

## **Inter State Border Conflict in North-East India with Special Reference to Assam Nagaland Border Conflict**

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**Abstract:** This paper is an attempt to study the inter-state border disputes in north-east India with special reference to Assam-Nagaland border conflict in the border areas of Golaghat district. The north-east region of India comprising of eight states has been gradually transforming into a conflicting area that breaks the harmony between the states and also undermines the concept of north-east India as a prosperous and culturally rich region of India. Due to some social, political and economic issues, this north east India divided into various states which were under the same umbrella at a time. Several inter-state disputes take place in this region with the upcoming of political and social unrest. The Naga insurgency that started in the late 1950's is known as one of the unresolved armed conflicts in India. So through this paper the researchers make an attempt to study how the recent Naga-Assamese clash happened in the border areas of Golaghat district is responsible for breaking down of communal harmony, humanity and inter-state peace process. As the dispute between Assam and Nagaland is currently the most prominent with a history of violent clashes between border areas, this paper aims to concentrate mainly on this issue. Moreover this paper will try to examine the role of the government regarding the above issue. Thus the above issues will be highlighted in the paper.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

North-east India is a frontier region with common borders with China, Bangladesh, Bhutan etc. This region gradually is transforming into a setting for multitude of conflicts that undermine the idea of this region as a prosperous and culturally rich region of India. Currently most of the states of this region except for Tripura, Mizoram and Sikkim are affected by some problems like political violence, insurgency, ethnic conflict, inter-state disputes arising out of various political, social and economic issues. The present political scenario of North-East India reveals the emergence of new forms of conflicts which are coming out of the lack of defining North-East India as a composite region. These conflicts not only affect the territorial and political sovereignty of the Indian state, but also the life of the people living in the border areas in inexplicable condition. The only commonality of the North -east people at the moment is the outburst of incompatible attitude against the agreement of geographical isolation. All these negative issues-agitation, abuse of human rights etc. hinder the economic and social progress and also break the popularity of North-east India as a bonding of eight states. Mutual misunderstanding between the states has led to various border disputes with increasing violence. The people of this region are suffering from a twin inability to evolve a common imaginary and identify themselves as inhabitants of North-East India, rather they are fighting with each other to gain identity of their own states to which they belong. This mentality gives birth to turmoil which is responsible for fragmentation of North-East India. An illustrative case is the border disputes raging for decades that have enveloped the states- Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur and Nagaland. Thus the North-East India has long remained one of the most volatile and sensitive regions in the country. The interstate boundary disputes plagued the relations between the parent and newly born states. The inter-state boundary between Assam -Maghalaya, Assam-Nagaland etc. has stained the relations between these states and resulting in creating a sense of insecurity in the minds of the people on either side of the border.

### **II. OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the study is to make a probe into the inter-state border disputes in North-East India with special reference to the Assam-Nagaland border conflict. The study aims to analyze deeply the cause of this conflict and its effect upon common people.

**Methodology & Database :**

The Study adopts investigative analytical methods.

**III. DISCUSSION**

**Origin, history and causes of the conflict**

The longest and the bloodiest inter-state dispute is the border dispute between Assam and Nagaland. The vexed issue of the Assam-Nagaland border dispute goes all the back to 1866 when the Naga Hills District was formed. Since then a series of events unfurled in the history of these two states that culminated in the formation of Nagaland in 1963. The claim of Assam and Nagaland over the forest tracts along the border is in reality a border conflict. The disputed land is claimed by private individuals and communities on both sides of the official border based on historical rights. There are some areas which Assam claims to be part of its territory based on constitutional rights while on the other hand Nagaland makes its claims based on historical grounds. Thus the genesis of the clashes among the Assam-Nagaland border areas lies at the refusal of Nagaland to accept the constitutional boundary of the states that was defined by the British rulers. Sundaram Commission recommended a borderline between the two states in early 1970s/s to which the Nagaland state government did not agree. In front of the aggressive Naga force, Assam became helpless and so took help of the Supreme Court in the later 1980's. But that has seen no verdict for the last three decades which is clearly noticeable in the recent anarchic situation in the border areas of Golaghat district. The atrocities by Naga militants on the people of Assam show the continuation of their demand to expand Naga territory. The refusal of Nagaland to accept its notified borders gave birth to the tensions between Assam and Nagaland and resulted in the first border clash between these two states in 1965 at Kakodonga Reserve Forest. Since then, violent clashes along the Assam-Nagaland border have become a regular feature with major armed conflicts reported in 1968, 1979 and 1985.<sup>1</sup> The border areas of Assam and Nagaland witnessed the worst ever clash in 1979 when nearly 100 people were killed and more than 20000 displaced. But again in 1985, there was an open war between the police forces of Assam and Nagaland was created, the border areas were thinly populated, but now the increasing population has changed the situation that results in conflicts. The recent conflict at Uriamghat in Golaghat district of Assam is a continuation of recurring conflicts that have periodically erupted along the Assam-Nagaland border.

Golaghat was once considered to be a peaceful district, but after witnessing the horrifying commotion during the recent Assam-Nagaland border clash, it became unacceptable. The clash was an attack against humanity regardless of any sympathy. The recent confrontation between the Naga and the Adivasi Assamese people was provoked by the alleged abduction of two Assamese boys by the Naga. As a result, naturally a protest was there on the Assam side of the border. While dealing with the protesters, firing from Nagaland led to the death of one and injury to two others. Soon the situation went out of control with the pathetic condition of the border inhabitants of Assam. A minor land dispute between an Assamese tribal and a Naga took a serious turn that resulting in the violent attack of the Naga miscreants upon protesters of Assam. But the remarkable fact is that this is not for the first time that a clash occurs between Assam and Nagaland. It is just a repetition

Conflict is surely a sign of breaking down of humanity and loss of unity and harmony among different groups of people. The recent Assam-Nagaland clash also highlights this. The aggressive and barbarous attack of the Naga miscreants lead the Adivasi people of Assam to face a pathetic condition. They left all their belongings in their gutted houses because the miscreants gave them no chance to carry anything while fleeing. They had to spend restless days and nights as their houses were burnt and the danger of being threatened conquered their minds. The tension was so serious that the central government had to send additional paramilitary forces to contain the situation. The outcome of the conflict was full of pity and loss, because several people had to displace from their own houses to the relief camps. Darkness dominated the whole area during those days and people lived a life of uncertainty and insecurity. Above these many people had lost their lives in this conflict. Thus we see how Uriamghat became a battling ground witnessing the play of blood and flesh coming out of border dispute. In the name of exercising one's power and domination, several lives of common people were totally ruined. Arson by Naga miscreants created a sense of insecurity and instability in the minds of innocent border inhabitants of Assam. Nothing came as a positive result from this conflict. Rather it only increased the separateness between the two states from each other in which they behave like enemies to each other despite being neighbor states and same parts of North-East India. The conflict has been lingering day by day and the innocent people are the sufferers.

Due to lack of perfect administrative knowledge by the state governments, the clashes often shift into police violence. Sometimes the situations are aggravated by the negative roles played by the governments of the concerned states.<sup>2</sup> The border dispute became a people versus history problem as the clash between the Naga and common people and many injured. The barbaric torture of Assam police upon the unarmed democratically protesting people changed the whole situation. It clearly brought forward the inability of the Government of Assam to tackle the real skirmish<sup>3</sup>.

Lack of infrastructure was a major cause behind the failure to bring stability to the border tensions. Instead of providing security to the victims, the Assam police attacked them with inhuman attitude which was really depressing and disgraceful. The people from the Assam side of border tried to protest against the barbaric act of the Naga with the hope that the authorities were there to help them. But unfortunately the situation had taken an opposite turn which forced everyone of Assam to involve in the battle as the conflict touched more or less every sphere of Assam through the protest against the unlawful activities of Assam police.

The repeated incidents of border trouble and death of common people bring in to sharp focus the lack of serious law enforcement. Regarding the recent Assam-Nagaland border dispute, while the Government of Assam had blamed the Central Government and its forces for failing to contain the violence, the Center claimed that it could only assist the state government responsible for policing. The Chief Minister of Assam promised to provide compensation to the displaced people. But we had seen his failure in bringing stability to the anarchic situation.

Lack of adequate security and infrastructure has been a perennial bane in border areas that had been reflected in the recent Assam-Nagaland clash.<sup>4</sup> A greater presence of the Assam police near the border would definitely had a restraining impact on miscreants seeking to foment trouble<sup>3</sup>. But being unable to do this they displayed their power upon the innocent insurgents of Assam. There is a possibility to the revitalization of such border conflicts. So the state government of Assam needs to take up strongly the center the issue of maintaining an incompetent neutral force like the CRPF which has made it a habit to stay passive during border incursion by Naga miscreants. The State Government of Assam announced creation of border development council and border protection force after going through the demands of the public. But here the significant fact is to see how far these steps succeed to tackle border conflicts.

#### **IV. REMEDIES**

The public awareness came to light in the recent Assam-Nagaland border clash. The common people were standing against the unlawful activities of the Assam Police and also protested against the barbaric attack of the Naga miscreants upon the Assamese Adivasi people. Several associations and organizations demanded for an immediate and permanent settlement to the Assam-Nagaland border confrontation. They also submitted memorandum to the State Government of Assam demanding safety and security of Assamese people living along the border areas from the marauding Naga miscreants. Thus by going through the recent violent border clash between Assam and Nagaland, it can be suggested that no states should claim its rights to the areas through violent attacks. The development should be the joint effort of the respective departments of both the states. The interest of the border inhabitants should be analyzed deeply in the process of maintaining peace and harmony. To restore peace and stability in the disputed area, it is necessary to talk directly with them in order to observe their needs and securities. We should create specific list of land record and strengthen local administrative mechanisms that deal with land disputes. It is also necessary to help them in regaining mental strength and confidence to their endangered minds. The solution cannot be achieved either by delaying the matter or by dividing people among themselves regarding states or communities. It can only be achieved by promoting a sense of unity, peace and concord, by developing the idea that we are parts of the North-East India, not of a single state.

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

Finally it can be said that the border disputes are coming out of people's awakening towards their own territory. At present people become very narrow minded that stakes humanity in the exercise of all violent conflicts. But the significant fact is that do we really need demarcation of state borders when we are living under the same umbrella called North-East India? What difference will we achieve if we have clearly demarcated inter state boundaries? Can all these violent clashes contribute to the development of the states of North-East region of India? So it is the time to think seriously all these contradictory issues. Government of the disputed states should come up with practical and acceptable solution to the border tensions as soon as possible. Now the need is to search for a lasting solution to the long pending interstate border conflicts in North-East India. If we can represent ourselves as a whole of North-East India through cultural and sports activities sharing the sense of unity, then we can also work for removing the clashes among states. Therefore, witnessing the conflicts only as a spectator is not our duty as human beings. Rather we should try to analyze deeply their tragic situation and also should try to develop the sense of unanimity among the inhabitants of North-East India. It is true that we cannot fulfil their demands. But we can pass a message of harmony that also helps them to realize the necessity of being integrated. Regarding the border clashes, we should not always be involved in criticizing the government for their inability to come to a permanent solution. In this process we should try to develop the concept the understanding between the Naga and Assamese by organizing awakening programs so the some violent instances like the recent Assam -Nagaland border dispute never happen again.

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