

# ETHNIC CONFLICTS IN ASSAM

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## **Abstract:**

*Conflicts can be of various types. Its ranges are very wide including cultural conflict, ethnic conflict, conflict of interest, organizational conflict, workplace conflict etc. Out of these ethnic conflicts are of prime interest to the researchers. After the two world wars more people have been killed in these fights for ethnicity. The term 'Ethnicity' as used today arose in the mid-20th century replacing the terminology of 'races' or 'nations' used for the concept in the 19th century. Regular warfare was formerly conceived as conflicts between nations, and only with the rise of multi ethnic societies did the concept of "ethnic conflict" arise as separate from generic wars. The North East India, more especially the state of Assam has become a 'melting point' of different cultural groups since antiquity and has given rise to composite culture which we know today as "Assamese Culture". Though there is the process of assimilation of different ethnic groups in the region yet another force is operating upon the same ethnic groups to maintain their distinctive forms. In the recent years the second force is gradually gaining its momentum and different ethnic groups once merged to form a united force are trying to re-establish their original identity even by being hostile to other groups. In this paper the writer intends to explore the nature of the ethnic conflicts in NE India particularly Assam.*

**Keywords:** Causes, Conflicts, Ethnicity, Ethnic Movements

## **Introduction:**

The history of international politics has been marked by ethnic conflicts. Ethnic conflicts are still the most prevalent type of armed conflict in the world. Recent examples include ethnic conflicts such as the ethnic war in Somalia, the Kurdish fight for independence in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, guerrilla warfare in El Salvador and Nicaragua, and the uprising in Chechnya, to mention a few. A conflict between ethnic groups is any instance of protracted violent conflict in which national, ethnic, religious, or other communal minorities engage in opposition to governments in order to bring about significant changes in their status.

Ethnic conflicts may be divided into three categories- Inter Communal Violence, Ethnic Rebellion, and Civil Rights Conflict. The first and second categories prioritize applying pressure to the government. The main request in Civil Rights disputes may be for the government to change or become more inclusive. The goal of full-scale Revolts is typically either to completely replace the government (civil war) or to establish a separate state for an ethnic minority group (secessionism). Members of different ethnic groups are the direct targets of violence in Inter-Communal Violence, not the government. The government in these conflicts may be a neutral spectator, police officer, or arbitrator, or it may side with one party or the other.

The causes of ethnic conflicts are the subject of numerous theories and extensive research endeavors. According to a group of researchers, the ethnic conflict is the product of globalization bringing different cultures into contact with one another, which eventually leads to a clash of civilizations. A different school of thought posits that ethnic conflict is related to the availability of natural resources. According to this theory, a nation state is far more susceptible to internal conflict when it is reliant on key commodities like agricultural products and natural resources on others. Greed or

complaints that one group is disproportionately disadvantaged by another in terms of access to natural resources are the root causes of conflict, which is defined as feelings of ethnic or political marginalization. The third line of study on ethnic disputes centers on the function of religion. The conclusion here is that religion is a fundamental component of contemporary social and political events and that it serves as a vital cornerstone of civilization. Religion plays a big role in ethnic conflicts because it provides a means of identifying with an ethnic group. Religious discrimination, religious legitimacy, religious institutions, religious complaints, and other variables play a significant role in ethnic conflicts. However, additional research suggests that ethnic conflicts are also greatly influenced by spatial dependency or contagion effects. It rests on the premise that actions in a geographic unit are somehow connected to and influenced by those in nearby regions. This idea can be used to ethnic disputes since negative repercussions from one neighboring nation-state might propagate to others, leading to intra-state conflict. Despite the apparent comprehensiveness of this kind of study on the roots of ethnic conflict, many unknowns remain.

### **Ethnic Conflicts around the World:**

The ethnic conflicts in Rwanda, which were primarily between the Tutsi minority and the Hutu majority, the South Sudan conflict of 2014, in which hundreds of people were murdered because of their ethnicity after South Sudanese rebels took control of the Oil Hub of Bentiu, the conflicts in Somalia, Lebanon, the Kurds in Iraq, Yugoslavia, Armenia, the Congo, Mali, etc., are all examples of ethnic conflicts that we must mention while discussing the topic. The socio-political realities of multiethnic nations like South Asia include this element of ethnicity. But on the other hand, ethnic disputes of varying degrees had been occurring across the South Asian area. In recent years, ethnic conflicts have been the most widespread type of collective violence worldwide. It refers to violent conflict between groups that disagree on the basis of their religion, culture, or linguistic traits. India and Sri Lanka have mostly focused on amplifying ethnic and cultural conflicts outside of this area.

Some researchers in the field, such as Darby and Mc Ginty, believe that there are five fundamental conditions necessary for effective conflict resolution. These include the protagonists' willingness to negotiate in good faith, the process's inclusiveness, addressing the underlying causes of the dispute, the negotiation's commitment to a continuous process, and the avoidance of the use of force by the protagonists to achieve their goals. Peter Wallenstein, a peace researcher, highlights two key elements that contribute to a long-lasting peace agreement. The first involves resolving the "distribution of power in society," that is, the involvement of all parties in the peace process, and the second involves ensuring the safety of those involved.

### **Ethnic Conflicts in North East India and Assam:**

Since ancient times, northeast India, notably the state of Assam, has served as a "melting point" for various cultural groups, giving rise to the composite culture that we now refer to as "Assamese Culture." In the area, there is the process of assimilating diverse ethnic groups, but another force is also at work on the same ethnic groups, attempting to preserve their unique identities. In recent years, the second force has been gaining ground steadily, and various ethnic groups that were previously united are now attempting to reassert their unique identity, even if it means being at odds with other groups.

The eight states of NE India have experienced a tumultuous period in recent years. In India, these states have been the site of between 200 and 430 tribal organizations. The area is now home to between 30 and 40 insurgent organizations. Ethnic disputes in Assam over territorial concerns, insurgency against the Indian government or separate homelands, and sectarian violence among Assamese and "foreigners" are some of the reasons that have caused the internal displacement of the population. In Assam, separatist movements have claimed the lives of at least 10,000

individuals over the past 25 years. The worst conflict occurred in the early 1990s between the Bodos and the Sauthals, which resulted in the expulsion of about 250,000 people. In 2005, thousands of Bengali Muslims were forced out of the area under suspicion of being illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Once more, in December 2005, some 111,000 individuals sought refuge in relief camps in Kokrajhar and Gossaigaon. The primary sites of violence in recent years have been Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills. This is the truth. On May 3rd, 2014, in the early hours of the morning, a wave of assaults against Bengali-speaking Muslims took place. Although the offenders are unknown, the National Democratic Front of Bodoland of the Songbijit group is thought to have been involved in this case. 32 people died in all.

An examination of the root causes of these conflicts reveals that both the Assam state government and the federal government in Delhi must share the blame for letting the violence get out of hand. The central government consistently ignores the problem due to its apathy and negligence, while the state government is often too slow to mobilize the security forces. A community in extreme poverty and lagging behind in all areas will consider its circumstances in light of the social, economic, and political progress that the other community has made over the course of time. Consequently, the underprivileged experiences jealousy and intolerance. This is occasionally aided by the past historicity. The ethnic war between the Zemi Nagas and the Dimasa Community in the N.C. Hills is one notable instance. It is also impossible to deny the participation of the third party, which is made up of certain leaders, in order to further their political goals. The 2005 Karbi-Kuki conflict serves as an illustration of this. In recent years, as Manipur was in turmoil, many Kukis had started relocating to Karbi Anglong in quest of a place to live. In exchange for money, several Karbi leaders had settled them in the more distant mountainous regions. Since the Kukis were hardworking farmers, they started practicing intensive farming and making significant profits. The young Karbis started collecting taxes from them while armed. The levy increased gradually until it was intolerable for the Kukis. After that, there was conflict that led to both sides murdering one another and setting fire to homes. These are just a few instances of Assam's ethnic conflicts. The reasons behind these conflicts are not always easy to comprehend. It is impossible for anyone who comes from another area of the nation to understand the circumstances in which they take place. Additionally, there might be underlying, undiscovered reasons. Social activists are perplexed and the intellectuals are irritated by these repeated conflicts. However, the truth is that the context in which ethnic conflicts occur must be taken into account when analyzing their underlying causes.

In addition to the ethnic disputes, Assam has recently seen a variety of ethnic movements, including those that promote identity, autonomy, and secessionism, as well as calls for independent statehood in some instances. As the underlying cause of these behaviors is a sense of discontent and rage, they deserve to be highlighted. This factor contributes significantly to ethnic disputes as well. Ethnic movements include the Tea Labour movement, the Chaudangs movement, the Hmars movement, the Dimasas movement, and, most notably, the language movement of the Mishings. The majority of these sectors of society are marginalized. Through these movements, they were able to express their economic, social, and political discontent. In addition to living in severe poverty and backwardness, these individuals are subjected to severe, offensive treatment from a society that encourages them to live apart. The international press occasionally refers to northeastern India as "India's Violent North East." This is an unfair term, given that the great majority of people in Northeast India do not support or want violence. It will be challenging to restore peace to a region that has seen decades of social turmoil. Therefore, it demands the participation and coordinated actions of people and communities.

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