

Framing the Tribal: Ethnic Violence in North East India

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Abstract:

The topic assesses the framing of “ethnic conflict in NE India, Focusing on militant groups and insurgency in the hill areas of Assam and a form of political violence known locally as “ethnic clashes”. The topic argues that ethnic clashes have become an institutionalized form of armed violence in the region while “ethnic rivalry is a key diagnostic frame for conflict. As enactments and imaginaries of institutionalized violence “ethnic clashes” are a product of factors that hold stakes in representing armed political violence as a result of ethnic conflict between rivaling tribal communities. The topic looks at the representation of causes of conflicts as well as the framing of acts of violence as key sites of consternation and thus as integral aspects of the conflict. The raises questions about the feasibility of scholarly efforts to make sense of specific cases of conflict.

Keywords: Assam, ethnic conflict, tribal, ethno-politics, armed violence, militancy, insurgency.

Introduction

The Northeast region of India comprising of eight States-Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim-a region poorly connected to the Indian mainland by a small corridor and surrounded by many countries such as Bhutan, Myanmar, Bangladesh and China, is the setting for a multitude of conflict that undermine the idea of India as a prosperous and functioning democracy. In terms of geographical size, Northeast India constitute about 8% of the total India's size and is roughly $\frac{3}{4}$ th the size of the state of Maharashtra.. Northeast India's Population is approximately 40 million (2011 census report), which represents 3.1% of the total Indian Population (1,210 million). However, since independence, in Northeast region of India formed lots of insurgency groups for fighting their constitutional rights as well as social and economics upliftment amongst the tribal communities. Hence I would like to bring few of such groups which has been leading violent of entire different communities and indigenous peoples of the region. The Naga insurgence which started in the 1950 known as the mother of the Northeast insurgencies is one of the oldest unresolved armed conflicts in the world. In Manipur, Assam, Nagaland and Tripura have witnessed scales of conflict that could at least between 1990 and 2000 be characterized as low intensity conflicts. Even, it must also be mentioned that internal conflicts have been a permanent feature of the Asian political landscape since 1945, of which post-colonial India is no exception. Currently most of the states in the region are affected by some form of conflict expect for Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Sikkim in which the situation is at the moment relatively stable. The reasons for the respective conflicts are wide ranging from separatist movements, to inter-community, communal and inter-ethnic conflicts. The conflicts and insurgences has been an all

pervasive phenomena and in its violent form in the region. It has not only affected the territorial and political sovereignty of the India state, but also the life of the various people living in the region in incomprehensible and inexplicable terms. However, amidst the widespread sense of helplessness, there is also an overwhelming desire and force to be free from such a situation of conflict which cripples the people from all sides.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of this paper are to simply historical evaluating the ethno-politics, constructing non-state armies, ethnic clashes of north east region of India which are created the ethnic violence.

Methodology:

Here, descriptive and analytical method has been used and required information are collected from secondary sources such as books, journals, newspapers etc.

Discussion

Ethno-politics in N.E Region of India-

Most accounts of the ethno-politics in Northeast India set out from a description of the region's ethnic diversity, often referring to the numerous tribes inhabiting the area, speaking hundreds of different languages. Historian describes the Assamese language movement as an important source of Assamese nationalism, drawing on the same ideologies that inspired the Indian decolonization struggle. After Independence, failed negotiations on the incorporation of the Naga Hills in to the Indian union led by the Naga National council to assert the sovereignty of Nagaland. After years of armed violence, the state of Nagaland was finally carved out of Assam in 1963 in an attempt to address the intractable demand for Naga self rule. The success of the Naga in achieving their own state set a powerful example, motivating other groups to make their own territorial demands. After the state of Meghalaya was formed in 1972, several new administrative units were set up as a result of negotiations with armed groups, including Mizoram in 1987 and the Bodoland Territorial Council in 2003(based on a settlement with Bodo Liberation Tiger Force). Despite these settlements, militancy continued throughout most of these areas, with new groups or factions often emerging as spoilers. Due to as regulated by the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution, district councils have been given extensive powers of legislation and administration of justice, powers to establish primary schools, assess and collect land revenue and impose taxes, issue leases for prospecting for minerals and make regulation for the control of money-lending and trading by non-tribals. The view of Northeast India as a site of "Ethnic conflict" has become the standard frame employed by researchers, commonly used also among local analysts. As such, it seems that the selective struggle with the state, claim of national identity by an ethnic community and its politics of difference have to be filled with event of violence.

Constructing non-State 'armies':-

Northeast India is a heavily militarized region. The region's history of armed insurgency started in the 1950s in the Naga Hills, where an increasingly local demand for an Independent Nagaland was spreader by the Naga National Council. In 1956, after carrying out a plebiscite on independence, the NNC announced that it had established a Naga Federal Government and a Naga Federal Army.

Government of India subsequently launched massive military operations and took direct control over the

Naga Hills. Armed conflict soon spread into Manipur and the neighbouring hill districts of Assam, and in 1958 these were all declared 'disturbed areas' under the newly promulgated Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) , Special power Act, 1958 (AFSPA). After formation of the state of Nagaland in 1963, NNC was eventually challenged on its championship of Naga independence. The National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN) was formed in 1980 by Isak Chisi Swu, Thuingaleng Muivah and S.S. Khaplang. In 1988, disagreement within the leadership led to a split in the organization and the formation of two factions: NSCN (K) and NSCN (IM). In the 1980s, the Assamese nationalist cause was also militarized, after the founding of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). In Manipur, the United National Liberation Front (UNLF) is fighting to throw off what they perceive as colonial rule of India. The Indian army is like an 'army of occupation' conflicts and violence particularly in Manipur is rooted in the poor treatment of the Manipuris (Meiteis) at the time of independence and the later accession of the kingdom to the Union of India. The general feeling is that, Manipur was not given a decent treat in the deal. Therefore the ultimate demand is for abrogating the accession of Manipur to the Indian Union. Despite their many differences, Northeast India's militant groups have all been formed around demands for sovereign nationhood, independence, or autonomous homelands, while their territorial demands often overlap, such differences can usually be ignored as long as groups maintain strategic alliances, Inter-group violence is more often related to disputes over economic stakes in taxation, rivalry between armed groups, and factional fighting, kidnapping for ransom, extortion, political abductions and killings, and violent enforcement of general strikes are some of the methods used by militant groups to make their presence felt. Another armed revolutionary wing in the name and style of Dima Halam Daogah (DHD) was soon reconstituted with youths newly recruited and remaining non-surrendered DNSF cadres. It looks up armed movement and pressed the government in support of the Dimaraji demand.

There are so many ethnic groups in Northeast India, who has been demanded for their separate statehood as well as territorial council. Such as NSCN (IM), DHD, DNSF, ULFA, NDF, BLT, KLO etc.

Ethnic clashes:-

Ethnic clashes are the key problems of violence and emerging of insurgency in Northeast region of India. Since the fifth last decade, the Northeast region of India has been suffering missives violence amongst the States and amongst the different communities of the region, as a result, the social lives as well as economics positions is becoming degraded. Anyway, hence I would like to focuses some such clashes which are always our mind. In 2003 after ceasefire violence in NC hills was widely described as an 'ethnic clash between Dimasas and Hmars'. In that violence several militant groups were engaged i.e, DHD and HPC-D as key actor. Another so-called 'ethnic clash' this time involving Dimasas and Karbi took place in Karbi Anglong in September-October 2005. The violence began with the killing of three Dimasas rickshaw drivers who were killed with sharp weapons in a forest near a Karbi village. The assailants were never identified. After several more case of abduction and killing an assault on the Karbi passengers of two public buses and a series of raids on Dimasas and Karbi villages left more than 90 people dead and 45,000 people taking shelter in relief camps. After the assaults on the buses, the police enforced a curfew and issued a shoot on sight order. Yet another 'ethnic clash' took place in NC hills in 2009, beginning with the killing of ZEME Naga villagers by Black window cadres who had entered a villager were asking for food. The militants unexpectedly opened fire as the villagers were preparing a chicken. In another Zeme Nga village, several people were lined up and shot dead. As in the

earlier cases, the violence involved a series of raids on villages in which houses were torched and any remaining people killed. These events were again framed as an ‘ethnic clash’ this time between Dimasas and Zeme Naga. Whereas the violence in the hills received surprisingly little press coverage, other events were making the headlines. But later on, subsequently protested by civil society groups including the Zeme Naga council and the Indigenous people’s Forum ‘Ethnic conflict was evidently set to continue. In Manipur, though the issue of ethnic conflicts are not found in its history but with the rising of the various outfits both in the valley and the hills, ethnic clashes over conflicting interest has increased in the state. It resulted to death of nearly a thousand people and an enormous loss of property. In Assam, the consent for ethnic conflict got nourished in 1979 primarily when the middle class people headed by the “All Assam Student Union” started protesting against the illegal migration from Bangladesh and was later joined by the ULFA, attacking the Bangladeshis settling in the state. During the last three decades, Assam has witnessed five major ethnic conflicts. These are between the Bodos and Santhals in 1993, 1996 and 1998, between Karbi and Kukis in 2003 and between the Karbi and Dimasas in 2005.

Conclusion

Thus, in North east India, the routine framing of armed violence as ‘ethnic’ is linked closely to the construction of organized armed violence as ‘ethnic clashes’. During the last decades, the media and local authorities have reported so consistently on ‘ethnic clashes’ in hill areas that the term is now virtually taken for granted. Now, we can assert that ‘ethnic clashes’ in Northeast region of India have become institutionalized forms of political violence, in which violence is constructed as ‘ethnic’ by media, law enforcement agencies, members of judiciary and other authorities, as well as ordinary citizens who know that the label ‘ethnic violence’ fits into the least controversial frame of understanding. The perpetrator is no doubt guilty of murder and arson. However, ‘ethnic clashes’ are not produced by physical acts of violence alone. As violent imaginaries, they are as much a product of actors who hold stakes in representing the ‘outbreak’ of violence as result of ‘ethnic conflict’ between rivaling and violent tribal communities. As we have seen, the ethnic conflict in Assam is geared to preserve their distinct identity, their culture, language, and religion. Since independence, there has been a tendency of assimilation rather than respect the diversity. Can violence achieve what these groups want to achieve? Is it a legitimate means to protect and preserve their identity? These are relevant questions at this juncture. The seeds of violence that has been planted by the oppressor never dies, but it comes to life and it takes its own time. And in the fullness of time there will be series of violence on both sides. Today, peoples in the Northeast in general are fed up with violence. There is a cry for peace. They want to live in peace. Violence can never be a means of peace in long run.

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