Introduction

The Problem

A crisis has been haunting the Northeast part of Indian territory for the last few decades. This region has often been described as a boiling cauldron by many academicians and journalists because of various problems inflicting the region. The factors responsible for such phenomenon are yet to be explained satisfactorily. If it remains ignored it may reach a very critical stage, and may even challenge the very existence of the state system. Though we can use many terms, I call it 'socio-political unrest' in the region. This unrest has been mainly viewed as the result of ethno-centric struggle for recognition by various groups. Ethnic divisions, religious commitments, caste gradation, linguistic and cultural diversities cut across the political boundaries creating many interlocking segments. And none of these interlocking segments presented any political uniformity and territorial contiguity. The fact is that, in the last 62 years since India got her independence, Indian democracy has not always been free from rancor. Disparities of aspirations and ideologies of groups lead to severely skewed democratic process.¹

There may be a variety of answers to the question 'why struggle for recognition?' But the common understanding is that this is due to injustice meted out towards certain sections or communities within the society. Though there are contextual differences in terms of the nature of conflicts, there is no state among the seven sisters that does not face the problems of ethnic

¹The problems in the Northeast are not linked to ethnic conflicts and politics of recognition only. There are other issues which lead to political unrest in the region. One such issue is armed struggle by some groups in Manipur with the aim of restoring the “past sovereignty”. However, I limit myself in analyzing only those issues related with the matters concerning ethnicity and politics of recognition.
tensions. Some even claim that the kinds of crises we face today are logical corollary of the attitude of the Indian mainstream. Thus, one of the scholars working in the field had to mention that the initial broadmindedness of the framers of the Constitution was gradually undermined by a Centre which was ever more concerned with national integration rather than nation-building in true sense. He opines “the centripetal attitude of the Centre was never satiated as its very mindset towards the region was negative as illustrated from a letter written by Sardar Vallabbhai Patel to Pandit Nehru in 1950: our Northern or Northeastern approaches consist of Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Darjeeling and the Tribal areas of Assam. From the point of view of communications they are weak spots... The contact of these areas with us, is by no mean(s) close an(d) intimate. The people inhabiting these portions have no established loyalty or devotion to India. Even Darjeeling and Kalimpong areas are not free from promongoloid prejudice. It is such an attitude of the Indian mainstream that is probably responsible for so many past and present ethnic movements in the Northeast India. Hence, if there is any problem of nation-building in the region, it arises from the mind-set of the mainstream rather than the region itself”.  

However, the nature of problems we confront in the region is more complicated than it is often portrayed from its outward appearance. As we shall see in the subsequent chapters, the inter-ethnic conflict in the region is not a post-colonial or recent development only. Colonial administration has its own contribution in the development of this phenomenon.  


3 When I discuss this issue with one of my friends, he disagrees with this view of mine. In his understanding ethnic conflict in the region is a post-independent phenomenon. He says that before it was fragmented and temporary and people as a whole did not see that way as we see to each other today. Of course, it was the colonial authority that ‘constructed’ certain communities but it
also internal forces that drive the crises in the region. Even the alleged “injustice” meted out to certain people is not only in material form. It is also cultural in form. On the one hand, there is the question of cultural domination, and on the other there are issues of economic exploitation or material injustice. Again there are circumstances in which both forms of injustice co-exist. Whatever the reason, the fact of ethnic imagining and politics of recognition is the dominant force in the region. Thus, the most challenging task for scholars working in the field is to explore the real stimulus that pushes such politics and to devise frameworks within which these issues and claims of recognition and redistribution can be addressed.

Issues of ethnic diversity and conflicts have been studied from different perspectives. Perhaps the most systematic study of these issues comes from theorists of multiculturalism, who not only study problems that wreaking havoc in societies with diverse communities but also have proposed distinctive normative and institutional structures for handling such situations. We also have a number of policy initiatives by the Government of India, and some of these resemble the suggestions of the multiculturalists. Yet, the problems persist. Indeed the most acceptable forms of settling such disputes, through measures of recognition, have proved overtime to be less than adequate.

was we who accepted it and built upon it certain structures to fight not only the colonial authority but among ourselves, and aggravated by certain policies of independent India. The interpretation of this phenomenon is different from scholar to scholar. But I still endorse the view that colonial administrative system has also contributed in the development of ethnic conflicts in the region. Justification of my stand will be more clear in Chapter 3 and 4 where I discuss cause of ethnic conflicts in Manipur and Meghalaya. In any case, I am grateful to Dr. Jangkhomang Guite, Faculty, Department of History, Assam University, Silchar for this valuable critique.

*I called attention to this point in my M.Phil Thesis too. See Bijen, Nameirakpam, Meetei, 2005, ‘Rethinking Multiculturalism: Examining Issues of Ethnic Diversity with Special Reference to Manipur’, M.Phil Dissertation submitted to the Centre for Political Studies, School of Social Sciences, JNU, New Delhi.
Will Kymlicka has studied the cases mainly in Northern America, eastern and western European countries, Joshep Carens in Canada and Fiji, Bikhu Parekh in U.K, and a host of other theorists have looked into such problems. One of the important concerns of these scholars is that of 'minority group accommodation'. In other words, among other things, they address the issue of cultural diversity within a liberal nation-state in which minorities are often put at a disadvantage, and also suggest ways to rectify such problems. Most of the earlier theories on multiculturalism referred to matters concerning majority-minority conflicts. In that sense, they were linked to the protection of minority groups in the region. However, there are cases in which the whole problem cannot be reduced to only minority-majority relationship. The issue here is about a sort of contest among various minority groups co-existing in a particular region. Due to such contextual differences and other reasons, these theories developed against the backdrop of the experiences of western liberal democracies have various limitations and therefore, there are problems in employing these theories in explaining social reality in Indian context. Consequently, the kinds of institutional arrangements suggested by them (some of which are already experimenting in some countries) will not be appropriate to apply here.

Among the things that need to be stressed is that in India recognition claims are often closely linked with claims of redistribution. This is an element that has also been pointed out by Nancy Frazer. She argues that on the one hand, the struggle for recognition takes place in countries where there are problem of material inequality such as in incomes and property ownership, in access to paid work, education, healthcare, leisure time, etc. And this material inequality is aggravating in most of the countries in
the world. She looks at it in the context of the eclipse of a socialist imaginary centered on terms such as ‘interest’, ‘exploitation’, and ‘redistribution’. On the other hand, as she opines, a rise of a new political imaginary centered on notions of ‘identity’, difference’, ‘cultural domination’, and ‘recognition’ has been observed. Thus, she writes

“instead of simply endorsing or rejecting all of identity politics simpliciter we should see ourselves as presented with a new intellectual and political task: that of developing a critical theory of recognition which identifies and defends only those versions of the cultural politics of difference that can be coherently combined with the social politics of equality.............., I assume that justice today requires both redistribution and recognition”.5

It is true that there are positive repercussions for preserving distinct group identities or even for being a member of a specific community. Nevertheless, “politics of recognition” or the existing policies of providing minority rights with the aim of promoting social equality have many limitations. Looking at the failure of the policies of recognition on certain states of the Northeast India, there is a need to see whether redistribution on the basis of equal individual rights, and not ‘recognition’, can be a more adequate option for providing justice to everyone. Whether redistribution measures can address problems of not only economic or material injustice, which is rooted in the political structure of the society, but also problems of cultural injustice?

Sometimes it is conceived that socio-political problems including that of ethnic conflicts in any given society is the logical outcome of economic disparities prevailing in the society. In other words, the political economic structure of society that manifests

exploitation, economic marginalization, deprivation often produces such problems. Therefore, redistribution involving redistributing income, reorganizing the division of labour, subjecting investment to democratic decision-making or transforming the basic economic structures is thought to be the adequate solution for such socio-political problems. 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 resources' are all example of conceptualizing the remedies of the socio-economic injustice through redistribution.

One may also assume that all human beings have the instinct of self-maximization. It is the nature of human being that he or she always demands satisfaction of his or her needs. Thus, men look up to the Government or the State for the fulfillment of their individual needs. Consequently, welfare of a community would mean welfare of its individuals. Since, today, we do not have institutionally recognized segregationist domination policies, like apartheid in South Africa, or policy of 'separate but equal' in the U.S.A., it is also thought that the problems of cultural injustice can be addressed by redistributionist model.

However, one needs to relook at the existing problems persisting in culturally plural societies before coming to a decisive conclusion. It is also necessary to take into account other factors which contribute to the development of these problems. One cannot deny so easily the role of cultural injustice in giving rise to many problems in societies. Such problems borne out of cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect of distinct cultural values of ethnic communities cannot be adequately solved by mere application of the mechanisms of economic redistribution. Unless there is some sort of cultural symbolic change in the society the
problem of such cultural injustice will not be easily mitigated. 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. There may be arrangements that can accommodate distinct groups by according special group rights such as separate representation and right to self governance.

In Indian context such measures of recognition range from mere allowance of certain religious or social practices of certain groups (for example, Article 371 A (a) (i) allows Nagas to continue with their religious or social practices, (ii) respect their customary law and procedure) to the formation of autonomous district councils (under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution). In stronger forms these measures involve formation of a separate state for a particular group (examples of such states include Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya). This sort of measures enables certain groups or communities to organize and protect their own social practices. However, as I have already mentioned, the politics of recognition or the policies of providing minority rights for promoting social equality have many limitations.

Thus, it is true that there are concerns of 'cultural injustice' in society. It is also similarly true that there are social distresses borne out of material inequality. Yet, the link between the matters of recognition (or the struggle for recognition) and material inequality should be adequately theorized. Question such as, whether cultural injustice can be adequately addressed from a redistributive perspective, should be studied more seriously. Besides the struggle for recognition is occurring in a world of deep
material inequality – in income and property ownership; in assess to paid work, education, healthcare and leisure time etc, in such contexts of material inequality leaders can, and at times do, mobilize groups on ethnic grounds. Again, this politics of ethnic assertions is in many cases linked to political (and at times) personal gains. The fruit of their struggle have been appropriated unequally by few elites. This has been the outcome of, and also problem with, the land policies in Meghalaya.

Again, every community is internally plural, so domination and internal hierarchy exist within any given group. If we cannot (and it is not often at least by minority rights) do away with internal domination or plurality, the mere recognition of the group often leads not only to more domination of one sub-group over other but also to domination of elites over their own people within the group. In India, cultural injustice or domination is not just limited to issues of language, public holidays, etc. Understandably, these kinds of issues will be there in any society where multiple ethnic groups, racial groups or religious groups exist no matter how many initiatives government has taken. The case in India is far more complex. The problems can be minimized only through certain arrangements founded not only on the basis of individuals’ convenience but on the basis of culture, religion, or ethnicity.

**Questioning Earlier Works and the Models**

Many scholars have studied such issues of ethnicity, cultural politics, religious and linguistic separatism and a host of other problems inflicting Indian ‘nation’. Most of the earlier studies, however, are concerned with the studies of these problems vis-à-vis national integration and nation building projects of Indian government. Issues in the Northeast have been mainly portrayed as the problem of relationship between the nation-building project
of India government and interests of the ethnic groups in the region, either as a problem of assimilation or of resistance to the assimilation. It is not to say that there is dearth of writings on the problems of the region. There are a good number of writings on it. And many of them are quite praiseworthy. It is only to say that though most of these authors have approached from different perspectives these literatures have some common features. First, they deal mainly with ethnicity and insurgency in the region. Second, they try to analyze the problem of the region either as a whole or some specific states vis-à-vis the policies of the centre towards the region. In this sense the present work in the form of a thesis has a distinct feature as it seeks to study “inter-ethnic” relationship in the region. This would become more clear if we first take the writings of three of the best known authors who have published on the Northeast.

S.K. Chaube has been one of the few authors who write extensively on the problems in the region. Among his works, mentions may be made of his two books: ‘Hill Politics in Northeast India’ and ‘Electoral politics in Northeast India’. These books do not directly deal with ethnicity, ethnic conflicts or insurgency in the region. His first book summarizes the process of reorganization of Northeast India. The second book analyzes the electoral politics in the region on the basis of the sixth Lok Sabha election (1977). It is more about how elections are held in the region and the factors which influence these elections. In this sense his books and the research proposed in the thesis have different themes and perspectives.

Then, we have ‘Contesting Marginality: Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Sub-nationalism in Northeast India’ by Sajal Nag. Sajal Nag, himself a historian, takes a historical perspective in defining how the insurgency (and ethnic movement for that matter) began to appear in the region. Starting by highlighting pre-colonial conditions, he narrates the relationship between each ethnic group and British India. He analyzes development of this phenomenon up to the formation of Nagaland and Mizoram. He studies only three ethnic groups, viz., Naga, Mizo and Meetei. He neither studies inter ethnic conflicts nor inquires the institutional arrangements aimed at resolving the ethnic tensions.

Last, but not the least, we have ‘Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India’ by Sanjib Baruah. His book, in fact, is a salutary attempt to give linguistic and theoretical muscle to an analysis of existing problems in the region. The book speaks about the region within a widely accepted discourse about nations, constituent nationalities and sub-nationalist, independentist aspirations. Thus, the single most important theme of his book seems to be insurgency and countering insurgency. In fact, his book shows as if the war is between the Indian state and each ethnic group in the region. That is, however, just a profile of the whole problem.

These widely read authors hardly discuss the problems that stem from and take the shape of the ‘inter-ethnic conflict’. There are no doubt problems of assimilation or segregation that confront this region but there are also problems of contests among and between various ethnic groups in the region. States in the Northeast are composed of three or more ethnic groups jostling for influence and power, and living in uneasy harmony within the

---

8Sajal Nag, 2002, Manohar Publication
9Sanjib Baruah, 2005, Oxford University Press, Delhi
same state border. Scholars have tended to overlook the importance of inter-ethnic conflict and crises in the region. They do not offer suggestions about how this crisis may be resolved. The policy makers too neglect institutional arrangements that may be necessary for resolving these conflicts. Most often it is the perspective and consensus of national integration that is defying the official discourse. But this framework has often been perceived by the ethnic minorities as detrimental to the cultural practices, hence it has generated little support for them. One of the ideas behind the establishment of federalism in India right from the time of independence was that decentralization of central authority on horizontal basis would end the quest for identity of the regionalized sub-national cultures in India otherwise compartmentalized in artificial administrative divisions of the Indian federal organization.\textsuperscript{10} Yes, federalism has allowed some degree of accommodation of cultural identities but problems persist. The nature of ethnic conflict in the Northeast is complicated because we have several groups co-existing within the same territory. It is not only conflict between tribal and non-tribal identities, but contest over resources, opportunities, and status among, for instance, different tribal groups. Now, the question we need to address is how do we accommodate the diverse cultural identities? Are the methods suggested by Will Kymlicka, for instance, the right to self-governance enough?

\textsuperscript{10}The Indian federal polity grew out of two diametrically divergent processes, which underlined the devolution of authority to erstwhile provinces of what was known as British India before independence, and the integration of the Indian princely states, which acceded to India in accordance with the instruments of Accession. The instrument of Accession envisaged the procedure by virtue of which the Indian States acceded to India. The federal organization of India was, therefore, constituted of the erstwhile Indian provinces and the Indian Princely States, which were liberated from the British tutelage after the British colonial empire in India came to its end in 1947. See ‘Coalition Politics and National Unity’ by Dr. M.K. Teng, Kashmir Sentinel, Kashmir Information Network, (www.Kashmir-information.com/MKTeng/art.shtml, accessed on 3-12-08)
In the Northeast the whole problem has become complicated, as we will see in chapters 3 and 4, for ethnicity is being used instrumentally here. How do we deal with this instrumental use of ethnic identity by the political leadership? The leadership mobilizes groups by the select use of ethnic symbols for their politico-economic purposes.\textsuperscript{11} What Dov Ronen suggests is also true in the context of Northeast India that ethnicity is politicized into the ethnic factor when an ethnic group is in conflict with the political elite over such issues as the use of limited resources or the allocation of benefits – issues that are particularly intense in developing third world countries, where greater the stakes involved, the greater the ethnic factor with which the central government must deal.\textsuperscript{12}

Keeping all these complexities in mind, I analyze the problems of redistribution, recognition and ethnic conflicts by taking two specific cases in Northeast India. I approach my study from a comparative perspective. I study two states in the region, viz., Manipur and Meghalaya, because they allow us to examine the adequacy of available institutional arrangements and mechanism for accommodating diversity. Further, they allow us to see whether ethnic conflict can be resolved simply by following politics of accommodating diversity. Meghalaya provides an example of a state where the classical form of multicultural accommodation, secured as a separate state was fail to protect the cultural autonomy of the tribal communities. This form of accommodation through self-governance right seemed to have been rather successful but today difficulties occur. The study of

\textsuperscript{11} Even Meghalaya Governor Ranjit Shekhar Moosahary once mentioned that militancy in the Northeast has become a “money-spinner” and vested interests, and corruption is responsible for insurgency in the region. \textit{Times of India}, March 8, 2009.

Meghalaya allows one to initially reflect upon the strategies suggested by the multiculturalists today. It also enables us to ask whether the strategies devised in Meghalaya can be applied to Manipur and whether they are likely to solve the problems of cultural and ethnic conflict currently seen in Manipur.

The natures of conflicts in these two states are poles apart. In Meghalaya the conflicts were earlier between tribal and non-tribal identities. Today the inter-ethnic (between tribes) tensions have started. In the past the biggest cause of such tensions was the fear of the indigenous tribes, that is, the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos, of being swamped demographically, culturally as well as economically by the non-tribes who can be broadly categorized into (i) external – foreign influx of nationals belong to other countries such as Nepal and Bangladesh (ii) internal – influx of Indian nationals from other states within the country. But today, along with this conflict between tribal and non-tribal, there are inter tribal clashes, and these have become serious threat to the peace of the state. In Manipur, however, the conflicts are mainly among the indigenous ethnic groups only.

Many provisions within the Indian constitution have been adopted for the Northeast states to resolve the ethnic crises. There are special provisions mentioned in the Articles 371A, 371B etc. for these states. There are provisions of Sixth Schedule and Fifth Schedule and many other policies specific to each state. In Meghalaya too, many institutional arrangements have been developed for easing ethnic tensions. It includes three Districts Councils created for each major tribe with the objective of enabling them to control and administer over tribal lands and forests, and to be a custodian of customary laws and practices. Meghalaya has the unique distinction of having retained its customary laws and practices and its traditional institutions. And again there is the
Meghalaya transfer of land (Regulation) Act that stipulates that no land in Meghalaya shall be transferred by a tribal to a non-tribal or by a non-tribal to another non-tribal except with the previous sanction of the competent authority. The Meghalaya Maintenance of Public Order (Amendment) Act (1979) facilitates the state government to distinguish between a permanent non-tribal resident and one who settled in the state recently. And there are a host of other Bills and Acts. And even Meghalaya was created to meet the aspirations of ethnic groups that inhabit it. Now the question is that with so many policies and special provisions why does the state still face problems of ethnic conflict? After the creation of Meghalaya, peace came in the state for some time. But since the 1990s ethnic conflicts have come again to the fore.

Manipur, on the other hand, remained as a separate erstwhile princely state. It does not have any special status under Article 371 and, thus far, no major initiatives have been taken for accommodating diverse cultural groups through arrangements of self-governance or separate representation. Hence, the claims presented by different ethnic groups are quite different here. And even though there are serious concerns about material and economic injustice, requiring re-distribution, the political rhetoric has been dominated by the demand for ‘recognition’.

While studying ethnic conflicts in the Northeast India, one cannot overlook the case of Manipur which exhibits as many problems that could possibly appear in the discourse of cultural conflict. The study of the state will highlight the complexity of ethnicity and politics that a composite culture possesses. Identity formation by more than 30 communities and tribes harping on exclusivity, integration and dominance, often result in several forms of conflict that would provide ground for several observations and narratives, that may not even have meeting
points. This is not to show pessimism but to highlight the difficulties - that of drawing possible unity of observations. The added advantage, however, is quite clear - not because ethnic conflict is widespread in the state but of the nature of demographic composition and identity formation. The pace of the assertions of identities, of 'nation' or 'sub-nation' characters, is fast and alarming. This development calls for serious reflection, not only for the state of Manipur but for the Indian State, which is more than willing to come out with quick political solution. The complexity of ethno-demographic relationship and subsequent conflicts in Manipur can provide a wider theoretical framework explaining a particular pattern of conflict and its possible solution. It is a different issue if such a pattern would successfully explain all other instances of ethnic conflict in the region or the country but the attempt is to provide a generic picture of conflict as it seems in a territorial entity having multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-sub-national identities. Manipur is a case in point, the most appropriate miniature of the Indian state.

This Thesis studies various issues including how should claims of different ethnic groups and communities be accommodated in both the states in separate chapters. For the moment it will suffice to mention that the seeds of ethnic conflict in the region had already been sown during the British colonial period. Because, it was during this period that the ethnic communities in the region had established contacts with a stronger and secular culture of the British. It is often claimed that the contacts with the British had brought about the cultural shocks which had usually uprooted some section of the people

from their cultural moorings. Further, in the case of hill people, 
“the artificial physical isolation through excluded, partially 
excluded and unadministered areas had also resulted in cultural 
isolation of the people from the rest of India. This process had 
alienated the hill people from other Indians and they began to look 
more inwardly and emphasize their separate cultural identity”.14 
Along with this colonial legacy, modern phenomena of politicization 
of ethnicity play the spoil sport in the region. This politicization of 
ethnicity has been one of the most important factors that 
contribute to the mutual suspicion among ethnic groups in the 
region.

Yet again, by studying these two contrasting states, one in 
which various ethnic groups are still claiming recognition, and the 
other in which policies of recognition have already been in place, 
and yet ethnic conflicts continue, I will try to riposte some 
important queries. One such query is whether recognition 
strategies used in India are enough. Moreover, the study will also 
be having the potentiality of dealing with theoretical issues such as 
whether this recognition strategy can accommodate and address 
concerns of redistribution that are linked to recognition.

**Organization of the Thesis**

One of my objectives at the start of this study of ethnicity in the 
Northeast is to understand the link between concerns of 
redistribution and recognition vis-à-vis ethnic conflict in Northeast 
India.

Since such kinds of problems have been studied most 
systematically by the theorists of multiculturalism and they even 
suggest normative theoretical institutional structures to resolve

---

such crises, I also look at the problem in the Northeast from the same theoretical background of multiculturalism. Therefore, there is a need to examine main arguments of these theorists and identify major problems with the existing theory of multiculturalism. This is what I deal with in the first chapter, ‘Recognition as a mode of addressing issues of ethnic diversity and conflicts’. Even if they produce one of the most taxonomical studies of problems in culturally plural societies, this theory is not free from limitations. One of my findings in this regard is that multicultural theories developed in the context of Western liberal societies cannot be adequately applied across all the contexts. We rather need context specific treatment of different ethnic problems.

Given that theoretical background second important issue was how Indian State has been dealing with its diverse cultural communities for the last 62 years. Here comes the need to study why both the provisions, one based on individual citizenship given in the Indian constitution, and the other based on specific group right provisions experimented in some states including Meghalaya failed in resolving ethnic problems. There is a need to examine the working and effects of these policies of recognition. This is the main issue I take up in the Second Chapter which is divided into two broad sub-units: A) ‘Recognition as a strategy used in dealing with diversity in India’ and b) ‘Frameworks of recognition used in Northeast India with reference to Meghalaya’.

Providentially, India has incorporated a variety of institutional arrangements to meet challenges of a society that inhabits a large number of cultural and linguistic groups. However, the expressions of ethnic discontent are still looming large in various corners of the country. Indeed, several ethnic conflicts have become so rooted that it is difficult now to reconstruct the sense of unity that accompanied independence. This rise of identity
politics demonstrates that people mobilize along ethnic, religious, racial and cultural lines, and demand recognition of their identity, acknowledgement of their legal rights and historic claims, and a commitment to sharing of power. The matters on which I give utmost stress are the provisions of differential treatment present (implicit or explicit) in Constitution of India. Starting from provisions envisaged during colonial period, I study the institutional arrangements provided under the present Constitution in this chapter.

However, study of these institutional provisions will remain insufficient without examining the kind of experiment undertaken in the state of Meghalaya. The case of this state is important because of three reasons. First, the history of the creation of the separate state of Meghalaya, and study of the relationship between the minority communities viz., the Khasi, the Jaintia, the Garo, etc. on the one hand and the major community on the other hand in the erstwhile composite state of Assam will herald an issue similar to a typical majority minority conflict in a multi-ethnic state. This exemplifies the cases that are often cited in the multicultural study of the importance of group specific rights for the vulnerable minority communities within a ‘nation’ state. Second, the problem in a multi-ethnic state is not necessarily only the issue of minority majority conflict, which is often presented. Over and above the majority-minority conflict, there are cases in which there are conflicts between minority communities living in the same territory. This is again best exemplified by the case of Meghalaya. In such cases we need to see the real thrust behind the conflicts and question ‘is the cultural injustice the sole reason for tensions between the minority communities’. Third, Meghalaya is one of the few states in the country in which all possible methods of resolving ethnic conflict have been experimented with in the
framework of the Indian Constitution. This study not only unfolds many of the loopholes in the present institutional arrangements, but also exposes the role played by politics in nourishing conflict in a multi-ethnic society. This case of Meghalaya is addressed in the third Chapter, ‘The Limits of Recognition Model in Meghalaya’.

In the fourth Chapter, ‘Conflicting Claims in Manipur: A critical examination’, I examine the case of Manipur. Manipur is also a state in the region haunted by the hurly-burly of ethnic conflicts. There are tens of ethnic groups in the state struggling for the recognition of their ethnic identities. There are many other groups that demand territorial autonomy. Manipur, so far has not been given any important multicultural institution perhaps with the rationale that it was a separate erstwhile princely state which was made into what had been called Part C State in post independent India. It still does not have any special status under Article 371 and no major initiatives have so far been taken for accommodating the interests of diverse cultural and ethnic groups through arrangements of self-governance or separate representation. Hence, the claims presented by different ethnic groups are quite different here. In such given condition, does Manipur require policies and institutions like the ones that had been initiated in Meghalaya? This question forms the central subject of the thesis. In order to arrived at a viable answer I need to look at the nature of ethnic conflict in Manipur. This helps me in finding required sources for a comparative study of these two states.

The final chapter, ‘Conclusion: Need of the hour: Recognition or Redistribution’, first attempts to take on the arguments over the ‘redistribution-recognition dilemma’ in the context of the Northeast. But, we should accept the fact that ethnic conflict and its reconciliation in India is perhaps more complex than any other
democracy across the globe. As I often mentioned, the Indian State faces a “multi-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. In the first case, it is more about the wish of the smaller ethnic communities to preserve their distinct cultural values vis-à-vis the union’s national integration project. This is not to deny the fact that there is an idea with the ethnic groups in the region that achieving that sort of cultural or political autonomy will automatically bring the economic auspices. However, in the second layer of conflict in the region, which is my main issue of analysis in this Thesis, the demand for autonomy is made not only on the basis of promoting ethnic identities but also on protection of economic interest of the smaller groups. When ethnic communities, vis, the Khasis, the Garos and the Jaintias, started demanding a separate state, it was mainly on the basis of enabling the preservation of their traditional way of life, as well as safeguarding their economic interest against the mainland non-tribal population. Now, more interestingly, the relationship between these ethnic communities entails not only factors of cultural differences (e.g. the case of Garos, and the Khasis and Jaintia) but also that of problem of redistribution (e.g. in the case of relationship between the Khasis and the Jaintias).

In the case of Manipur we see a different sort of basis of demanding autonomy by ethnic groups. Here the question of cultural differences is more prominent than economic interest. Again, the ethnic mobilizations have also been following out on the basis of cultural differences and the need for recognition.

Altogether then, the final contention is that the multicultural policies which are being applied in the case of Meghalaya cannot be adequately applied in Manipur for a lasting solution of ethnic
crisis in the state, due to difference in the nature of ethnic conflict. Even the Meghalayan model of institution should be readjusted in order to incorporate basic interest of all the communities devoid of any territorial division. In the case of Manipur we need to fashion new set of institutional arrangements. Subsequently, I also attempt in this final chapter to suggest a model of institutions for Manipur. The single most important objective of the study was, in fact, to find what sort of institutional arrangements will be capable of adequately addressing such ethnic conflicts. In fact the study is concerned more with the applicability of specific institutional arrangement for resolving ethnic tensions.

A Word on Methodology

It is virtually impossible for a social scientist to conduct a completely value free study of socio-political issues. Values enter in the choice of the problem as well as the perspective from which it is analyzed. Yet, once this decision is taken, we can attempt to examine and explore the reality systematically so that it offers an adequate answer to the questions initially raised. This is what I have attempted to achieve by using a comparative framework. Thus, I examine two cases of ethnic relationship and conflict in Northeast India, viz., Meghalaya and Manipur. I look at three important materials: various official documents regarding policies of recognition in the Northeast by the government of India. It gives me an idea about the nature of policies adopted by the government of India for the purpose. Ultimately, it helps me in analyzing the working of such strategies of recognition and redistribution, etc. However, I must confess here that there were several constraints that were faced due to various ‘security problems’ and at times one was compelled to rely more on newspapers and websites. However, I am happy that during my fieldwork I could interact and interview
potential leaders of select communities as well as student leaders. I also had the chance of discussing with scholars working in the field. I undertook empirical field studies at two different stages of Ph. D: first at the beginning of my research i.e. during May-June of 2006, and the second round in late November 2007.

Finally, it is perhaps important to mention briefly some of the terms I use in the Thesis. This is especially because of the fact that in social sciences terms and concepts have been interpreted in different degrees and meaning. In order to minimize the confusions on the meanings of some of the terms in parts of the Thesis I would like to mention here some of them.

One term that has been used very often is 'Tribes'. They are sometimes defined as more or less a homogenous group of people having a closely-knit way of life, with relatively simpler means of production, to be somewhat falling under a close/communicable speech community. ‘Ethnic community’ is the politicized tribe with certain ideological constructs as goal. As compared to the tribe, it is more politicized, ideologically structured with a matured form of communication network. However, defining these terms in the context of the Northeast is very complicated and it is not always possible to make these distinctions particularly when we are dealing with contemporary conflicts and politics I have therefore used these terms interchangeably to refer to those communities with a linguistic identity and traditions different from another.

In the Thesis I have used the term “Sub-tribe” to refer to communities that are totally homogenous in nature, but over a period of time due to factors both from outside and within, were subsumed under an encompassing identity of a tribe. Though they came to be known by the encompassing tribe’s identity, they also retain their subsumed identity either as a sub-tribe or a clan.
instance, Kuki vis-a-vis Thadou and Gangte. Thadou and Gangte are sub-tribes subsumed under the larger tribe identity of Kuki.

I hope this will minimize the confusions on the meanings of these terms. With all this in mind, let me start with a systematic examination of the existing theory of multiculturalism in the first Chapter.