at present because right now the Khasis have better access to educational facilities than the Garos do. The latter need reservations since they are far behind the other tribal groups. They feel that their lack of progress is due to lack of an educational infrastructure, not because of lethargy created by the reservations. Compared to the past when there was hardly any good educational institution, the Garo hills are now in a better position with the coming of some good private institutions. The number of graduates too has increased as a result. There is no competition for reservations between the Khasis and Garos. Real competition is within the Garo community.

On the other side is the Jaintia issue. They “are not satisfied with the arrangement of the reservation policy. They keep on demanding a separate quota for their ethnic group. They feel that by having a combined reservation for jobs with the Khasis, they will not be fully represented in the government establishments.” (*8. Pakem cd.*)

**The Issue of a Separate Garo State and ANVC**

Unlike the reservation policy, Greater Garo Land (GGL) is an issue raised by a few persons under the banner of A’chik National Volunteers Council (ANVC), a militant group operating in the Garo Hills. It has aroused the sentiments of the Khasis as the demand for GGL includes a vast area of the Khasi land. ANVC has identified 49 villages of West Khasi Hills having a Garo population of 36,124 to be amalgamated in GGL. It also claims 76 villages of Kamrup and 195 of Goalpara district having a Garo population of 23,625 and 62,228 respectively. Some Garos think that GGL can solve the Reservation problem.

\* Shreeranjana. *Perspective of Development in Meghalaya*. (A publication of State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) Meghalaya 200 I.) Pg.19



The ANVC was formed on 20th December 1995 with the objective to form a separate Garoland Autonomous State. According to ANVC “The Garos do not have a state of their own for the preservation of their own national identity. The present state of Meghalaya is not specifically meant for the Garos. Neither the nomenclature “Meghalaya” has any significance for the Garos nor it carries any meaning ‘or identity for them” (*ANVC 1999: Pg. 11*).

The issue of a Garo State is much older than what it seems to be. Even before the founding of Meghalaya, on 21 January, 1972 the Garos demanded that they be united under one jurisdiction. ANVC is a desperate outcome of that demand. The Garo National Council submitted a memorandum to the Governor of Assam and the Prime Minister on 31st January 1956 for:

I. Inclusion in the autonomous district of Garo Hills, the plain areas contiguous to it which are predominantly inhabited by the Garos.

II. Recognition of the Garos living in the plain districts of Assam as members of the scheduled Tribe. (*ANVC, 1999 Pg. 7*).

In their memorandum to the Centre the ANVC regretted that, “The Meghalaya State has been created by the then benign Government headed by Smt. Indira Gandhi.....but the age-old demand of the Garos living in the Kamrup and Goalpara districts of Assam was left out again.” (*Ibid Pg. 7*).

According to ANVC the separate Garoland will comprise the following areas:

- a) The existing Garo Hills autonomous districts of East, West and South Garo Hills.
- b) Garo inhabited areas of Khasi Hills, lying contiguous to Garo Hills;
- c) The Garo inhabited areas of Goalpara and South Kamrup districts of Assam lying contiguous to Garo Hills (*Ibid Pg. 10*).

While ANVC demands a separate Garo Land, they also state

that the people in the villages want to be a part of Meghalaya. But they are desirous of uniting all the villages inhabited by the Garos... and the question of rectification of the boundary to include these areas in Meghalaya definitely deserves consideration (*Ibid Pg.5*). “All the Garos in Kamrup and Goalpara district of Assam expressed a keen desire for rectification of district boundaries to be under Meghalaya State which are contiguous so that the people of the same tribe are brought under one common administration.” (*Ibid Pg 6*). It is true that some Garos including GSU support the demand of the ANVC for a Separate Garo Land but an attempt should be made to understand whether the Garos actually need a separate Garo Land or a more organised integrity of Meghalaya.

### **Khasi View on Greater Garo Land**

The KSU disagrees totally on this issue. They feel that it would never be possible for ANVC and their associates to attain Greater Garo Land. It may be possible to have the present Garo Hills as a separate State for the Garos but not GGL. However, there is difference of opinion among them. Some think that it will be proper for the Garos to have a separate state for political prosperity. Others are of the view that it will be appropriate to keep Meghalaya as one united state for its economic development (*Group of youth, Shillong, dated September 2004*)

The Khasis are generally more silent with regard to GGL. They do not share their opinion very easily with anyone but a discussion with them indicates that they are strongly against greater GGL. Most of them think that it is not yet time to voice their opinion, possibly because up to now it is seen as a problem of the underground and not of the public. They also seem to think that it is practically not possible for the Garos to get a separate state. However, while talking to a Khasi young person, the researcher was left with the impression that the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) may be planning to ask for a Separate Khasi State. The authenticity of the information could not be verified. Besides, since GGL is an initiative of the Garos, the Khasis are waiting to hear the decision of the

government at the centre. The Government of India has signed a ceasefire and talks are on with the ANVC.

### **The Youth Organisations**

The main youth organisations to influence the Khasi and Garo people are the KSU and GSU. Whether it is the Reservation Policy or GGL, they play a vital role in moulding public opinion.

#### **Khasi Students Union (KSU)**

The Khasi Students Union (KSU) was formed prior to the intense anti-foreigner stir of 1979 as an effective pressure group. With the foreigner issue, many student leaders were placed under detention under the Meghalaya Preventive Detention Ordinance (MPDO) or the National Security Act (NSA). The foreigner issue brought in a lot of turmoil in the state in 1979-80 against the Bangladeshi migrants and in 1987 against the Nepalis.

The KSU Constitution adopted on 18 December 1981, spelt out in clear terms that it would try to foster the spirit of unity, love and mutual help among the students of Meghalaya, that it would stand firm to protect the fundamental rights, the special place and freedom of each and every member and that it would not take part in politics or religious matters. In the Constitution as amended on 4 April 1993 on the Khasi National Awakening Day, the objectives were expanded to include demands from the Government for infrastructural facilities to uplift education by setting up Government colleges, medical, engineering and agricultural colleges. It also wanted protection from the Government through laws so that the sons of the soil may control the economy, Government and land. It also wanted to awaken in the Khasi community respect for their language, *culture*, tradition and all that belongs to the Khasi nation. Of the nine objectives, the last one spoke clearly about peace. It read: “To achieve peace in the Khasi land within the framework of the Indian Constitution by placing it on the same level with Jammu and Kashmir.”

In the course of its movement, it demanded photo identity cards, erection of a wall along the international border with Bangladesh, speedy action on the Residential Permit Bill and the extension of the Assam Accord to Meghalaya, introduction of the Inner Line Regulation, total reservation in the state assembly for the indigenous people, revival of the Durbar Hima and curbing the sale of mortgaged land, etc. In recent years, it has taken up the issue of Work Permit to outside labourers, scrapping the 40:40 percent reservation for the Khasis and Garos. On 25 September 2001, it started the “KSAN RINGIEW MOVEMENT” which has now spread to the different areas of the state.

The KSU is probably the most articulate and dynamic, mass-based group in Meghalaya with a variety of in-campus and off-campus issues. It also adopted all known peaceful and non-peaceful techniques of protests. It gets most of its support from all indigenous people including the other organisations like Tribal Women Welfare and Development Association, Meghalaya (TWWADAM) now known as KWWADA, the Khasi Jaintia Welfare Association (KJWA) ka lewduh Khasi Pnar Association (KIKPA), ka Synjuk Ki Rangbah Shnong (SKS) to name a few. In early 2001, the Union widened its territorial jurisdiction by forming units in the Easternmost part of Ri Hynniewtrep, the Jaintia Hills District. “Students pursuing their professional courses outside Meghalaya have organised themselves into students associations, and affiliated these associations with the KSU. These include the Meghalaya Agricultural Students’ Association, Nagaland (MASAN), the Khasi-Jaintia Students’ Union, Dibrugarh and the Meghalaya Agricultural Students’ Association, Imphal. The KSU is affiliated to the North East Students’ Organisation (NESO), an umbrella body of the major Student Unions of the region.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

The views of the Garos and Khasis are examined here based on a questionnaire and Tables showing percentages. The information was gathered through group discussion and interviews.

Table 2: Is There Tension between the Garos and Khasis?

			Tribe		
			Garos	Khasis	Total
Yes	Designation	Student	82.8%	68.8%	77.8%
		Working	80.0%	81.3%	80.8%
		Others	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		Group Total	82.5%	76.5%	79.7%
No	Designation	Student	6.9%	31.3%	15.6%
		Working	10.0%	12.5%	11.5%
		Others			
		Group Total	7.5%	20.6%	13.5%
Not Sure	Designation	Student	10.3%		6.7%
		Working	10.0%	6.3%	7.7%
		Others			
		Group Total	10.0%	2.9%	6.8%
<b>The Respondents</b>					
There were 77 respondents of the 15-35 age group, 41 of them Garos and 36 Khasi, 35 males and 39 females. 3 did not mention their gender in the questionnaire. More than 50 percent were students					

There were 77 respondents of the 15-35 age group, 41 of them Garos and 36 Khasi, 35 males and 39 females. 3 did not mention their gender in the questionnaire. More than 50 percent were students and the rest were working. All are residents of Shillong or Tura.

Sources of apprehension between the Garos and the Khasis 80 percent of the respondents from both the tribes feel that there is tension between the Garos and Khasis. However a small number of Khasi students (31%) do not feel that there is tension. It can be established from the data that although there has not been any violence, there is a feeling of tension between these two communities.

70 percent of the Garos and 85 percent of the Khasis or 77 percent of the total respondents agree that the reservation policy is a bone of contention. This is one common point on which there is agreement among them. It is a source of tension. The Khasis look at it as a problem because Garos (8,62,473) are only a little

more than 50 percent of the Khasis (14,43,596) but enjoy the same percentage of reservations. On the other hand, the Garos complain that they have always been deprived of their reservations and that their share is reduced to 15-20 percent (Table 3).

Table 3: Does the Reservation Policy Create Tension?

			Tribe		
			Garos	Khasis	Total
Yes	Designation	Student	79.3%	81.3%	80.0%
		Working	40.0%	87.5%	69.2%
		Others	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		Group Total	70.0%	85.3%	77.0%
		Student	6.9%	12.5%	8.9%
		Working	30.0%	12.5%	19.2%
No	Designation	Others			
		Group Total	12.5%	11.8%	12.2%
		Student	27.6%	12.5%	22.2%
Not Sure	Designation	Working	20.0%		7.7%
		Others		50.0%	33.3%
		Group Total	25.9%	8.8%	17.6%

40 percent of the Garo youth and 69 percent of the Khasis say that cultural diversity is a major issue. The Khasis agree on it more than the Garos do. The Garos have an almost equal number (35%) of those who agree and disagree that cultural diversity is a problem. More than half (53%) of the respondents agree and 30% disagree that cultural diversity is a source of apprehension between the Garos and the Khasis. (Table 4)

Table 4: Is Cultural Diversity a Major Source of Apprehension?

			Tribe		
			Garos	Khasis	Total
Yes	Designation	Student	41.4%	68.8%	51.1%
		Working	40.0%	68.8%	57.7%

		Others	50.9%	33.3%
		Group Total	40.0%	67.6%
No	Designation	Student	31.0%	18.8%
		Working	40.0%	31.3%
		Others	100.0%	33.3%
		Group Total	35.0%	23.5%
Not Sure	Designation	Student	27.6%	12.5%
		Working	20.0%	7.7%
		Others		50.0%
		Group Total	25.0%	8.8%

Table 5: Is Geographical Diversity a Source of Apprehension?

		Tribe		
		Garos	Khasis	Total
		Student	64.3%	50.0%
Yes	Designation	Working	20.0%	68.8%
		Others	100.0%	66.7%

		Group Total	51.3%	61.8%
No	Designation	Student	21.4%	18.8%
		Working	70.0%	25.0%
		Others	100.0%	33.3%
		Group Total	35.9%	20.6%
Not Sure	Designation	Student	14.3%	31.3%
		Working	10.0%	6.3%
		Others		
		Group Total	12.8%	17.6%

64 percent of the Garo students and 20 percent of the Garo working youth, 50 and 69 percent respectively of the Khasis say that geographical diversity is a source of tension. Of the total 56 percent say that it is a matter of tension but 70 percent of the Garo working youth disagree with it. The big difference of opinion among the Garo students and working youth may be because the students are

extensive travellers and the job holders are confined to a base. The students travel to Shillong very frequently for interviews, jobs, for filling forms, exams etc. and often they find it very expensive. The Khasis seem to feel that geographical diversity is a source of tension because the weather in the Garo hills does not suit them since they come from a cold climate and find it hard to survive the heat and malaria (Table 5)

Table 06: Should the Khasis Fear the Garos?

		Tribe		
		Garos	Khasis	Total
Yes	Designation	Student	31.0%	12.5%
		Working	10.0%	18.8%
		Others		

		Group Total	25.0%	14.7%
No	Designation	Student	31.0%	75.0%
		Working	60.0%	75.0%
		Others	100.0%	100.0%
		Group Total	40.0%	76.5%
Not Sure	Designation	Student	37.9%	12.5%
		Working	30.0%	6.3%
		Others		
		Group Total	35.0%	8.8%

A very small number of the respondents feel that there is a reason for the Khasis to fear the Garos. The Khasi students and the working groups are equally strong in their opinion. 75% of them think that they are secure and have no reason to fear the Garos. Though not as strongly as the Khasis, the Garo students (31%) and working youth (60%) too are of the same opinion. In general 57% think that the Garos are no threat to the Khasis and about 23% are not sure. It is useful to note that while 76.5% feel that the Khasis need not fear the Garos, only 40% of the Garos

feel the same (Table 6).

Table No. 7 Should the Garos fear the Khasis?

		Tribe			
			Garos	Khasis	G. Total
Yes	Designation	Student	35.7%	18.8%	29.5%
		Working	10.0%	12.5%	11.5%
		Others			
		Group Total	28.2%	14.7%	21.9%
No	Designation	Student	32.1%	62.5%	43.2%
		Working	40.0%	81.3%	65.4%
		Others	100.0%	50.0%	66.7%
		Group Total	35.9%	70.6%	52.1%
Not Sure	Designation	Student	32.1%	18.8%	27.3%
		Working	50.0%	6.3%	23.1%
		Others		50.0%	33.3%
		Group Total	35.9%	14.7%	26.0%

The Garos have mixed feelings towards the Khasis. 28 percent of the total say that they fear the Khasis, 35 percent oppose it and 36 percent are not sure. Only 15 percent of the Khasis think that the Garos should fear them, 71 percent oppose it and 15 percent are not sure. A majority of both either say that the Garos should not fear the Khasis or are not sure. The fear factor is more among the Garo (Table 7).

45 percent of the Garos and 67 percent of the Khasis i.e. 55 percent of the total do not feel that the Khasis will dominate the Garos. However, 33 of the Garos and 21 percent of the Khasis feel that they will do it. The reason for a bigger number the Garos having this fear seems to be that the literacy rate among them is much lower than that of the Khasis. Field notes also show that the Garos feel that they do not have equal representation in the government, that the Khasis are politically more powerful and that the infrastructure in the Khasi Hills is more advanced than that

of the Garo Hills. As a result, the hue and cry is more from the Garos than Khasis who claim that they do not have any intention to become a threat to the Garos (Table 8).

Table 8: Will the Khasis dominate the Garos?

		Tribe			
			Garos	Khasis	G. Total
Yes	Designation	Student	37.9%	18.8%	31.1%
		Working	20.0%	25.0%	23.1%
		Others	0	0	0
		Group Total	32.5%	20.6%	27.0%
No	Designation	Student	34.5%	62.5%	44.4%
		Working	70.0%	68.8%	69.2%
		Others	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		Group Total	45.0%	67.6%	55.4%
Not Sure	Designation	Student	27.6%	18.8%	24.4%
		Working	10.0%	6.3%	7.7%
		Others	0	0	0
		Group Total	22.5%	11.8%	17.6%

48 percent of the Garo students and 80 percent of their working youth feel that the Garos do not dominate the Khasis, so do 50 percent of the Khasi students and 81 percent of their working youth. It comes to 61 percent of all the respondents. Working youth from both the tribes say it more strongly than do students. A bigger number of Khasis than Garos takes this stand (Table 9).

Table 9: Will the Garos Dominate the Khasis?

		Tribe			
			Garos	Khasis	G. Total
Yes	Designation	Student	17.2%	25.0%	20.0%
		Working	20.0%	6.3%	11.5%
		Others	0	0	0

		Group Total	17.5%	14.7%	16.2%
No	Designation	Student	48.3%	50.0%	48.9%
		Working	80.0%	81.3%	80.8%
		Others	100.0%	50.0%	48.9%
Not Sure	Designation	Group Total	57.5%	64.7%	60.8%
		Student	34.5%	25.0%	31.1%
		Working	0	12.5%	7.7%
		Others	0	50.0%	33.3%
		Group Total	25.0%	20.6%	23.0%
Table 10: Does Cultural Consciousness Create Stress and Anxiety?					
			Tribe		
			Garos	Khasis	G. Total
Yes	Designation	Student	55.2%	73.3%	61.4%
		Working	70.0%	18.8%	38.8%
		Others	0	0	0
		Group Total	57.5%	42.4%	50.7%
No	Designation	Student	13.8%	0	9.1%
		Working	20.0%	31.3%	26.9%
		Others	100.0%	0	33.3%
Not Sure	Designation	Group Total	17.5%	15.2%	16.4%
		Student	31.0%	26.7%	29.5%
		Working	10.0%	50.0%	34.6%
		Others	100.0%	66.7%	0
		Group Total	25.0%	42.4%	32.0%
55 percent of the Garo students and 70 percent of their working youth (total 57%) against 73 and 19 percent of the Khasi (total 42%) think that cultural diversity creates stress and anxiety. More than half (51%) of all the respondents say that it creates tension and only 33 percent are not sure. The big difference between the Khasi students and working youth could be because the students have more access to people in different parts of the state in a compact place such as a school, college or university.					

In contrast the working youth are confined more to offices where very few people of different cultural backgrounds work.

Table 11: Does Political Consciousness Create Stress and Anxiety?

			Tribe		
			Garos	Khasis	G. Total
Yes	Designation	Student	62.1%	81.3%	68.9%
		Working	70.0%	75.0%	73.1%
		Others	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		Group Total	65.0%	78.8%	71.2%
No	Designation	Student	3.4%	0	2.2%
		Working	20.0%	6.3%	11.5%
		Others	0	0	0
		Group Total	7.5%	3.0%	5.5%
Not Sure	Designation	Student	34.5%	18.8%	28.9%
		Working	10.0%	18.8%	15.4%
		Others	0	0	0
		Group Total	27.5%	18.2%	23.3%
65 percent of the Garos and 79 percent of the Khasis (71% of the total) say that political consciousness creates stress and anxiety and 23 percent are not sure. The Khasis seem to be more politically conscious. Their demand to review the reservation policy on the basis of the population, is one of its signs. From the Garo perspective the Khasis have been making full use of their reservation quota while they themselves have been lagging behind. They also feel that due to lack of political awareness, they have not been able to establish a strong political front for themselves but are now becoming conscious (Table 11).					

Table 12: Have the Church Leaders Tried to Improve the Relations between Communities?

Tribe

		Garos	Khasis	Group Total
Yes	Student	69.0%	62.5%	66.7%
	Working	30.0%	62.5%	50.0%
	Others	0	100.0%	66.7%
	Group Total	57.5%	64.7%	60.8%
No	Student	24.1%	12.5%	20.0%
	Working	20.0%	37.5%	30.8%
	Others	0	0	0
	Group Toatal	22.5%	23.5%	23.0%
Not Sure	Student	6.9%	25.0%	13.3%
	Working	50.0%	0	19.2%
	Others	100.0%	0	33.3%
	Group Total	20.0%	11.8%	16.2%

57 percent of the Garos and 65 percent of the Khasis (61% of the total), agree that the Church leaders have tried to improve the relations between them but 23 percent do not think so against 16 percent who are not sure (Table 12).

62 percent of the Garos and only 29 percent of the Khasis (47% of the total) say that the government has been partial. A large percentage of the Khasis (47%) are not sure. The reason why Garos, more than the Khasis, feel it could be, that a majority of the ministers are Khasi. They also feel that they do not have equal representation. The Khasis too, have suspicion of the Garos, though comparatively less. Basic to it is lack of trust and competition between these two communities (Table 13).

Table 13: Have Successive Governments Been Partial to One or the Other Community?

		Tribe		
		Garos	Khasis	Group Total
Yes	Student	62.1%	25.0%	48.9%
	Working	60.0%	37.5%	46.2%
	Others	100.0%	0	33.3%
	Group Total	62.5%	29.4%	47.3%

No	Student	27.6%	37.5%	31.1%
	Working	0	12.5%	7.7%
	Others	0	0	0
	Group Total	20.0%	23.5%	21.6%
Not Sure	Student	10.3%	37.5%	20.0%
	Working	40.0%	50.0%	46.2%
	Others	0	100.0%	66.7%
	Group Total	17.5%	47.1%	31.1%

Table 14: Has There Been Any Effort by Khasi and Garo Leaders to Ease the Tension?

		Tribe		
		Garos	Khasis	Group Total
Yes	Student	41.4%	12.5%	31.1%
	Working	20.0%	56.3%	42.3%
	Others	50.0%	33.3%	0
	Group Total	35.0%	35.3%	35.1%
No	Student	24.1%	25.0%	24.4%
	Working	30.0%	31.3%	30.8%
	Others	0	0	0

Not Sure	Group Total	25.0%	26.5%	25.7%
	Student	34.5%	62.5%	44.4%
	Working	50.0%	12.5%	26.9%
	Others	100.0%	50.0%	66.7%
	Group Total	40.0%	38.2%	39.2%

35 percent each of the Garo and Khasi feel that their leaders “have made efforts to ease the tension between them. 26 percent of all the respondents feel that they have made no effort to ease the tension and 40 percent are not sure about it. (Table14).

Table 15: If You were in a Position to Recruit Someone, Whom Would You Choose?

Not capable	Capable from other community			
	from own community			

Designation	Tribe			Tribe		
	Garos	Khasis	Group Total	Garos	Khasis	Group Total
	Student	70.8%	93.3%	79.5%	29.2%	6.7%
Working	90.0%	87.5%	88.5%	10.0%	12.5%	11.5%
Others	50.0%	50.0%	33.3%	100.0%	50.0%	66.7%
Group Total	74.3%	87.9%	80.9%	25.7%	12.1%	19.1%
74 percent of the Garos and 88 percent of the Khasis are ready to choose anyone capable from another community to work with. The Garos seem to be more tribe conscious than the Khasis in choosing someone to work with (Table 15).						
Table 16: How is the Relationship Between the Khasis and Garos?						

	Cordial			Indifferent			Suspicious		
	Tribe			Tribe			Tribe		
	Garos	Khasis	Group Total	Garos	Khasis	Group Total	Garos	Khasis	Group Total
Student	44.8%	25.0%	37.8%	13.8%	37.5%	22.2%	41.4%	37.5%	40.0%

Working	44.4%	31.3%	36.0%	22.2%	31.3%	28.0%	33.3%	37.5%	36.0%
Others	100.0%	50.0%	66.7%				50.0%		33.3%
Total	46.2%	29.4%	38.4%	15.4%	32.4%	23.3%	38.5%	38.2%	38.4%
46 percent of the Garos and 29 percent of the Khasis (total 38%) feel that the relations between them are cordial. 15 percent of the Garos and 32 percent of the Khasis (23%) feel that they are indifferent. 38 percent each of the Garos and Khasis feel that there is suspicion between them. More Garos than Khasis feel that the relations are cordial. More Khasis than Garos feel that the relations between them are indifferent. The main reason for a bigger number of Khasis speaking of poor relations is the 40 percent reservations for the Garos in spite of their relatively small population (Table 16 ).									

42 percent of the Garos and 50 percent of the Khasis (total 46%) say that the Khasis have stereotyped attitudes about the Garos. 27 percent of the Garos and 35 percent of the Khasis (31%) feel that it is not true. 23 percent of the total are not sure (Table 17).

Table 17: Do Khasis Have a Stereotyped Attitudes about the Garos?

Yes	Tribe		
	Garos	Khasis	Group Total
	Student	51.7%	37.5%
Working	20.0%	62.5%	46.2%
Others		50.0%	33.3%
Group Total	42.5%	50.0%	45.9%



No	Student	20.7%	43.8%	28.9%
	Working	40.0%	25.0%	30.8%
	Others	100.0%	50.0%	66.7%
	Group Total	27.5%	35.3%	31.1%
Not Sure	Student	27.6%	18.8%	24.4%
	Working	40.0%	12.5%	23.1%
	Others			
	Group Total	30.0%	14.7%	23.0%
Table 18: Do Garos have Stereotyped Attitudes About Khasis?				
Yes			Tribe	
		Garos	Khasis	Group Total
	Student	44.8%	43.8%	44.4%
	Working	30.0%	62.5%	50.0%
No	Others		100.0%	66.7%
	Group Total	40.0%	55.9%	47.3%
	Student	31.0%	18.8%	26.7%
	Working	40.0%	18.8%	26.9%
Not Sure	Others	100.0%		33.3%
	Group Total	35.0%	17.6%	27.0%
	Student	24.1%	37.5%	28.9%
	Working	30.0%	18.8%	23.1%
40 percent of the Garos and 56 percent of the Khasis (47% total) say that the Garos have stereotyped attitudes about the Khasis. 27% of all the respondents disagree with it and 26 percent are not sure (Table 18)	Others			
	Group Total	25.0%	26.5%	25.7%
	Student			
	Working			
Table 19: Has the Media Reinforced Stereotypes about Khasis and Garos?				
			Tribe	

Yes	Student	25.0%	20.0%	23.3%
	Working	40.0%	56.3%	50.0%
	Others		100.0%	66.7%
	Group Total	28.2%	42.4%	34.7%
No	Student	50.0%	13.3%	37.2%
	Working	40.0%	18.8%	26.9%
	Others			
	Group Total	46.2%	15.2%	31.9%
Not Sure	Student	25.0%	66.7%	39.5%
	Working	20.0%	25.0%	23.1%
	Others	100.0%		33.3%
	Group Total	25.6%	42.4%	33.3%
35 percent agree, 32 disagree and 33 percent are not sure that the media has reinforced stereotypes about the Garos and Khasis. More Khasis (42%) than Garos (28%), and among the Khasi, the working youth (56%) more than students feel that the media has reinforced stereotypes. There is not much difference in the numbers saying ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘not sure’ (Table 19).				
77 percent of the Garos and 35 percent of the Khasis (72% and 50% respectively or a tototf 64% students) or 58 percent of the total respondents do not think that the Garo teachers are biased against the Khasis. But 50 percent of the Khasis are not certain that the Garo teachers are not biased (Table 20).				
Table 20 : Are the Garo teachers biased towards the Khasis ?				
Yes			Tribe	
		Garos	Khasis	Group Total
	Student	6.9%	6.3%	6.7%
	Working		18.8%	11.5%
No	Others		50.0%	33.3%
	Group Total	5.0%	14.7%	9.5%
	Student			
	Working			

No	Student	72.4%	50.0%	64.4%
	Working	90.0%	25.0%	50.0%
	Others	100.0%		33.3%
	Group Total	77.5%	35.3%	58.1%
Not Sure	Student	20.7%	43.8%	28.9%
	Working	10.0%	56.3%	38.5%
	Others		50.0%	33.3%
	Group Total	17.5%	50.0%	32.4%

Table 21: Are the Khasi teachers biased towards the Garos?

		Tribe	
		Garos	Khasis
Yes	Student	17.2%	11.1%
	Working		6.3%
	Others		50.0%
	Group Total	12.5%	5.9%

No	Student	51.7%	62.5%	55.6%
	Working	90.0%	50.0%	65.4%
	Others	100.0%		33.3%
	Group Total	62.5%	52.9%	58.1%
Not Sure	Student	31.0%	37.5%	33.3%
	Working	10.0%	43.8%	30.8%
	Others		50.0%	33.3%
	Group Total	25.0%	41.2%	32.4%

Similarly, 62 percent of the Garos and 53 percent of the Khasis (total 58%) do not think that the Khasi teachers are biased against the Garos. Of this number 56 percent are students, including 52 percent Garo 62 percent Khasi students. 25 percent of the Garo and 41 percent of the Khasi are not sure (Table 21).

Table no. 22 : Can Khasis and Garos prosper within the same state ?

		Tribe	
		Garos	Khasis
Yes	Student	41.4%	62.5%
	Working	50.0%	50.0%
	Others	100.0%	
	Group Total	45%	52.9%
No	Student	24.1%	

	Working	20.0%	31.3%
	Others		100.0%
	Group Total	22.5%	20.6%
Not Sure	Student	34.5%	37.5%
	Working	30.0%	18.8%
	Others		
	Group Total	32.5%	26.5%

If prejudice is not as strong as it is made out to be, then one had to find out whether they could live in the same State and prosper. That was the next question. 45 percent of the Garos and 53 percent of the Khasis (total 49%) think that it is possible. Only 22 percent think that it is not possible and 30 percent are not sure.

The Main Conclusions from the Data

The Tables give bare facts. They show that 80 percent of the Garo and Khasi, both students and those who are working, feel that tension between them is high. 77 percent attribute it mainly to the reservation policy. Not surprisingly a bigger number of Khasis (85%) than Garo (70%) feel it because of the perception that it benefits mainly the Garo. On the Garo side the KSU demand for its revision is the main problem while on the Khasi side it is the policy itself. Cultural differences between them do cause tension between them. They feel that except for their matrilineal background, there no commonality between them But it is less than reservations.

The remaining factors such as greater cultural and political consciousness add to the tension. 71 percent think that political

consciousness has added to the tension. One can also argue that the protests against the reservation policy result from greater political consciousness. If that is the case, dealing only with the reservation policy may not be the solution. The youth (51%) from both the communities feel that the new culture that includes the modern trends and a fast lifestyle makes them more conscious of each other's presence. Cultural consciousness becomes stronger with their fast growing political consciousness. This consciousness has made the youth verify their own background and history and that of the other. Each tribe looks for its own benefits.

It is also possible that the government did not take care to understand the importance of providing equal opportunities to both the communities. The feeling that the State was partial is stronger among the Garos (62%) than Khasis (29%). The Garo think that it is the main reason for their slower development. They feel that the Khasis always got a bigger share than they did and resent the fact that the Khasis are trying to take away from them the 40% reservations which is the only benefit they have got. The Khasis do not have such a problem so fewer of them blame the State.

In spite of cultural and other differences a large number of them do not think that they are a threat to each other. Around 23 percent see a threat and a similar number is not certain. Thus, the threat perception is not absent completely but is not the predominant one. One may add that more Khasis say that the Garo are not a threat to them than the Garo who say the same about the Khasi. Its reason seems to be the KSU demand for a change in the reservation policy. They think that the Khasis are politically more powerful as they have more representation in the legislature and bureaucracy. A majority of the Garo do not see a threat but 25 percent feel it and a similar proportion is not certain.

Stereotypes about each other continue. But 58 percent of the respondents feel that the tension, cultural differences and stereotypes have not affected the teacher-student relationship. They feel that

the teachers remain neutral. More Garos than Khasis are confident about good student-teacher relations irrespective of their tribe. Tables 20 and 21 show that more Khasis than Garos are not sure that the teachers are biased against the students from the other tribe. However, there is a strong tendency among the respondents from both the communities to side with their own tribe, be it on the issue of teachers, domination, the fear factor or cultural affinity (Tables 5 to 8).

While they recognise lack of bias on the side of the teachers, the respondents also state that the relationship between the Garo and Khasi students is not cordial. 62 percent say that there is suspicion or at best indifference among the students of their communities. The Khasis seem to be less comfortable with the Garo than the Garo are with the Khasi. Its main reason seems to be that there are more Garos in Shillong than there are Khasis in Tura. Besides, interviews leave one with the impression that the Khasis take pride in being locals. That makes them feel less comfortable not merely with the Garos but also with others who are considered outsiders to Shillong.

Despite the tension around the reservation policy, as many as 81 percent would be ready to appoint a capable person for a job, irrespective of his/her community (Table 15). There is a bigger number of Khasis (88%) than Garos (74%) among them. Only a small number would choose someone of their own community irrespective of the person's capabilities. In spite of the differences, 49 percent of the respondents (45% Garo, 53% Khasi) think that these two tribes can prosper within the same state. There has been a demand for a Greater Garo Land but that does not seem to be a priority. For the time being identity and developmental issues are more divisive than territorial ones.

These Tables show that the break between the Garo and Khasi is not complete. There is a possibility of solving the problems through a dialogue. The negative side of it is that the leaders have

done nothing to ease the tension. Most respondents are of the view that only the Church leaders have attempted to bring the two sides together and that they should continue to make a contribution. One may add that though there is no record of communal violence, the Reservation Policy has damaged the Garo-Khasi relationship. Linked to it are cultural and other problems. If there is a talk of a State among the Garos, it is linked to this factor. Some of them think that a separate State is the best way of putting an end to the debate around the Reservations. The State too has failed in its duty. However, if measures are not taken soon, the situation can deteriorate.

### **An Analytical Look**

Now that the findings have been summarised they can be analysed under the DNH and other frameworks.

### **Do No Harm Framework**

The Do No Harm (DNH) framework under which all the findings are explained helps one to check any unintentional or unrealised harm by an agency in carrying out its works in a particular place. For example, the agencies involved in development may plan to do good but without intending it, may also cause negative effects. They are also known as unintended negative effects. The DNH framework has six major steps. Step one is to identify the stakeholders or parties and the process through which they are involved in a problem. Step two is to identify and analyse the dividers that can cause violence between groups. Step three is to identify and analyse connectors that may help bring peace between the parties in conflict. Step four is to see the methods of providing aid. Step five is to analyse the impact of the programmes on the dividers and connectors. With it one can consider the programme options and present some peace building measures.

### **Step I: The Stakeholders in the Garo-Khasi Tension**

The student leaders (GSU and KSU) and the militant groups

HNVC and ANVC respectively for the Khasis and Garos are the primary stakeholders in relation to the Garo-Khasi tension. The secondary parties are the Jaintias and other tribal and the non-tribal population of Meghalaya. The Garos in general look at the Khasis as a tribe that has always enjoyed the favour of the government. They feel that they themselves have been deprived of their 40% reservation quota. The KSU demand to review the reservation policy adds to their feeling of injustice. ANVC feels that a number of Garo populated villages outside Meghalaya are deprived of education and other facilities and that they should be included in the proposed Garo Land for the development of the Garos under one autonomous state. Some Garos feel that they and the Khasis can prosper together but others think that all tension, including the reservation policy, would come to an end with GGL.

The Khasis believe that the reservation policy is not realistic and has to be reviewed. The Garos were given 40% of reservation because they were educationally backward but now they think it is time to have equal share. The Khasis did not stop the Garos from utilising their quota but their own incompetence has been an impediment for their growth and development. With regard to ANVC's demand for GGL, some Khasis feel that the present Garo Hills could become a separate state but no part of the Khasi land should be included in it. A considerable number of Khasis also feel that the Garos and Khasis can prosper together.

### **The Process of Garo and Khasi tension**

At the foundation of Meghalaya, the leaders decided unanimously to have an internal reservations policy. The Garos and the Khasis were allotted 40 percent each. However, the rise in new cultural and political consciousness and the fact that the Khasi and the sub-tribes under them have a population of nearly double that of the Garo but have a quota of only 40 percent, have led to tension. It led KSU to think in terms of reviewing the reservation policy based on the size of the population or raising the reservations

from 80 to 90 percent for the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo together, to be enjoyed on the basis of merit. That is when the GSU realised that the 40% reservations were not implemented. They studied the past and rightly or wrongly came to the conclusion that they have been getting only 15-20% instead of 40%. Thus began the unending Garo-Khasi struggle.

Thus the Reservation Policy of 1971 is the root cause of all problems. Also the Garo demand for a Greater Nagaland is old but was revived by the ANVC. So it is a repetition of the history in Meghalaya. Though the ANVC became active from 1995, the demand for a separate Garo land was already in the mentioned in a memorandum to the Indian Government at independence. (*Idea derived from the ANVC Memorandum 1999, Pg. 6*)

### **The Location of Offices**

The Garos add also issues such as the location of all major government offices in Shillong, unequal distribution in educational facilities, failure to hold the Winter Session of the legislative assembly in Tura, the controversies over the Meghalaya Board of Secondary Education (MBOSE) etc. Thus, there are allegations and counter-allegations including HSLC question papers leaking. Most of these events are signs of a lack of trust between them. These problems are also related to lack of development, Garo Hills being less developed than Khasi Hills.

The Khasis have a different perspective on these issues. Their only priority is the Reservation Policy and the demand for equal distribution based on the proportion of the population in each tribe. They feel that they have to share their quota of 40 percent with many sub-tribes under them whereas the Garos are of one tribe and comparatively smaller population than the Khasis.

### **The issue of GGL**

The ANVC was born out of what the Garos perceived as their neglect after the creation of Meghalaya. They have been bringing

this neglect to the fore in recent years. For example, they highlighted it during the recent passage of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Bill in 1995 by the Assam legislature. The ANVC used the following arguments and grievances in their memorandum:

As regards the creation of Meghalaya State, we cannot presume that the government has done well, satisfying the needs and aspirations of the Garo people. One of the greatest blunders that we can be cited is the bifurcation of the same linguistic, culture and ethnically single community into many perplexing sections, having no regard to our cultural and linguistic affinities. The independent India brought us nothing but only a many sided bifurcation of our tribe and community making us to remain in a state of "Divide and Rule." We have been divided into the Garos of Garo hills and Khasi Hills within the Meghalaya state itself; the Garos of Assam and Meghalaya in the a National level; the Garos of India and Bangladesh in the International level..... (ANYC) Pg.8

The recent passage of the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Bill on 1995 by the Assam Government, granting autonomy of the Rabha Community living in Goalpara and Kamrup districts of Assam, is a glaring symbol of negligence and partiality towards the Garos living in these two districts. (Ibid) pg.9

The Garos feel that it is all right to practise the same faith, get education from the same institution but it is important to have a separate political identity. Schools in the Garo dominated areas of Assam are deprived of basic funds from both Assam and Meghalaya Government. Khasis seem to be satisfied with what they have but Garos are still to reach that state and as a result, there is the demand for a Separate Garo State. The Garo Students Union (GSU) also supports the demand for Greater Garo Land.

The issue of GGL affects Khasi population living in the Khasi Hills. In their response the Khasis have said that they have no

objection to a separate Garo Land but not at the cost of any part that belongs to the Khasi Hills. They feel that the government of Meghalaya is not partial against the Garos. It gives equal facilities and opportunities to both.

### **Implications of a Separate Garo state and GGL**

A separate Garo State (not GGL) along with more and direct funds coming from the central government will bring more development opportunities, jobs and education to the people. It would, however, demand greater responsibility of the Garo leaders for the progress of the Garo people. A new state would require leaders who can give it efficient administration. With growth and development there will also be more opportunities for corruption. Demands of the minority and infiltration from Assam and Bangladesh would also be important concerns of the state.

The situation can turn more destructive in Greater Garo Land, especially in the border villages where Garos and Khasis will have to live side by side. It will call for much higher responsibility of the Garo leaders to run the administration of the new state.

### **The Dividers in the Conflict**

The first divider in the conflict is the strained relations between the Garos and the Khasis. From that follows poor communication that is fostering suspicion and tension between them. To it one may add the educational and economic gap that paves the way for a social chasm between them. Different languages and cultures are another significant factor dividing the Garos and the Khasis. The call for a Greater Garo Land is yet another hurdle. "The boundary dispute may turn out to be more complex than it seems to be as there is no proper demarcation of the boundary but only a vague description." (*Dr. M Sangma, Tura, dated November 30, 2004*)

It is also clear that in the perception of the Khasis the most

important divider is the Reservation Policy. On the Garo side, the most important divider is what they perceive as Khasi domination over the Garos. KSU and GSU are sustaining these dividers with no effort made to get over the problems. These two organisations claim to speak on behalf of the common people on the Reservation Policy and the Separate Garo Land issue. They are very strong within their own communities and mould public opinion. They become dividers by trying to uphold the interests of their community alone at the cost of others. They thus turn a political problem into a social problem. The media add to it by strengthening the stereotypes of each other. The students' unions and the media representatives keep in touch with each other as both find this link productive. But they tend to serve the interests of one community alone though they can be a useful in bringing the groups in conflict together.

### **The Connectors in the Conflict**

While the dividers keep people away from each other, there are also connectors that can bring people together. Among them are some institutions such as the Churches, women's organisations and schools and colleges, where members of both the communities meet. Women were less aggressive than men during his interaction. The present writer found great potential for peace among women. Most of them were much less aggressive than men when they spoke of relations with the other tribe. For example, when asked about a separate state, most Garo women said that one should continue to look for measures to keep the state of Meghalaya undivided. The Garos and the Khasis must learn to live together.

The churches bring their adherents from different tribes together under the same roof for Sunday worship and other services. A majority of both the communities are Christians though they belong to different denominations. They also run a large number of schools and colleges not merely in Shillong and Tura but also in smaller towns. That creates in these institutions the potential to bring the two tribes together.

The most important connectors are probably the ordinary Garos and the Khasis. They share the same rich experience of fighting for the statehood of Meghalaya. Besides, there cannot be peace without the support of ordinary Garos and Khasis. The fact that ordinary persons from the two tribes are not really bothered about issues such as the reservation policy and GGL and the fact that some of them are not even aware of tension between the two is a good connector.

### **Peace Building Measures**

One has to base oneself on these dividers and connectors in the interventions one makes to promote peace between the Khasis and the Garos. Despite some tension, the relationship between them is healthier than the main dividers are ready to accept. On the other side, some of the media agents and the growing cultural and political consciousness have a negative effect on the people. Cultural and political consciousness is good in itself. It acquires a negative dimension when persons with ulterior motives manipulate it for their selfish interests. The institutions such as women's organisations and Churches that are active at the grassroots level or have a mass base need to counter the forces that cause tension. They can spread awareness especially among the students, the youth and women about the potential for peace with justice.

An appropriate way of reaching the micro level is through seminars, peace rallies, peace education for villagers, families, youth and youth leaders. At the macro-level the state government can be asked to take peace initiatives through education in schools and colleges and through schemes aimed at solving the problem of unemployment and cultural alienation. These institutions can take the initiative in evaluating the State government policies and programme from the point of view of their impact on unity between various ethnic groups. They can also look at their implementation to see whether their benefits reach the masses and whether they serve all the communities equally. Decentralisation of education

and equal distribution of economic and educational resources can definitely reduce tension between these tribes.

Encroachment on land by those who infiltrate from Assam and Bangladesh causes further shortage of resources and increases tension. The demands come not merely from non-tribals but also from the Garos residing in Assam. They feel discriminated against in Assam so they demand their right of being Garos in Meghalaya. In some stray cases the Garos from Assam have caused problems in Shillong and the consequences of their actions are borne by the Garo community of the Garo Hills. The organisations that have networks in Assam can use their links to bring the problems the Assam Garos face to the public domain and pressurise the State authorities to solve the problem. Unless that is done, even the formation of GGL will not be of much use since infiltration will continue to cause tension in the new State.

Equally important is the fight against corruption particularly during the elections. There is a need to spread awareness among the masses about the manner in which elections are conducted. Lack of awareness of these processes among the masses encourages corrupt practices. The media too can play a role in removing people's apprehensions about each other. Civil society groups have to play a role in finding peaceful solutions particularly when there is direct conflict.

Economic solutions too are required. Most jobs in Meghalaya are in the bureaucracy or in the service sector. They cannot produce the number of jobs required by the growing population and the number of young persons coming out of schools and colleges. The State and institutions like self-help groups, women's organisations and the churches have to join hands to create low-cost creative employment. They need to get involved in skill development especially among the youth. One does not refer to technical skills alone but also analytical skills. For example women's groups support peace processes but political awareness is low among

them. Ways have to be found of improving their analytical and negotiating skills in order to support their peace initiatives. They can thus better tackle some points of tension such as the demand for a Garo State before they get out of control. There is a mixed feeling among the Garos on this issue. If a compromise based on justice to all is not found at an early stage, it can become a mass demand and polarise the communities. A solution can prevent polarisation.

Encouraging the type of political awareness that can deliver peace with justice would be the ideal. Most Garos are peace-loving. Development that results in the masses acquiring their right to a life with dignity is a major step towards peace with justice. Compared to the Khasis they were educationally backward till now. But today they realise the value of education. Some Garo and Khasi leaders see the importance of education for social harmony. Some youth and women leaders have started questioning their own leaders. One considers it the first step towards development and peace.

In order to promote peace and harmony between the Garos and the Khasis and instil in them the hope of developing in unity, it will be necessary to strengthen common platforms like the Federation of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo People (FKJGP) and Meghalaya Students' Federation (MSF). These organisations can also work against perceived or real discrimination that cause tension between the tribes.

### **Conclusion**

Tribal people are known for their hospitality. The Garos and Khasis are two major tribal groups who keep to this tradition. For example, the Garos living in Shillong face no discrimination and do not consider themselves victims of social prejudices. The same is true of the Khasis living in the Garo Hills. There certainly are some stray incidents but they are exceptions, not the rule. These two tribes do not have a written history but they have shared

the experience of a common State since its inception in 1972. It is intrinsic to their history and it is important to build on it and work towards a corruption free administration that can ensure the development of all the tribes living within its boundaries.

It is equally important to ensure that the administration is not biased in favour of any of the three tribes. Such a government can win the trust of all three and can be a major step in freeing them from the suspicion of each other. Such an atmosphere of trust can also be of help in dealing with the Reservation Policy that was a welfare measure but has today become a bone of contention between the Garo and Khasi. Because of the tension it causes, government and other social leaders have failed to take any initiative to solve it.

This tension is caused also by the fact that the Khasis have had better access to education than the Garos did because the educational revolution came to Shillong much earlier than it came to Tura. The government never realised the importance of decentralising education. Some Garo parents are not yet convinced of the need to send their wards to school. They do not want their sons and daughters to get involved in politics. Because of it and since the inhabitants of Shillong enjoyed better facilities than those in the remaining districts of Meghalaya, a social gap has developed between the Garos and the Khasis. To some extent it has also given rise to a superiority and inferiority complex between these tribes.

The GGL issue too cannot be ignored. A recent survey by the ANVC in the Garo dominated villages of Assam and Khasi hills shows that the Garos living there wish to be one with the Greater Garo Land. However, the ANVC is not very sure of how long they will be able to support them in this demand since any struggle for it will result in hardships. The ANVC says that it will do its best to avoid bloodshed in their struggle for this demand though they feel that the Garos living outside the Garo Hills are more than eager to be included in Greater Garo Land.



Dr. Milton Sangma reflects the views of many others when he says that GGL is an ideal but not practical. The ANVC may be speaking of an attainable objective if it demands a Separate Garo State comprising the present Garo Hills and the Sixth Schedule for the Garo dominated villages outside the Garo Hills.

The contribution of the Church to the Garos and Khasis is commendable. However, the Churches take care of their general welfare but not from the perspective of Garo-Khasi harmony. Both the tribes enjoy the fruits of the pastoral, educational and medical work the Churches have done. However, they have not gone beyond it though these inputs can be used as meeting points for all the tribes, not merely the Garos and Khasis. The Churches alone are capable of becoming bridge builders between them. It can use these tools to build up awareness among them about the issues that divide them and those that can bring them together. They can do it without getting involved in politics in the narrow sense of the term.

In all these efforts, one has also to be aware that all the tribes have their traditional peace making and reconciliation systems. By and large they are in the hands of women. It is important for the agencies working for peace not merely in Meghalaya but also in the remaining States, to study these systems and update them to suit today's needs. New tensions can be overcome only through new and courageous initiatives.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Pakem B.ed, *Nationality, Ethnicity and Cultural Identity in Northeast*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi.

Verghese, B.G., *India's Northeast Resurgent*, Konark Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 1996.

Syiemlieh, D.R., *British Administration in Meghalaya*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, 1989.

Aggarwal, Kailash S., ed, *Dynamics of Identity and Intergroup Relations in Northeast India*, Indian Institute of Advance Study, 1999.

Sinha, Kamleshwar, *Meghalaya, Triumph of the Tribal Genius*, National Herald, New Delhi, (Publication Division, Delhi)

Lyngdoh, R.S., *Government and Politics in Meghalaya*, Sanchar Publishing House, New Delhi.

Sen, Sipra., *The Tribes of Meghalaya*, Mittal Publications, Delhi.

Sarma, Siddheswar, *Meghalaya - The Land of Forest*, Geophil Publishing House, Guwahati.

Shreeranjana, *Perspective of Development in Meghalaya*, A publication of State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) Meghalaya, 2001.

**[www.khasistudentsunion.org](http://www.khasistudentsunion.org)**



## THE GARO-KHASI TENSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE YOUTH AND WOMEN

*Sarah Maria Bang*

Meghalaya that became an autonomous state on 2nd April 1970 and a full-fledged state on 21st January 1972 has a sex-ratio of 974. The relatively high sex ratio may be attributed to the fact of all three of its major tribes i.e. the Garo, Jaintia and Khasi being matrilineal. They follow this tradition of female inheritance but social power is in the hands of men. Their customary laws have defined the roles of men and women. Men were warriors and protectors, tillers, hunters and administrators. Their role is in the domain outside the home. Women are mothers, housekeepers, custodians of family property, helpers in the fields and groves. All three communities have increasingly adopted Christianity but all three have movements that try to revive their traditional customs and festivals and keep the old faith and values alive. Khasi and Garo are the principal languages, with English as the official language. However, culturally they belong to two different strains. The Garos are of the Bodo-Tibeto Burman stock and have settled in the Garo Hills for the past 400 years. The Khasis and the Jaintias belong to the Mon-Khmer group.

### About This Study

That ethnic identity is most precious to the tribes of the region became more apparent in the movement for hill states in the undivided Assam. Each ethnic group sought its own interest and power (Madav 1998). Because of the different identities of the tribes that won Meghalaya, there are internal conflicts in the distribution of reservations for Government jobs and seats for education among the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos. There is also disparity in the distribution of educational facilities and major Government institutions.

That leads to the demand of separate states within Meghalaya on ethnic and geographical lines. There has been an undercurrent of tension between these two for a long time, with the student unions playing an active role. This study takes a closer look and tries to gain a special insight into the role played by the youth and the role of women in particular. The study which limits itself to the Garo-Khasi tension will try to understand women's role both in the conflict and in a possible solution. It has the following objectives:

1. To gain an understanding of the Khasi - Garo tension and its impact on the civil society and youth in particular.
2. To identify factors that lead to the conflict.
3. To study the role of youth organisations in this conflict situation.
4. The role of women in the context of ethnic tension.
5. To suggest appropriate intervention measures to be adopted by youth ministry, government and civil society.

This study on the causes of the conflicts and of methods on preventing violence is an urgent need in the present scenario of growing Khasi-Garo tension. Such a study has not been done till today by any persons or organisations. The researcher hopes that it will contribute to an understanding by the people of the consequences of the conflict. The suggestions for intervention can help the communities, the Church and youth and women's organisations to find ways of peaceful co-existence and a common approach to the development of the State.

### Background of the Conflict

There is a growing concern in the academic circles about the Garo-Khasi tension in Meghalaya. Though literature dealing with the topic per se is very little, a number of factors contributing to it have been identified. Literature gathered here is based mainly from primary data. It has been categorised under the following heads.

### **Socio- geographical and political background**

In Meghalaya, the state is so diverse, yet interrelated in its geological, physiographic, ecological and climatic aspects. The Khasis and Jaintias known as the ‘Hynniewtrep’ occupy mainly the hills in Eastern Meghalaya. The Garos or ‘Achiks’ live mainly in western Meghalaya. There are more similarities between the Khasis and the Jaintias than between the Khasis and the Garos. The Khasis and the Jaintias have the same origin and are socially and linguistically linked to the larger Mon-Khmer group while the Garos belong to the Bodo family of the Tibetan-Burman race. Their commonality is that they are matrilineal (Verghese 1996: 98). Politically, the Garo and the Khasi-Jaintia people came together in 1969 under the political platform of the All Party Hill Leaders’ Conference (APHLC), demanding the creation of a separate state for the hill areas. On 30th December 1971, the Indian parliament passed the North Eastern Areas (Re-Organization) Act 1971, conferring full Statehood on Meghalaya. It became a full fledged state on 21st January 1972 (Shreeranjana 2001: 12-13).

### **Reservation Policy**

Indian constitution limits the percentage of reservations for a particular tribe to 40%. The then Chief Minister Capt. William Sangma decided to adhere to it by granting 40% each to the Khasi-Jaintias and the Garos. (Varghese 1996: 202).

The KSU now demands that the reservation policy be revised as according to the 2001 census, the Khasi population is 14,43,596, as compared to the Garo population of 8, 62,473 (KSU Pamphlets). It wants the combined Khasi-Jaintia-Garo quota to be raised to 90%. The Garos resist it as they feel that the better educated Khasis will make inroads into their entitlement. Garo recruitment to the higher echelons of government is less than their numbers warrant.

### **The Separate Garo State**

This is among the factors that led the Garo National Council, to demand a separate Garo State (Ray 1994). As a Garo social activist *said*, ‘When in a family the children have grown up it is wise on the part of the parents to give them their share so that the children live happily in their own new home. That should also be the case with the Garos and Khasis’. Many both among the Khasis and the Garos feel that they cannot live together in one political unit. Many Garos claim that their own leaders failed to present their needs, dreams and aspirations to the state government. Thus, a separate state is more a need of the Garos than the Khasis. They consider it an end to all suspicion, misunderstandings and accusation between the Garos and Khasis. (*Extract from the group discussions*)

### **The Role of Government, Educational Institutions and the Churches**

Shillong being the State capital, has most Government institutions and educational setup, except The Meghalaya Board of Secondary Education (MBOSE) that is situated in West Garo Hills. Shillong has for many years catered to the educational needs of the students from all over the Northeast. The educational revolution came to Shillong much earlier than it came to the Garo hills; as a result the people of Shillong understood the need for education and have been enjoying the benefits of most Government as well as private schools and colleges. The State did not realise the importance of decentralising education. That has created a social gap between the Garos and the Khasis. Motivation is still lacking among the Garos in the field of education. (*Extract from the group discussion*)

The people of Garo hills feel that if the winter session of the State Assembly is held in Tura it would bring more development

to the Garo Hills. People recall the time when the governor visited Tura. The garbage was cleared, drains were cleaned and the town wore a new look many days before the governor's arrival. If this was how it looked in one short visit of the governor, how much more it would be if the winter session of the assembly were held in the Garo Hills. The council of ministers and legislators would flood the town. But it has only remained a dream of the people of Tura (*Extract from an interview with a social activist from Garo hills*).

Meghalaya has a vibrant church that has established various institutions throughout the state. It works primarily through education and plays a significant role in public life, in developing social, political and economic consciousness among the people. Though its influence is felt in many spheres, the Churches limit themselves to the educational and spiritual spheres and have not played an active role in reducing the Garo-Khasi tension

According to the reservation policy of 1971 jobs and seats in education are distributed equally i.e. 40% each between the Garo and the Khasi who include the sub-tribes and 20% for others. The

### **The Khasi Students' Union (KSU)**

The Khasi Students' Union (KSU) which is a leading student organisation in Meghalaya was formed on March 20, 1978. It was associated by the students of twelve colleges under the Northeastern Hill University and those studying at the University itself. At its inception, the motto was "For the Welfare of the State and the Community". Later it was changed to "Main Shaprang Khlur Ka Ri" (Strive Forward Children of the Soil). The Constitution of the KSU adopted on December 18, 1981, said that it would foster the spirit of unity, love and mutual help among the students of Meghalaya. It also stated that it would stand firm to protect the fundamental rights, the special place and freedom of each and every member and that it would not take part in politics or

religious matters. In the Constitution as amended on April 4, 1993 at the Khasi National Awakening Day, the objectives were further expanded to include demands from the Government for infrastructural facilities to uplift education to suit the times by setting up Government medical, engineering and agricultural colleges. It also wanted legal protection to help the children of the soil to control the economy, government and land of Meghalaya. It also wanted to awaken in the Khasi community respect their language, culture, tradition and all that belongs to the Khasi nation. Of the nine objectives, the last spoke clearly about peace. It read "To achieve peace in the Khasi land within the framework of the Indian Constitution by placing it on par with Jammu and Kashmir".

The KSU which was formed prior to the intense anti-foreigner stir of 1979, became an effective pressure group during it. Many student leaders were placed under detention under the Meghalaya Preventive Detention Ordinance (MPDO) or the National Security Act (NSA). This issue brought in a lot of turmoil in the state in 1979-80 and 1987. The first phase was against the illegal migrants from Bangladesh and the second against the Nepalis. In the course of the movement, KSU demanded photo identity cards, erection of a wall along the international border with Bangladesh, speedy action on the Residential Permit Bill, the extension of the Assam Accord to Meghalaya, introduction of the Inner Line Regulation, total reservation in the state assembly for the indigenous people, revival of the Durbar Hima and curbing the sale of mortgaged land. In recent years, it has taken up the issue of Work Permit to outside labourers and scrapping the 40:40 percent reservations for the Khasis and the Garos. On September 25, 2001 it started the "Ksan Rngiew Movement" which has now spread to different areas of the state. The KSU is affiliated to the North East Students' Organization (NESO), an umbrella body of the major student Unions of the region.

The KSU is probably the most articulate, dynamic, mass-based group in Meghalaya taking up a variety of in-campus and off-campus issues. It also adopted all known peaceful and

other techniques of protests. By and large, its uupport base is all indigenous people including the organisations like Tribal Women’s Welfare and Development Association of Meghalaya (TWWADAM) now known as KWWADA, the Khasi-Jaintia Welfare Association (KJWA) ka Iewduh Khasis Pnars Association (KIKPA), ka Synjuk Ki Rang bah Shnong (SKS) to name a few. Early in 2001, the Union widened its territorial jurisdiction by forming units in the Easternmost parts of Ri Hynfiiewtrep, the Jaintia Hills District.

Students pursuing their professional courses outside Meghalaya have organised themselves into students associations and affiliated these associations to the KSU. They include the Meghalaya Agricultural Students’ Association, Nagaland (MASAN), the Khasi-Jaintia Students’ Union, Dibrugarh and the Meghalaya Agricultural Students’ Association, Imphal.

Women’s role

With all three tribes being matrilineal, women’s status is better than that of other women including tribals elsewhere. However, males continue to dominate the political scene. Women are barred from participating even in their traditional grassroots institutions and have no say in running the village affairs. But they are assigned a role in the women’s organisations (Seng Kynthei) that are directly under the village council. Within this organisation women are allowed to take up welfare activities which do not impinge upon the power of the village council. They have no right to criticise the council or raise issues that are politically sensitive. For the Khasis, politics is an exclusively male domain (*The Telegraph*, 30 November, 2004). The Khasi tradition refers to a woman who takes part in politics as “a hen that crows and would bring bad omen”. With this psychological burden, women have shunned politics and participate only as supporters and campaigners.

Mother’s Union is strong among them as well as the Garos. The Garo women’s group mediated the surrender of the ALMA, a militant group in Garo Hills. Women participate and play a significant role in both administrative and social activities for the welfare of the state. With regards to the Garo-Khasi tension, women do not have any feeling of rivalry towards each other. However, their relations are slightly strained but they are reluctant to discuss it probably because they do not want to disrupt the equilibrium.

Table 1: Is There Tension between the Garos and Khasis? (by Tribe and Sex)

	Male				Female			
	Tribe		Tribe		Tribe		Tribe	
Yes	Count	Garo	Khas	Total	Garo	Khasi	Total	
	% within Tribe	20	10	30	14	17	31	
No	Count	2	3	5	1	4	5	
	% within Tribe	9.1%	23.1%	14.3%	5.9%	18.2%	12.8%	
Not Sure	Count	0	0	0	2	1	3	
	% within Tribe			11.8%	4.5%		7.7%	
Total	Count	22	13	35	17	22	39	
	% within Tribe	100.0%	100.0%	100.0	100.0%	100.0%	100.0	

Analysis and Iterpretation

In order to understand the issues, we gathered the opinion of 76 young persons aged 15 to 35, 41 of them Garo and 35 Khasi. Half of them were men and half women. The respondents had an equal number of students and working youth. All of them are from Shillong and Tura.

The first question concerned Garo-Khasi tension. More Garos (82.5%) than Khasis (76.5%) are aware of the Garo-Khasi tension. 20.6% Khasis against 7.5% Garos feel that there is no tension. 2.9% of the Khasis are not sure against 10% of the Garos. More Garo (90.9%) than Khasi males (76.9%) feel that there is tension between them. 9.1% of Garo against 23.1% of Khasi men feel that there is no tension. The same difference exists among females with 82.4% of the Garo against 77.3% of the Khasi feeling that there is tension. 5.9% of the Garo females and 18.2% of the Khasi do not feel the tension.

Thus, Table 1 shows that a majority of the Garo as well as Khasi respondents are aware of the tension although there has been no violence. However, more male than female respondents of both are aware of it probably because it is primarily a political issue and men are involved directly in political affairs while women support them. However, the fact that a majority of the women too are aware of the tension shows that they are sucked into these issues though decisions are taken by men.

More Khasi (69.2%) than Garo males (45.5%) feel that the Khasis do not fear the Garo. 36.4% Garo against 7.7% Khasi males are not sure. More Khasi (81.8%) than Garo females (41.2%) feel that Khasis do not fear the Garos but 9.1% Khasis against 29.4% Garo females are not sure that the Khasis fear the Garos.

Table 2: Should the Khasis Fear the Garos?

	Male				Female			
	Tribe		Total		Tribe		Total	
Yes	Count	4	3	7	Count	5	2	7
	% within Tribe	18.2%	23.1%	20.0%	% within Tribe	29.4%	9.1%	17.9%
No	Count	10	9	19	Count	7	18	25
	% within Tribe	45.5%	69.2%	54.3%	% within Tribe	41.2%	81.8%	64.1%
Not Sure	Count	8	1	9	Count	5	2	7
	% within Tribe	36.4%	7.7%	25.7%	% within Tribe	29.4%	9.1%	17.9%
Total	Count	22	13	35	Count	17	22	39
	% within Tribe	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	% within Tribe	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Thus more Garo than Khasis of all categories think that Khasis have reason to fear the Garos. To check whether that thinking is based on some stereotypes we asked the respondents whether the Garos have reason to fear the Khasis. The contrast continued also in this field. More Khasis (76.5%) than Garos (40%) feel that the Khasis do not fear the Garos But 35% of the Garos and 8.8% of the Khasis are not sure. More Khasis (62.5%) than Garos (32.1%) feel that the Garos do not fear the Khasi.								

Table 3: Do the Garos have Reason to Fear the Khasis? (by Tribe & Sex)

Male Female

Tribe				Tribe			
		Garo		Khasi		Total	
Yes	Count	8	4	4	1	5	
	% within Tribe	36.4%	30.8%	25.0%	4.5%	13.2%	
No	Count	7	7	6	18	24	
	% within Tribe	31.8%	53.8%	37.5%	81.8%	63.2%	
Not Sure	Count	7	2	6	3	9	
	% within Tribe	31.8%	15.4%	37.5%	13.6%	23.7%	
Total	Count	22	13	16	22	38	
	% within Tribe	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
It is thus clear that there is tension between them but there is difference of opinion on its extent. The Garos seem to feel it more than the Khasis do. More Khasi (53.8%) than Garo males (31.8%) feel that the Garos should not fear the Khasis. Similar more Khasi (81.8%) than Garo (63.2%) females feel strongly that the Garos should not fear the Khasis. Thus, even the perception of fear is tribe specific but exists in both of them.							

Domination of One over the Other

An important fear in this interaction is that one will dominate the other. So we began by asking the respondents whether in their perception the Khasis will dominate the Garos. The responses show that such

a fear exists but not as much as in the issues that have preceded. Fewer Khasis (67.6%) than Garos (45%) feel that there will not be such domination but even among the Garos the proportion of those who feel that they will not dominate is substantial. In fact, only a minority of the Garos (32.5%) as well as Khasis (20%) feel that the Khasis will dominate the Garos.

Table 4: Will the Garos Dominate the Khasis?

		Garos	Khasis	Total
Yes	Designation	Student	17.2%	25.0%
	Working	20.0%	6.3%	20.0%
No	Others			
	Group	17.5%	14.7%	16.2%
	Total			
	Student	48.3%	50.0%	48.9%
	Working	80.0%	81.3%	80.8%
Dominating the other group is a major threat and it can create tension. That is why the fact that, only a minority in both				

the tribes feels this threat gives an opening towards a better understanding among them. There certainly is fear but it seems to be more about sharing of benefits than about domination. In other words, fear of domination is mainly political. To get over it one may have to focus on social and economic issues such as education and jobs and then move on political issues of representation in the legislature. If the Garo access to these benefits remains low, the fear of political and social domination can grow. That is why it is important to know that a majority of both feels that they can prosper within the same state. One has to build on this positive aspect.

More Khasis (64.7%) than the Garos (57.5%) feel that the Garos will not dominate the Khasis. That took us to the next question of ongoing relationship between the two tribes. We asked the respondents whether they felt that the Garos and Khasis can

prosper within the same State. Table 5 gives only the division by sex and omits the Table by student and working class division. In those responses 45% of the Garos and 52.9% of the Khasis say that they can prosper within the same state. 32.5% of the Garos and 26.5% of the Khasis are not sure.

Table 5: Can Khasis and Garos Prosper within the Same State?

		Male			Female		
		Garo	Khasi	Total	Garo	Khasi	Total
Yes	Count	12	8	20	6	10	16
	% within Tribe	54.5%	61.5%	57.1%	35.3%	45.5%	41.0%
No	Count	4	3	7	4	4	8
	% within Tribe	18.2%	23.1%	20.0%	23.5%	18.2%	20.5%
Not Sure	Count	6	2	8	7	8	15
	% within Tribe	27.3%	15.4%	22.9%	41.2%	36.4%	38.5%
Total	Count	22	13	35	17	22	39
	% within Tribe	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5 shows that 57.1% of the male and 41.0% of the female respondents believe that they can prosper within the same state. Majority of the young people, particularly the students feel that in spite of all the difference, they can live and prosper together, here too there is a positive feeling that both the

communities can live together in one state. However, men (57.1%) are more convinced of it than are women. That can become a divisive factor because women are the main socialisers of children. If most of them are not convinced of this need, the process of the two coming together may not get the importance it deserves.

Table 6: Do You Think that the Reservation Policy has Created Tension?

		Male			Female		
		Garo	Khasi	Total	Garo	Khasi	Total
Yes	Count	17	13	30	11	17	28
	% within Tribe	77.3%	100.0%	85.7%	64.7%	77.3%	71.8%
No	Count	2		2	2	4	6
	% within Tribe	9.1%		5.7%	11.8%	18.2%	15.4%
Not Sure	Count	3		3	4	1	5
	% within Tribe	13.6%		8.6%	23.5%	4.5%	12.8%
Total	Count	22	13	35	17	22	39
	% within Tribe	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Source of Tension							
After hearing from a majority that they would like to live together within the same State, we explored the causes of tension once again. Both the tribes attribute it to the reservation policy but from two							



different perspectives. So we asked them whether the jobs and seats in educational institutions should be reserved according to the population of each community.

Table 7: Do You Think that Geographical Diversity is a Major Problem?

			Garos	Khasis	Total
Yes	Designation	Student	64.3%	50.0%	59.1%
		Working	20.0%	68.8%	50.0%
		Others	0	100.0%	66.7%
		Group Total	51.3%	61.8%	56.2%
No	Designation	Student	21.4%	18.8%	20.5%
		Working	70.0%	25.0%	42.3%
		Others	100.0%	0	33.3%
		Group Total	35.9%	20.6%	28.8%
Not Sure	Designation	Student	14.3%	31.3%	20.5%
		Working	10.0%	6.3%	7.7%
		Others	0	0	0
		Group Total	12.8%	17.6%	15.1%

More Khasis (85%) than Garos (70%) agree that the reservation policy has caused tension. In fact, 100% Khasi males and 71.8% Garo males give this as the main source of tension. More Khasi youth (68.8% Students and working) than Garos (40%) say that cultural diversity is one of the major factors in the tension. However, the Garo students give greater importance to geographical diversity since they have often to travel a long distance to Shillong where most entrance and other exams and job related interviews are held. Some Khasi working young persons say that geographical diversity is a source of tension because those who are posted in the Garo Hills find it difficult to bear the weather. 64.3% of the Garos and 50% of the Khasi students find a problem in geographical diversity, so do 68.8% of the Khasis and 20% of the Garo working youth (Table 7).

What creates a problem is not cultural diversity as such but its consciousness. In order to test this hypothesis, we asked the respondents whether they felt that cultural consciousness divides them from the other tribes. Table 8 shows that 73.3% of the Khasis and 55.2% of the Garo students feel that it is not primarily cultural diversity but greater consciousness of it in the two tribes that creates stress and anxiety. 70% of the Garo and 18.8% of the Khasi working youth think the same. The big difference of opinion between the students and the working youth could be because the students have to mix more with people in different parts of the state than the working group does.

Table 8: Do You Think that Cultural consciousness Creates Tension?

			Garos	Khasis	Total
Yes	Designation	Student	55.2%	73.3%	61.4%
		Working	70.0%	18.8%	38.5%
		Others	0	0	0
		Group Total	57.5%	42.4%	50.7%
No	Designation	Student	13.8%	0	9.1%
		Working	20.0%	31.3%	26.9%
		Others	100.0%	0	33.3%
		Group Total	17.5%	15.2%	16.4%
Not Sure	Designation	Student	31.0%	26.7%	29.5%
		Working	10.0%	50.0%	34.6%
		Others	0	100.0%	66.7%
		Group Total	25.0%	42.4%	32.9%

What is said of cultural consciousness is equally true of political consciousness. In other words, it is not culture or political awareness that creates problem but the exclusive nature of consciousness. 78.8% of the Khasis and 65% of the Garos say that political consciousness creates stress and anxiety. The reasons may be that the Khasis are more politically conscious

than the Garos. In fact, during group discussion many Garos said that they have not been able to go forward mainly because of political awareness and a strong front for progress (Table 9).

Table 9: Does Political Consciousness Create Stress?

			Garos	Khasis	Total
Yes	Designation	Student	62.1%	81.3%	68.9%
		Working	70.0%	75.0%	73.1%
		Other	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
No	Designation	Group Total	65.0%	78.8%	71.2%
		Student	3.4%	0	2.2%
		Working	20.0%	6.3%	11.5%
		Other	0	0	0
Not Sure	Designation	Group Total	7.5%	3.0%	5.5%
		Student	34.5%	18.8%	28.9%
		Working	10.0%	18.8%	15.4%
		Other	0	0	0
		Group Total	27.5%	18.2%	23.3%

The answers to the next question on whether successive governments have been partial to one or the other tribe are not different from what has already been reported in chapter 7. So we shall not repeat them here or give a Table. Suffice it to state that 62.1 % of the Garo and 25% of the Khasi respondents feel that the Government has been partial to one or to the other community. Partiality of governments to people sharing different cultural traits is not unusual and that comes out in the responses. However, a bigger number of Garos than Khasis feel that the successive governments have been partial. In that sense, this response too seems to continue the feeling of deprivation that one has noticed among the Garos in the answers that have preceded. Besides, more Garo (71.4%) than Khasi (46.2%) males speak of this environment

of discrimination. However, only 35.9% of the female respondents i.e. 52.9% of the Garo and 22.7% of the Khasi agree with it. It may be because many women are more open to relations with others than are men. It may also be continuation of what has been said in the last chapter about them being less analytical in their responses or possibly a combination of these two.

Teachers are another group that can make a difference in a peace process. In this case more Garos (72.4%) than Khasi students (50%) feel that the Garo teachers are unbiased toward the Khasis. Not surprisingly, as many as 62.5% of the Khasis stated that the Khasi teachers are not biased against the Garos against only 17.2% of the Garos who said that they were not biased. On the other side, only 6.8% of the Khasis felt that Khasi teachers were biased against a little over 15% of the Garos. Thus, the Khasis seem to be more dissatisfied in this respect about the Garos than the Garos are about the Khasis. By and large one gets the impression that both trust their teachers whatever tribe they belong to. That is a good opening for peace building.

Also the response to the question on whether the two tribes had stereotypes attitudes to what one has seen in the last chapter. So the Tables will not be repeated here. Suffice it to state that more Khasis (55.9%) than Garos (40%) feel that the Garos have stereotyped attitudes towards the Khasis. Similarly, more Khasis (50%) than Garos (42.5%) feel that the Khasis have a stereotyped attitude towards the Garos. One is often told that women are protectors of the culture of a tribe, as such polarisation is greater at their level. However, 46.2% of the Khasi and 31.8% of the Garo males feel that the Khasis have a stereotyped attitude about the Garos. This statement was made by only 25.6% of the Garo and 28.2% of the Khasi female respondents. The opposite is the case when it comes to Garo stereotyped attitudes towards the Khasis. 40.9% of the Garo and 23.1% of the Khasi males feel that the Garos have such an attitude. However, only 29.4% of the Garo and 13.6% of the Khasi female respondents feel that the Garos have such

an attitude towards the Khasis. Thus, a fairly big number speaks of a stereotyped attitude but their number is not as big as that of persons who disagree with it.

**Table 10: Do the Media Reinforce Stereotypes about Khasis and Garos?**

		Garos	Khasis	Total
Yes	Students	25.0%	20.0%	23.3%
	Working	40.0%	56.3%	50.0%
	Others	0	100.0%	66.7%
	Group Total	28.2%	42.4%	34.7%
No	Students	50.0%	13.3%	37.2%
	Working	40.0%	18.8%	26.9%
	Others	0	0	0
	Group Total	46.2%	15.2%	31.9%
Not Sure	Students	25.0%	66.7%	39.5%
	Working	20.0%	25.0%	23.1%
	Others	100.0%	0	33.3%
	Group Total	25.6%	42.4%	33.3%

Chapter 7 shows that the Media that can be a uniting factor often becomes divisive and reinforces the stereotypes about one another. So we questioned the respondents once again on the same issue. Table 10 shows that more Khasis (42.4%) than Garos (28.2%) feel that the media reenforces stereotypes.

**Table 11: Do you feel that Church Leaders Have Tried to Improve Relations?**

Female Male  
Tribe Tribe

[illegible]

the gap between the Khasis and Garos. More Khasis (64.7%) than Garos (57.5%) feel that the church leaders have tried to build a better relationship between them. 71.8% of the female respondents felt that the church has tried to improve the relations between the two tribes (Table11).

Table 12: How do you define the relationship between Khasis and Garos (cross tabulation)

		Male			Female		
		Garos	Khasi	Total	Garos	Khasi	Total
Cordial	Count	10	21	2	7	8	15
	% within Tribe	47.6%	15.4%	35.3%	41.2%	36.4%	38.5%
Indifferent	Count	3	2	5	3	9	12
	% within Tribe	14.3%	15.4%	14.7%	17.6%	40.9%	30.8%
Suspicious	Count	8	9	17	7	5	12
	% within Tribe	38.1%	69.2%	50.0%	41.2%	22.7%	30.8%
Total	Count	21	13	34	17	22	39
	% within Tribe	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Also responses to the question on whether if a capable person from another tribe is available they would be ready to allow that person to fill the vacancy if a person from their own tribe is not available to fill a post reserved for it. More Khasis (93.3%) than Garos (70.8%) say that they would choose to work with one capable from another community. Though the Garos are fewer than the Khasis, they are							

more than two thirds of the respondents. That is a hopeful sign that the crucial issue of reservations can be dealt with through negotiations. Despite all the apprehensions and tension between the two communities, the Khasi and Garo respondents are willing to work with a ‘capable’ person from the other community. The Khasis seem to be more open to the idea because the sense of deprivation is less among them than among the Garos. In spite of it, more than 70% of the Garos are open to it.

Then came the final question on the Garo-Khasi relations. The responses are not much different from what one has seen in the last chapter. 46% of the Garos and 29% of the Khasis feel that the relations are cordial against 15.4% and 32.4% respectively who feel that they are indifferent. However, the Table is given above in order to show the diffrence in male and female attitudes. Unlike in other issues, the male-female difference on this question is minimal. 35.3% of the males and 38.5% of the females feel that they are cordial. However, more Garo (47.6%) than Khasi (15.4%) males feel that the relationship is cordial against 40.9% and 17.6% Khasi and Garo females. Thus, more Garo than Khasi seem to think that the relationship is cordial. Both also have a big number that is suspicious of each other. There are more males (50%) than females (30%) in this category.

Summary of Findings and Suggestions

An aspect that stands out of the above data is that the Garo-Khasi tension is more political than social. Cultural consciousness adds to it but political vested interests exploit the sense of resentment in both the tribes to their own advantage. The reservation policy is the source of resentment among the Khasi while the feeling of deprivation is the main source of tension among the Garo. This feeling makes the Garo demand Greater Garo Land. That causes more resentment among the Khasis who feel threatened by the demand that the Garo inhabited areas in the Khasi Hills be included in GGL. The inferiority and superiority complexes add to the sense of discrimination or resentment. However, with all the tension, apprehension and fear most respondents of both the groups feel

that the Garo-Khasi relations are either cordial or can become such. In order to search for a solution based on this attitude, the findings of the study are presented through the Do No Harm (DNH) framework, which identifies the people, the main problems and the processes involved in the tension.

### **The People Involved**

The people involved in this tension are the Khasi (KSU) and Garo (GSU) student leaders, the militant groups ANVC and HNVC and the political parties. The reservation policy was raised by the KSU that demanded its revision. The GSU opposed this demand. Thus, the reservation policy has been the bone of contention between the Khasis and the Garos. The feeling of discrimination and disparity adds to this tension. The political parties use the Garo-Khasi tension to gain political mileage by blaming each other and increasing the conflict.

One can add that the reservation policy that led to the Garo-Khasi tension is itself a political problem. The demand for Greater Garo Land adds to it because geographically, the boundary between the Garo Hills and Khasi Hills is not well demarcated. Socially there is lack of trust and understanding between the two communities and psychologically there is a feeling of fear and suspicion of each other. Many Khasis accept the idea of a separate Garo State in the present Meghalaya State but not GGL. On the other side, a majority of the respondents feel that the two tribes can live together and develop in the same State. In other words, the tension on this point has not reached the point of no return. The conflict is much greater around the reservation policy. In order to understand a possible way out of this tension, we shall not study the dividers and connectors.

### **The dividers and Connectors**

The issues of the Reservation Policy and the demand for Greater Garo Land are the main dividers between the Garos and the Khasis. To it should be added the suspicion of each other, the stereotypes,

cultural differences and languages, all of them exploited by the political vested interests.

That takes one to the connectors. Principal among them are the institutions and organisations such as the Church, schools, colleges and women's organisations that bring members of both the tribes together at the functional level. They can function as connectors in the Garo-Khasi tension. The Church is an important organisation that has served both the communities for a fairly long time and the study shows that most members of these two tribes have faith in its leaders and institutions. Children and youth from both the communities go to the same schools and colleges. With some effort a common bond can develop among them as it did among the Naga tribes in the early 20th century. It resulted in the growth of a common Naga identity.

The Garos and the Khasis have worked together for the statehood of Meghalaya. They have thus created a stake in the hill State. Differences have arisen after its creation because of the need for the economic and other benefits accruing from its creation. Because of this common foundation, a majority of the youth, particularly students feel that in spite of all the differences they can live and prosper together.

### **Suggestions for intervention**

Peace building programme for the Khasis and the Garos have to be based on the foundation of these connectors. At the micro level, it would be appropriate to have political awareness programmes, seminars, peace rallies, peace education for the student leaders, the youth and the women. A new leadership among them committed to peace can work against manipulation by those with a vested interest in division among them. At the macro level, the state government can introduce peace education in schools and colleges. It is equally important to decentralise the educational resources. There is also a need to evaluate all government policies and programmes regularly.

The Church is another organisation whom most members of both the tribes trust. In order to play its role as a peace maker, the

Church needs to be more sensitive to the present scenario and take steps to help in improving the Garo-Khasi relations. Its service can reduce the gap between the Garos and the Khasis. The Churches can also train teacher to impart the values of peace based on justice, thus re-enforcing the constructive attitudes among the persons from the two tribes who want to find common development within the same State. The Church is also a platform that can facilitate dialogue between the leaders of the two tribes on one side and between the government and pressure groups on the other. Issues around the Reservation policy need to be solved through compromises that the Churches can facilitate. They can get the cooperation of the NGOs in promoting healthier relationship and in restoring peace.

All the Table show that women can play a major role in peace building. As mothers and custodians of religion and property they are also the socialisers of their children. They need to be helped to develop an analytical mind on these issues in order to help their children and peers to develop new attitudes that can be helpful in peace building. In order to ensure it her status as the protector of the tribes values need to strengthened while adding to it the type of decision-making power in their society that can give her the status required for negotiations for peace building. Today she is no longer regarded just as a kinswoman or a clan-woman. Her status is dependent on her own social position and that of her husband. The formation of the State Women's Commission shows that the State is feeling the pressure from women for equality. The response to this pressure was limited but one needs to build on it by building up similar pressure on their societies for social and political equality.

## Conclusion

Meghalaya is one of the less troubled states in the Northeast. Despite its rich natural resources it suffers from economic stagnation which accentuates its socio-political and ethnic problems. The state has diverse ethnic and cultural groups, each with its own traditional cultural systems. But they are in conflict today. They have had traditional indigenous knowledge and practices of conflict

management. But these systems have not been used in the present Garo-Khasi conflict. The main issue around which tension exists have been identified as the Reservation Policy. The demand for Greater Garo Land adds to the tension that is accentuated by suspicion and stereotypes about each other.

Only a few of them are areas of real conflict. At present there is tension around other issues as such they have a potential for conflicts. The common people particularly women groups feel that in most cases the problem is still dormant. While the conflict can be avoided, many of them do not want to intervene for the fear of disrupting the equilibrium. But it is clear that the youth feel that the tension is growing between these two tribes. The DNH analytical framework has helped in identifying the people involved and the process of their involvement. It also shows that the Garo-Khasi tension is a major challenge in Meghalaya today. There is a need to search for a constructive intervention to avoid violence. The State, the Church groups, women's organisations and NGOs have to come together to accept the responsibility of finding a solution to the problem that can lead to peace based on justice.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Bareh, H., *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1985.
- Chacko, P.M., *Matriliny in Meghalaya : Tradition and Change*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 1998.
- Chattopadya, S.K., *Tribal Institutions of Meghalaya*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1985.
- Danda, A.K., *Ethnicity in India-Tribal Studies of India Series T144*, Mital Publications, New Delhi, 1991.
- Dasgupta, P.K., *Life and Culture of Matrilineal Tribe of Meghalaya*, Inter India Publications, New Delhi, 1984.
- Gurdon, P.R.T., *The Khasis*, Low Price Publication, Delhi, 1966.

- Kusum and P.M. Bakshi, *Customary Law and Justice in the Tribal Areas of Meghalaya*, M.N. Tripathi Pvt. Ltd, Bombay, 1982.
- Kyndiah, P.R., *Khasis : Yesterday and Today. Meghalaya : Yesterday and Today*, Han-Anand Pub, New Delhi, 1990.
- Malngiang, P, *Students and Politics in Meghalaya*, Seven Huts Enterprise, Shillong, 1979.
- Shreeranjana, *Perspectives on Development in Meghalaya*, State Institute of Rural Development, Meghalaya, 2001.
- Singh, K.S., *People of India-People of Meghalaya, Vol. XXXII*, Seagull Publications, Calcutta, 1994.
- Syiemlieh, P.B., *The Khasis and Their Matrilineal System*, Ri Khasi Press, Shillong, 1994.
- Varghese, B.G., *India's Northeast Resurgent*, Konark Publications, New Delhi, 1996.
- Yogi, A.K., *Development of the Northeast Region, Problems and Prospects*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1991.

The Northeast is known in the rest of India only as a region of conflict. That there is violence in the region is beyond doubt but that is not its only identity. The State views the conflicts only as a law and order issue. The authors of papers in the present book try to find out whether it is only a law and order issue or more than that. These case studies done by students and other beginners are an effort to identify the causes of the conflicts and possible solutions to them. The region experiences both nationalist and ethnic conflicts. Though some communities studied here get the support of nationalist militant organisations, the focus in this book is on ethnic conflicts. Some of them are around land and other are for protection of identity or culture. Though one of these issues predominates in each conflict, most of them combine them into one. As a result, nationalist, cultural and political demands merge in them. An understanding of these issues is required in order to find solutions to the conflicts that the region faces.

North Eastern Social Research Centre

110 Kharghuli Road

Guwahati - 781 004

Assam

Ph: +91 361 2602619

E-mail: nescr1@sancharnet.in

Price:

INR 200

USD 20.00

Euro 10

Cover Design: Nazimuddin Ahmed