Chapter V

Conclusion

Need of the Hour: Recognition or Redistribution

In the course of formulating principles to mitigate the problems of a multicultural society, scholars have confounded with one important question, 'is the existing policy of “recognition” adequate to resolve such crises?' This question is important for it encourages us to critically study various aspects of ethnocultural movements, before suggesting any normative institutional principles based on the kinds of demands made by different ethnic communities. There are two dominant views on the origin of such ethnic phenomena and means to extenuate the crises in multi-ethnic societies. The first view says that since inequality in society emanates from the cultural differences of diverse ethnic communities, there is a need to give due recognition to different ethnic minorities. The enlightenment's talk of universal rights remained oblivious to inequalities in gender, race, ethnicity, etc. Thus, the conception of equal citizenship embodied in equal rights needs to be supplemented by a set of culturally differentiated rights. This will create a more democratic and egalitarian society leading to perfection. Under the contemporary condition of cultural heterogeneity, 'classical' or 'difference blind' liberal principles fail to deliver on either 'liberty' or 'equality'; only by adopting the tenets of the 'politics of difference', it is said that we can hope to achieve real liberty and equality. Communitarians and, in particular, multiculturalists are the supporters of this view.

The second view does not see “inequality” in society as something necessarily turn out of diversity of cultural identities, rather it is a kind of payoff for unequal material possession. Accordingly, the struggle for recognition occurs where there are problems of aggravating material inequality for example, in incomes and property ownership, in access to paid work,

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1 For detail see first Chapter of this thesis.
education, healthcare, leisure time, etc. And this material inequality is worsening in most of the countries in the world. Thus, redistribution rather than recognition is the right means to deal with these problems. There are shared disadvantages among individuals such as unemployment, poverty, low-quality housing and inadequate public services. Diverting attention away from these disadvantages is an obvious long-term anti-egalitarian objective.

Understanding the Concepts
These two viewpoints are what we called "recognition" model and "redistribution" model respectively for promoting 'justice' in society. What is meant by redistribution is that remedies for socio-economic injustice, which is rooted in the political-economic structure of society. Some of the examples of such injustice are exploitation (having the fruits of one's labor appropriated for the benefit of others); economic marginalization (being confined to undesirable or poorly paid work or being denied access to income-generating labor altogether); and deprivation (being denied an adequate material standard of living). Thus, redistribution involves redistributing income, reorganizing the division of labor, subjecting investment to democratic decision-making or transforming the basic economic structures. As mentioned earlier, John Rawls' account of justice as fairness in the distribution of primary goods, Amartya Sen's view that justice requires ensuring that people have equal 'capabilities to function', and Ronald Dworkin's view of making ensured 'equality of

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2There are many definitions and general (as well as abstract) ideas on the concept of 'redistribution'. However, taking into consideration of the debate on whether redistribution is necessary for a satisfactory solution of the conflicts in multi-ethnic states, the explanation of the term by Nancy Frazer captures the essence of the idea on the subject. It is, therefore, I am reemphasizing her explanation of the concept of redistribution.

3John Rawls, 1971, *A theory of Justice*, Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press. Rawls' first principle of justice, which calls for equal civil and political rights, articulated classical ideal of liberal citizenship, while his second principle gave recognition to the demands of social and economic citizenship. The first part of his second principle set out a very strong conception of equality of opportunity, while the second part (the difference principle') made the justice of social and economic institutions depend on their making the worst-off socio-economic group in the society as well off as they could be made under any set of institutional arrangements.

resources[^5] are all example of conceptualizing the remedies of the socio-economic injustice through redistribution[^6].

Recognition, on the other hand, is remedy for cultural injustice. Systems or conduct that lead to cultural domination (being subjected to patterns of interpretation and communication that are associated with another culture and are alien and/or hostile to one’s own); non-recognition (being rendered invisible via the authoritative representational, communicative, and interpretative practices of one’s culture); and disrespect (being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and/or in everyday life interactions) are examples of cultural injustice. Some kind of cultural symbolic change may well redress such cultural injustice. This could involve upwardly revaluing disrespected identities and the cultural products of maligned groups. It could also involve recognizing and positive valorizing of cultural diversity. More radically still, it could involve the wholesale transformation of societal patterns of representation, interpretation and communication in ways that would change everybody’s sense of the self.[^7]

The above explanation is based on the existing theories (especially the one advanced by Nancy Frazer). Let me take this discussion little farther. Two very important ideals of democracy are ‘freedom’ and ‘capacity’. There are many conceptions of freedom, but I simply do mean by it the condition of being free; the power to act or speak or think without externally imposed restraints. However, this condition of ‘absence of restraints’ does not give individuals license to do whatever he or she likes. Because, they live in culturally structured world and thus, individuals are not merely atoms but community

[^6]: There are many other trajectories of discussion on ‘redistribution’. Some of the crucial questions surrounding the moral significance of redistribution are namely; can social practices that are commonly said to involve redistribution be justified? In what contexts and for what purposes it is permissible to adopt these practices? Does the fact that a social practice involves redistribution count for or against it, or does it lack basic moral significance? That means there are many other perspectives of looking at the concept of redistribution. However, my concern is not the conceptual analysis but it is the question that ‘can redistribution be a possible option to recognition for resolving ethnic crisis such as in Manipur’. Thus, I will concentrate on this question rather than conceptual analysis.
[^7]: Frazer, op.cit. 1995.
men. Freedom necessarily means doing or acting within the accepted norms of the community they belong to. This does not mean that men as individuals cannot do things in their own way. It means that individuals being community men shared many things in common with others and therefore, freedom means the ability of individuals to act in accordance with the accepted norm of the community. Freedom also involves, therefore, recognition of those accepted norms of the community. These accepted norms of community are what we can call the ‘cultural values’ of the community. There are many communities in the society with distinct cultural norms and values, and these cultural values should be given due recognition if we want to promote freedom in true sense of the term. For example, one should be allowed to speak in his or her mother tongue in order to communicate with other fellow individuals in the group; to decide whether to build a temple or not; to take food of his/her choice. Thus, a Christian has the freedom to go to church to offer prayer; a Muslim has the freedom to enjoy a meal with beef or any dish; or a group of Khasi has the freedom to communicate in their mother tongue ‘Khasi’; or a Hindu can have his marriage ceremony according to Hindu traditions, so and so forth. This shows the indispensable relationship between the actions of individuals and the cultural values of the community they belong to. Therefore, freedom of individual is very much to do with the recognition of the cultural values of the community he/she belongs to. As individuals live within culturally structure world, if these cultural values are not given due recognition the “freedom” of individual is hardly meaningful. This is because, as was said earlier, human beings are culturally embedded in the sense that they grow up in and dwell in societies which are culturally structured and also fashion their lives and social relations in terms of a culturally derived system of meaning and significance. Thus, culture becomes a very integral part of human life. It is when the cultural embeddedness of individuals is not given due recognition that problems in relationship between ethnic communities crop up. If the presence of minority, which are often outmaneuvered and outbid on issues that are really matter to them, has been largely overlooked in the preoccupation with
national culture/s that would provide homogeneity to the body politic, then it is not simply a case of 'misrecognition' but it is stripping of freedom. Thus, if a Tarao student,\(^8\) (who cannot claim the Schedule Tribe 'status' using his own tribe's name) is given the status of ST only by using a larger tribes name such as the Nagas, or the Kukis or the Lushai, it is simply a matter of stripping his freedom of being a Tarao. Thus, freedom is necessarily yoke with culture, and it would not be surprising to say that freedom involves treating people equally by granting special group rights for vulnerable minorities. So, recognition is the process of 'devising freedom'.

Now, let me come to the concept of 'capacity'. One should not confuse freedom with capacity, though they are closely related. Capacity has the force of resources. That means the capacity of an individual or group of individuals depends much on the availability of necessary resource. For instance, the inability of a swimmer to swim due to lack of resources (water or pool etc.) is not unfree to swim but lack of capacity to swim. This lack of resources may be because of the swimmer's inability to raise fund to construct a swimming pool (as he happens to be very a poor man, for instance), or short of required land for such a plan. Thus, enabling an individual to swim involves distributing or redistributing material resources. The grounds for such redistribution may or may not be necessarily cultural but material inequality is an important base. The rational for redistribution of material resources is that true justice will be gained when material inequality in the society is reduced in such a manner that all have capacity at least to pursue their desire vocation. Thus, redistribution of materials is that process of 'bolstering capacity'.

**Examining Redistributive Model of Justice**

True, justice is perhaps the most important virtue of society and vital for social harmony and stability. However, in a multi-ethnic society where there are conflicts between various cultural groups, where there are claims and counter

\(^8\) See Fourth Chapter for reference.
claims from a number of groups, what sort of model of justice do we need? Is it bolstering capacity of all individuals and groups, or is it devising freedom in terms of acknowledging (or rather recognizing) cultural root of individual (and groups) that we need to promote?

The proponents of redistributive model of justice, whom I will call redistributionist, often seek solace in the redistribution of wealth and material resources in the society. One may assume that the rationale behind the 'redistribution' model of justice is to reduce economic inequality in the society, and the hope that reduction in the material inequality will certainly lead to a more egalitarian society even limiting the scope of ethnic conflicts. It means that they try to locate justice in bolstering capacity. Now, one needs to analyze if this redistribution model can actually promote harmony and stability in multi-ethnic societies against the backdrop of the problems in Manipur and Meghalaya that was presented in chapters 3 and 4. There are many questions surrounding the 'right basis of redistribution' of wealth, economic resources, etc. in the society. Many of these concerns have not been addressed adequately by redistributionists. Some of these concerns are: in order to resolve crises in a multi-ethnic society such as Northeast, what goods are to be redistributed; is it to be wealth, power, respect or, some combination of these things; between what entities are they to be redistributed, that is, whose capacity to be bolstered, capacity of the individual members of society or groups? What is the proper basis of redistribution; meritocracy, according to social status, or according to need?

J.J. Rousseau was one of those few modern philosophers who acknowledged the risk of inequality in wealth possession. Even if he was a supporter of private property his proposal that "no citizen shall be rich enough

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9 It will be proper to mention here the communitarian critique of John Rawls, one of the finest supporters of Distributive justice. According to communitarians, ideas are derived from the society or community one belongs to. Hence, what should be the criterion of distribution of anything will obviously emerge out of this context. Since the "veil of ignorance" keeps individual out of a real social context, how the choice they make can ever be relevant in an actual social context. Thus, the distribution of goods cannot be decided without understanding the specific meanings of those goods which are socially constructed and embedded in the community, its practices and institutions rather than in individual deeds and thoughts.
to buy another and none so poor as to be forced to sell himself".10 is sufficient
evidence to say that the danger of social inequality is accredited. This principle
is in consistent with the modern idea of redistribution of wealth in the effort to
bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. However, it will not be wrong to
say that this principle is more to do with “reducing social inequalities than with
achieving any abstract goal of social equality”.11 In that sense, when modern
‘democrats’ advocate equality they are referring to the modest idea of
‘distributive equality’ rather than any radical goal of substantive equality.
Thus, they only recognize the desirability of material equality but miss to count
many other social realities such as cultural circumstances. The question in the
context of Northeast is that by merely pumping in huge amount of money can
we expect peace in the region? Will the kinds of demand the Nagas are calling
for be served by bolstering individual capacities of the Nagas? After having 40
per cent of job reservation exclusively, why do Garos still demand separation
from both the Khasis and the Jaintias? If we consider the genesis of conflict in
most of the Northeast states one can very safely conclude that it is not only the
lack of economic development and opportunities for the large majority of the
people that spark such movements. These movements are also fueled by the
idea of preserving unique indigenous identity. Just looking at some of the most
visible examples will confirm this fact. Even if there are much politics doing
around the so called “Naga movement” of the present day, in the beginning this
was purely based on the question of preserving Naga identity. Even before
independence, a section of Nagas made the point that they were never and
never wanted to be a part of India. They went to the extent of declaring Naga
Independence on August 14, 1947. While the independent existence of a small
Naga Nation – landlocked and with meager resources, is from an economic
viewpoint, unviable, they were ready to fight for their cause. The case of
Tripura is also one of the issues of preserving identity. Large numbers of

10Cited in Richard Bellamy, 1993, Theories and Concepts of Politics: An Introduction, Manchester University
11See Bellamy, ibid,
refugees from East Bengal, soon after partition, came in the state, push the locals, mostly tribal to the hills and transformed them into being a minority in their own homeland. This can hardly be accepted to the Tripuris.\textsuperscript{12}

From the analyses in chapters 3 and 4 it would not be wrong to say that one cannot implant ‘justice’ in a multi-ethnic society by merely bolstering capacity of individuals or groups only, that is to say by redistributive model only. It is true that the economic development and ethnic conflict are linked problems. However, in the context of the Northeast, it will be wrong to say that economic development would inevitably reduce the potential for violent ethnic conflict. The hope that growth would be rapid and the resulting benefits diffused through all levels of society will hardly work here.\textsuperscript{14} Even in developing nations that did well economically, economic benefits did not diffuse to all segments of society or all regions. This leads some ethnically diverse states such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Sri Lanka to implement preferential policies that benefited some groups or regions disproportionately. Sometimes, disagreements over the fruits of development made the accommodations necessary to sustain political order more difficult and contributed to outbreaks of violent conflict.

As mentioned in chapter 3, the major reason of the conflict between the local tribal population and the outsiders in Meghalaya is not only the fear of the former of being materially or economically exploited by the outsiders but also the fear of losing their cultural identity due to the influx of outsiders in the state. Even in the case of tensions between (and among) various ethnic groups in Meghalaya, one big causal factor is of cultural in nature. The conflict between the Khasi and the Jaintias, or between the Khasi-Jaintia combine and


\textsuperscript{13}By this term ‘justice’ I do mean not only fair treatment of all, but also an environment in which all the sections, individuals as well as groups live together with equal respect and rights. That it has the value of equality above all. But this equality does not mean equal distribution of goods and resources, material as well as cultural, devoid of any special consideration, or entirely based on merit, which is usually understood as some combination of talent and hard work.

\textsuperscript{14}This is against what proponents including both mainstream and Marxist development scholars had said. Not only in the Northeast but also in the late 1960s, rising ethnic tensions in many new nations, and full-blown ethnic civil wars in some, raised doubts over this contention.
the Garos may be somewhat an example of conflict over unequal distribution of wealth and resources (including job reservation). However, the issue of conflict between the Garos and the Khasis are more of cultural differences than the unequal distribution of wealth.

The combination of these two factors is also true in the case of Manipur too. Let me cite here one example each for these two factors. As evident from historical records it is beyond doubt that the Meetei Kings carried out frequent raids on different hill peoples and collected tribute from the tribal Chiefs who also made counter attacks on the Meetei Kings. The history of relationship of the Meetei with the neighboring hill tribes centered on the frequent wars fought between the Meetei Kings and the Chief of the hill tribes. However the Meetei Kings were always at the upper hand. Such a historical reality has paved the way for establishment of the conveners-convenored relationship between the Meeteis and the hill peoples. The memory of the economic exploitation of the Hills by the Meetei Kings is still an issue in inter-ethnic relation in Manipur. Now, one of the very interesting points that deserve a special mention is that even when it is clear that economic exploitation is one of the factors, the ethnic conflict cannot be resolved by merely providing new economic opportunities for the vulnerable tribes. This is because of the fact that this factor has been so intertwined with the idea of cultural distinctiveness that it is very hard to mark out features that can be resolved by the redistributive model. If one goes back to history again for a while, it is quite apparent that Kings in monarchical pasts exploited their subjects irrespective of caste, creed, and religion. Thus, Meetei Kings exploited not only people in the Hills but also their Meetei subjects in the valley. There are records of early Meetei Kings committing gravest misdeeds that even included changing the religion of the entire population in the valley by force and burning down all the sacred writings of the Meeteis. Even then these incidents were never used by anyone so as to become an issue of conflicts within the Meeteis. This clearly shows that difference in culture, traditions, language and even religion is an important factor in inter-community relationship in Manipur.
However, when the Meeteis became the followers of the Vaisnavism, the framework of pollution-purity was slowly fabricated. In the process the alienation of the non-Hindu tribals took its roots. The tribes, who have embraced Christianity since the extension of colonial administration, also have alienated themselves from the Meeteis. This social gap resulted from the mutual alienation becomes wider with the metamorphosis of the colonial subjects into free citizens of independent India. Political democratization has its own share in stimulating primordial sentiments. This further shows that the cultural factors such as religion are important issues in inter-ethnic relations.

A more recent issue of inter-tribal tension borne out of religious differences pertains to the efforts of Rongmei community to preserve their traditional faith. Expressing concern over undue interference from other religious groups and attempt for forceful conversion of believers of Tingkao Rag-wang, general secretary of Chingmeirong Rongmei Pei Authority R Aholeng has pledged that the Pei Authority would try its level best in preservation and promotion of the indigenous religion, culture and tradition of the Rongmei people. Talking to media persons in this connection at Chingmeirong Kabui Village, Aholeng observed that disowning one's own religion, culture and tradition amounts to disowning one's own identity. So every possible effort should be made toward preservation of the cultural elements and tradition of the Rongmei community, he said, while appealing to all the people of Rongmei community to contribute their mite in this cause. Taking serious note of the undue influence of other religions, which he maintained, is posing a threat to the existing religion and cultural elements of the Rongmei people. Aholeng is apprehensive of a possible inter-religious conflict if such undue interferences are not stop in time. He also reminded to all concerned that even if the Indian Constitution allows any person to profess the religion of one's choice, any forceful conversion and luring people to convert is in contravene to the provisions of the Constitution as well as to the judgment of the Supreme Court in this regard, he explained. So along with embracing Tingkao Ragwang wholeheartedly, the Chingmeirong Rongmei Pei Authority would continue to
work for the preservation and the promotion of the religion and culture of the Rongmei people, he said.\textsuperscript{15}

It is quite unlikely that these issues of cultural diversity will be resolved by employing redistribution model of justice, that is, by bolstering capacity of individuals. Again, I need to mention here one important point that ethnic conflict and its reconciliation in India is perhaps more complex than any other democracy across the globe. As I have already mentioned that Indian State faces a “two-layered” conflict within its territory. On the one hand, we have a conflict between the homogenizing tendency of the nation-state and ethnic communities in different regions or states. Dealing with such problems is not that easy too. Because, there is a popular perception especially among the groups that the national leaders preferred to have remote control from New Delhi over the affairs in Northeast India rather than entrusting to the people of the region to look after themselves. This paternalistic outlook based on suspicion of the potentiality of secessionism resulted only in incurring the mutual suspicion from the people of the region that they have been treated merely as an appendage. Sometimes it is said that India’s policy of national integration in the context of Northeast India would have been more effective if she adopts the resolution of the Congress Objectives moved by Nehru on November 17, 1947: “Land with its minerals, and all other means of production as well as distribution and exchange must belong to and be regulated by the community in its own interest”.\textsuperscript{16} And this “interest” should be defined as “cultural necessity” of those communities. On the other hand, there is a contest among different ethnic communities. Now the question is how to find a strategy that can deal with the problem of conflict between the homogenizing tendency of the nation-state and ethnic communities in different regions or states, and also accommodate the claims of diverse communities.

\textsuperscript{15}See Sangai Express, 28 August, 2007.
What Multiculturalism Requires: The Need of the Hour

Developing a multicultural society based on equal respect and concern is not an easy task, yet it is need of the hour. Now it is clear that it is not only material inequality but also cultural injustice that causes crises in multi-ethnic societies. Therefore, besides measures of redistribution, measures that involve recognizing and positive valorizing of cultural diversity should also be adopted. However, it is also clear from the examination of the issues in Manipur and Meghalaya that existing politics of recognition based on the idea of self governance is also not adequate. The claims and counter-claims of various ethnic groups in Manipur not only create disharmony in the state but also is an indication of unequal relationship among the various ethnic groups, which resulted into various ethnic clashes. We need to remember the clashes between the Nagas and the Kukis (1992-1997), which lasted for nearly 5 years and claimed thousands of lives; skirmish between the Meeteis and the Pangals (1993); and between the Kukis and the Paites (1997-1998). All of these are not due to diversity but inequality with regard to rights, respect and concern. So creating an atmosphere of 'equality' is need of the hour.

A mere separation or division of the small territory will not yield the desired result because of the internal difference within each umbrella group. This is something we can learn from the experiences in Meghalaya. The territory (the state), which was earlier a part of composite state of Assam, was created to put in effect the demands for self government by three major hill tribes of the region viz, the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos. In this small state that came into existence as a result of the 'united struggle' of the three dominant indigenous communities, the attempt made to unite the communities of the whole state met with little success. Every single civil society groups (even student unions) have different standpoints. Most of them are organized along the ethnic lines. There are ideological clashes between these groups on various issues. Tussles on the job reservation policy of the state are perhaps the best example. This shows not only the overt differences between the Khasi-Jaintia and the Garos, it also demonstrates the discrepancy between the so-called
'brothers’, Khasi and Jaintias. Today these communities aspire for separating the state further on ethnic lines.

Even the provisions of Autonomous District Councils established under the Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution hardly offer any promise. One of the factors, besides various limitations mentioned in the previous chapters, that lead to the failure of ADCs is its foundation on territorial basis. Due to this territorial basis ADCs have not been able to protect the interest of each ethnic community within the area covered by District Councils. ADCs are more like miniature states within state. An ADC is established for a particular district, which means that it covers all the communities living in that particular district. A Major defect of such a system is that in terms of representation the bigger communities have the largest number of representatives thereby minimizing the chances of the smaller ones. There is no provision for separate representation for distinct communities. So, the issue of domination of one group (the bigger group) over the smaller ones is still persisting. Now, the question is that why do the institutional arrangements in the state take into consideration only those numerically larger groups sidelining the smaller ones. This is the major factor that led to the division of Khasi-Jaintia Hills ADC into two separate ADCs namely, KHADC and JHADC. Promoting peace in a multicultural society will be accomplished only when the recognition is granted to all the communities and the respective cultural needs. Lack of recognition to these groups may augment the space of tension in the region. The smaller tribal communities have already started asserting their claims for separate existence as distinct ethnic groups and demand autonomy.

The history of the failures of solidarity movements by different linguistic groups also reminds us the need to rethink such calls for separate states or territory often made by “united” or “combined” groups. The case of Dravida
movement in South India can be cited as a good example. This is how linguistic diversity/heterogeneity makes a solidarity movement of secessionism failed.17

Therefore, application of the present models of recognition (that is existing in states like Meghalaya) to Manipur will be hardly successful. Manipur needs a new set of institutions that can accommodate all the distinct ethnic groups in the state. Manipur is a typical state where different conglomerates of ethnic groups demand separate territories. My contention is that all these groups should understand the possible outcomes of their demands. Fulfillment of such demands will barely resolve the crisis in the region. The Meeteis should understand that Manipur is a multicultural state. The beauty of this multiculturalism can be preserved only when each group respects the other with regard to their ways of life, language and cultural practices. No single group or ethnic community controls or possesses Manipur as a whole practically. The fate and destiny of Manipur has to be decided by its constituent communities which the Meeteis have to admit and they have to shed their streak of majoritarian dominating stance. The Meetei culture and nationhood should be made accommodative of other cultures and ethnic identities. It is said that the destiny of Manipur hinges around four important factors: A) Political outlook of the Meeteis B) Their dealings with the other communities C) Perception of other ethnic communities towards the Meeteis and D) How the outside world perceives them.18

The same responsibility has to be shouldered by other cultural communities too. The Nagas should understand that the mere formation of a separate state for them is not the solution. Many of the ethnic groups within the Nagas opposed to this move. Even the extension of cease-fire agreement between the NSCN (IM) and the Indian Army to Manipur had been opposed by none other than people from Tangkhul, Kabui, Maring, Chiru, Zelilargon

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18 Farooq Ahmad ‘Preserving Territorial Integrity of Manipur’ Manipur online, August 2002.
communities who are constituent parts of the Naga umbrella. The Meetei Pangals off and on assert that they want to see Manipur as it is united territorially within the Indian polity because they read any other move will be catastrophic. Neither the Meeteis nor the Kukis will accept the claim of Nagas. The interests of all the communities should be respected and recognized and that is the beauty of Multiculturalism. We should understand one fact that most of the ethnic groups want to remain distinct and separate from others. There is little argument on the fact that all the groups view with greater concern the possibility of being dominated by relatively stronger group/groups. This is the reason why local people fear of illegal immigration into their territory or apprehensive about the arrival of other Indians in search of jobs and economic opportunities. The minority like the Khasis feel more weakened by the entry of people from outside because of the fact that non-tribals have controlled the economic forces in their land. The same is true in terms of inter-tribal relations. That is why smaller ethnic groups like the Garos and the Jaintias claiming that the major chunk of the state’s resources is being enjoyed by the Khasis. This yields little gain for creating separate territories on the ethno-cultural basis. Because, every cultural group is internally plural and diverse. “The point about ethno-culturally divided societies is that they wish to remain divided... Each group draws the essence of its being, its group consciousness, from the fact that it is different and that it wishes to remain different”. A Thadou or a Mao is as determined to retain and preserve his identity as is a Tangkhul or Meetei. All have different social and economic problems and aspirations.

In such a condition besides measures for redistribution, the most desired solution is to give certain amount of autonomy, not territorial but cultural to each of all the ethnic communities. There should be a socio-political set up in which identity of each ethnic group is recognized and respected. Every single

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20Farooq, op.cit.
identity should be taken into account instead of recognizing an umbrella group composing different ethnic communities.

**Inadequacy of the available options**

Given the fact that the existing institutions that have been established for resolving ethnic crisis in the Northeast fail to yield the desire result, what sort of institution Manipur needs to establish? Traditionally Manipur had been ruled by the Meetei kings with considerable local autonomy. However, this local autonomy was not uniform in the sense that some local authorities had more power than others. And since, these were not constitutional, many a time the larger or the stronger power ran over the smaller ones. Taking this factor into consideration, we may also think of having a socio-political set up in that traditional line of local autonomy with constitutional recognition.

Besides this traditional system of governance, there are two conventional options before us; first, we may look at consociational democracy. Arend Lejphart explains how consociational democracy explains the political stability of Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. In his classic study, he identified the critical elements of the consociational experiments: A) Government by a grand coalition of all significant segments; B) A mutual veto or "concurrent majority" voting rule for some or all issues. C) Proportionality as the principle for allocating political representation, public funds, and civil service positions; and D) Considerable amount of autonomy for various segments of the society to govern their internal affair.22

This kind of government of a grand coalition of all significant segments with mutual veto powers is possible and perhaps successful in the countries where there are few (not many) ethnic groups of more or less equal size. However, it will be very hard to think of a consociational democracy in a state, which is divided into too many small ethnic groups. Especially the provision of veto powers will not work here. Because, if each of the groups has veto power,

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it will be very difficult to take decision on any matter. We should not forget that all the groups have different opinion on the nature of "good life". So the best possible option is to have certain kind of arrangements or mechanism to develop consensus among these various groups. And the most important question is that without a veto power system how can a minority group protect its autonomy?

Again, we have the option of the Western model of multination federation. A multilevel federalism adopts a form of government that grants significant territorial autonomy to several national minorities. This kind of territorial autonomy cannot be considered in the context of Manipur of the various reasons I have mentioned earlier. Of course, certain amount of autonomy should be given to all ethnic communities. However it should not be in the form of territorial autonomy. It should be in the form of cultural autonomy which enables them to organize and administer their own publicly funded schools in their own mother tongue, to establish newspapers and media, to address the organs of government, etc. It may be in the form of what Otto Buer’s non-territorial autonomy in the old Habsburg Empire.23 This empire was ruled by the Austrian royal family, the Habsburgs, with its capital at Vienna from the late Middle Ages until World War 1. The Habsburg Empire included Hungary, the Czech lands, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and important parts of Italy, Poland, and Romania. Unlike most self acclaimed modern “secular states,” the Habsburg Empire offered protection to many small national groups and kept them from being absorbed by other cultures.24

Another significant point we need to discuss here is one of the most important values of multiculturalism, namely, “equality among various groups”. The mechanism to promote this value (which I mention in my first and second chapters) is missing in both the options of multilevel fedralism and

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23Issacharff, 2004, ibid.
consociational democracy. So, we certainly need to evolve or develop a certain mechanism which can promote all the three values of multiculturalism viz. the value of cultural community, the value of equality among all the cultural communities and the value of individual rights.

We can also see if religious or cultural institutions like the church can take any role in building peaceful environment in the Northeast. The idea is that if such institutions can make some kind of forum which can work as a platform for all conflicting communities to sort out differences so that ultimately the peaceful environment can be retraced. One can analyze the possibility of religious body like church taking leadership in directing communities to restrain themselves from antagonizing the cultural values of others. When one studies this sort of possibility in the Northeast, it will be interesting to observe some activities in Mizoram. This is an example of how such forums can be effective in maintaining public disciplines. During Assembly election of 2008, departing from the earlier ones, Mizoram does not see lavish feasts, the musical bands, the public meetings, which have candidates renting the air with oft repeated slogan vote rawh, parts of the electioneering till the last elections are completely missing. It is said that the credit for the extraordinary turn around goes to the Mizoram Peoples’ Forum (MPF), an umbrella organization of Churches and social organizations like Young Mizo Association- which have set a plethora of “guidelines for the parties to follow”. MPF President Reverend Vanlalauva was reported to say that the objective of the forum was to ensure that the election did not vitiate the peaceful atmosphere in the state and the polling was free and fair. The guidelines were formulated jointly by the Churches and the NGOs in consultation with political parties.

For the candidates to reach out to the electorate, the MPF offers a common platform in each vengs (ward) of a constituency. Each constituency has about five to six vengs with a population of 2000-3000 each wherein all the

contenders are given “adequate time” to speak about their agenda and defend the charges against them or their party in front of the electorates of the ward/s. The electorates are given opportunities to put their queries to their candidates. “It is entirely the MPF’s discretion to decide how many such rallies should be organized by a party and where. For instance, the Congress wanted Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to address public meetings in three places, but it got permission for only Lunglei and Aizawl’. The election was completed in a leisurely fashion devoid of the trappings of usual election hullabaloo”.26

Will this sort of development, such as, the rise of the Church as successful ‘peacemaker’ in Mizoram, be possible in other conflict zones of the Northeast? It will be very difficult to think of such kind of development in states like Manipur. In Mizoram Church can play a remarkable role in socio-political affairs of the state as more than 90% of total population is Christians. In terms of ethnic composition also, the state is culturally not as heterogeneous as that of Manipur. It is said that in Mizoram there are only two groups “Mizo and non-Mizo”. There is not much ethnic division among the population in the state.27 Whereas, in Manipur, the whole population is divided not only ethnically but also in terms of religion. Church is not so popular in the state, and even amongst the Meeteis there are religious differences. Some follow Hindu Vaisnavism and other still following the traditional Meetei religion called “Meetei Lining”. Moreover, there are not well founded Civil Society groups which can come up to the level of managing crisis in the state.

Designing Institutions for a Multicultural Manipur

As mentioned in the First chapter, a multicultural policy should promote three important values viz. value of cultural communities; value of individual democratic rights; and value of equality. We have already understood the importance of being a member of a particular cultural community. All human

27 I am indebted to an Associate Professor of Mizoram University (name withheld) for this basic information provided to me in an interview with him on 18-12-08 at Link Road Silchar.
beings are culturally embedded in the sense that they grow up and live within a culturally structured world and organize their lives and social relations in terms of a culturally derived system of meaning and significance. Thus, the value of cultural community is one which multiculturalism needs to recognize and even promote. But promoting only the value of community membership is not enough. There are conflicts that arise out of larger communities’ project to expand and dominate over the smaller ones. So, along with acknowledging the value of community we need to find a mechanism to promote equality among various cultural communities so that the ultimate goal of peaceful co-existence is achieved. Again, promoting only these two values will not ascertain the growth of the kind of justice we are looking for. Therefore, we also need to assure that the value of individual liberty is also taken care of. There are times when individual rights and liberty are undermined in the name of community values. Individuals need their own space for the development of their personality. Thus, the final position is that all the three values are to be promoted side by side.

Since the two institutional options mentioned earlier namely (a) multilevel federalism, and (b) consociational democracy have certain limitations, and it is not possible to promote all the three values by these institutions, we need to rethink and develop a new kind of governance, which can promote all these values, and a true multicultural socio-political system. Again, we need context specific institutional arrangements for resolving crises in multi-national societies. In the case of Manipur too we need to think for a new set of institutions that can effectively maintain ethnic relationship in the state so that the existing conflict will ultimately be minimized.

We can think of a new system that presents pyramidalistically structured three-tier governance. The power of the State will be divided among the three different levels of governance. At the bottom of the structure there will be ‘ethnic governments’ of different ethnic communities. These ‘ethnic governments’ will have considerable cultural autonomy when it comes to their internal affairs. However, these governments are not to be formed on regional
basis by which a regional government is constructed with territory based autonomy. As mentioned earlier, the mode of territorial autonomy (or territorial separation) will be suicidal in an already fractured society like Manipur.\textsuperscript{28} If we want to promote territorial integrity as well as peaceful co-existence, we should not go for any kind of territorial division. We need to remember that most of the communities in Manipur are indigenous communities and if territorial autonomy is granted to each group, at least the whole territory will be divided into various pieces. And there are not just five or six groups but more than thirty different tribal communities. The members of some of the groups are not confined to a fixed place but are scattered over different places. I have already mentioned that all the cultural groups need to be recognized individually instead of just identifying as Nagas, Kukis, etc. So, territorial division within Manipur remains infeasible. Manipur, the territory, should remain as a common property of all the groups existing in Manipur.

Regarding the membership of these governments, all the members of a community can be members of that particular ethnic government no matter where he or she lives. They can take part in the maintenance of internal affairs of their ethnic government. The Meeteis will not be members (or citizens for this matter) of Imphal where they live. Pangals will not be members of Lilong where majority is Pangals. But, Meeteis will be citizens/members of the \textit{Meetei (community) Ethnic Government}. Paite will be members of their \textit{Paite Ethnic Governments} but not members of the local where they belong to. Meaning, territory is nothing to do with this kind of membership or citizenship. But when we talk of Manipur as a whole, all eligible adults, like in other normal states, will be citizens of Manipur. Thus, we have two kinds of citizenship: membership of each ethnic government which has no territorial significance as such, and citizenship of the State. In short, these governments will be in the

\textsuperscript{28}We can even look at the experience of Northeast State reorganization. Since Nagas got a State, other ethnic groups began to demand theirs. In 1972, the Northeast was politically reorganized when a new tribal state of Meghalaya was created. Later Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh were also given full statehood in 1987. This spurred many ethnic groups to demand homelands and even adopt armed militancy as the tactic to achieve them. These armed groups often attack settler communities or rival tribes as part of their strategy of ethnic cleansing to achieve ethnically compact homelands.
form of culturally autonomous bodies, which enables groups to organize and administer their own publicly funded schools in their own mother tongue, to establish newspapers and media, to address the organs of government, etc. This kind of non-territorial autonomy is possible.

About the nature of governance of each ethnic government, it is to be decided according to the need of each ethnic community. If an ethnic group has its own system of village or ethnic administration, we should let them continue with it. However, we should make sure one thing that this system does not weigh down the minimum basic individual liberty and hampers the relationship with other communities. Many of the ethnic communities in the Noertheast have their own traditional mode of administrations. For instance, Aimols have their own village administrative system. Here all members of the village hold the right to participate in the village administration. The Chief of the village is known as Kamsaki. His Ministers are known as Pasha-Kariat. Chieftainship is attained by promotion. After the death of the Chief, the senior most Minster can become the Chief. After the Pasha-Kariat group comes the Maitrempi group. The Chief can take help of the Maitrempi in settling disputes.29

At the middle level of the three-tier system, there will be a Government with Community Representatives (Gocomretive). Representatives from each ethnic community will form this government. All the communities will send certain number of representatives on the basis of proportionate representations with some provisions that stipulate minimum and maximum numbers of representatives one ethnic community can send. Representatives should be from each single distinct ethnic community, not from generic groups like the Nagas, the Kukis, and the likes. The purpose or objective of this government is the maintenance or the promotion of the value of equality i.e., equality among different community groups. There are moments when conflicts arise due to various sorts of encroachment, propensity of domination and fight against to

domination. The Paites fought against their own Kuki tribes for the same reason. This government can maintain harmony by not only granting recognition to each distinct cultural value and incorporating their views in taking any important decision, but also can be a forum which can work as a platform for all conflicting communities to sort out differences so that ultimately the peaceful environment can be retraced. Lack of mutual understanding and coordination also lead to conflict among the communities. By establishing this Government it is hoped to minimize this problem. But there should not be any veto system. Decisions will be taken by consensus or absolute majority system. The veto system can be a destructive option since it can delay or perhaps hamper decision-making process especially when there are numerous groups with veto powers.

There will be another level of government on the top of the pyramid. This is the State Government for the state as a whole. The single most important function of the state government is to safeguard the rights and liberty of individual citizens. It has a duty towards bolstering capacity of the individuals in the state. It will have the responsibility of policing, communication, interstate trade and commerce and other important concerns for the state as a whole. As a government representing the entire population, the State should also make sure that their economic interest is well safeguarded. One of the concerns of the tribal communities in the Northeast is their fear of being swamped demographically, culturally as well as economically by the non-tribes. The State has to make proper policies to deal with such problems concerning common interest of all the tribal communities.

In financial matters too, the power will be divided among these three levels of government. The ethnic governments may charge some taxes in order to run their internal affairs. But they can not impose taxes on any matter related to land, territory, even road, agricultural lands, etc. because the power is limited to the promotion of their ethnic community value without territorial concern. The taxes on land, communication, road, etc. will be charged upon by the State. This sort of governance system will not only give due recognition to
the cultural values of the respective communities but also fulfill demands of redistribution. It will also limit the chances of politicizing ethnicity.

In fact, what multiculturalism wants is a society in which all the diverse communities live together with equal dignity and concern. It envisages a society, which offers equal opportunities, an environment of peaceful co-existence of various groups within the same territory. For this purpose we need to recognize every single cultural community of all size thereby giving due consideration to each group. The development of such environment of peaceful co-existence is not possible in an ‘unequal’ society. We need to understand that in modern democratic countries politics of State is usually identified with majority culture, while the communities that differ from it are designated as minorities. In such ‘unequal multiethnic or multinational’ societies, minority cultures or communities are disadvantaged in the public arena. They are disadvantaged through the cultural orientation and practices of the nation-state. Multiculturalism, thus, locates cultural identity as a source of discrimination in the society.

Hence, State should respect the diverse cultures. And respect of diversity implies equal space and opportunity for all cultural communities to sustain themselves. Therefore, remedying minority discrimination entails policies that ensure full and equal membership to all communities within the state. This may, at times, require special consideration or even collective right for vulnerable minorities who have been the victims of force assimilation or exclusion. This will create a more integrated society. As minority receives institutional recognition and their cultures survive and flourish, they will develop a sense of belonging and commitment to the State. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the application of the institutional arrangements already adopted in western socio-political context cannot be feasible here. This is because of the fact that there are contextual differences. In this sense this new system of governance can be a possible option in the context of Manipur and other similar cases.