



# Assertion Of Ethnic Identities And Plurality Of Socio-Religious Movement In North East India: A Contemporary Issue

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on the various ethnic identities in North East India as well as the emergence of socio-religious movement where politically they have to campaign and fight for their land, language, culture and so on. With the existence of diverse culture and plurality in nature culturally and geographically, the people in North East face several challenges and are in desperate need for their revival and progress of their own identities. They face the threat from the dominant of the plain tribes and religion which could become a threat to their ancestral identities.

## Keywords

Zeliangrong Heraka, Seng Khasi, Meitei, Indianness, ethnicity, Hinduisation, sanskritisation.

## Introduction

Ethnic identities and its issues has perhaps become the most serious problem faced by Indian society, which leads to various conflicts among different communities revealing on the basis of caste, creed and religion. In fact, there are altogether around 705 officially recognized ethnic groups in the Northeast, South and Western part of India. Some political groups with their fundamentalist agenda behind and their right wings for their political gain tend to forget the diverse nature of the country since the time immemorial, and often create disharmony on the basis of ethnic lines. Another form of disparity in the larger sections of the society is their ideological differences on the basis of faith and religion. In order to get rid of oppression and marginalization many ethnic communities have joined the mainstream religions of Hindu where they are benefited socially and economically. And therefore, those are the emergence of ethnic groups and socio religious movements. This paper is an attempt to study ethnic identities and the various reasons for the emergence of socio-religious movement in North East India.

## 1. Research method:

This article focuses on the assertion of ethnic identities and various rises of Socio-religious movements in India. The researcher employed interdisciplinary and cognitive approach as it deals with the study of various religious movements and their significance for the overall development and bring into the limelight for a better understanding and looking from a deeper perspective as to how it came to form and their agendas in formulating those various movements. The issue of ethnicity and religion has been the main problems that have been arising in a pluralistic nation like India, so it asserts on how to deal with various identity crises and to resolve in a peaceful and dialogical ways.

## 2. Ethnic Identities in India:

The origin of the term 'ethnicity' goes back to the greek word for nation- 'ethnos'. In ancient Greek this was used to describe a community of common descent- in other word, 'etyhnis' is used to describe a kinship group linked by ties of blood.<sup>1</sup> The 'ethnic' categories in Indian politics are really permeable 'identities' based around religion, language, tribe, and the Aryan/Dravidian divide. Religion is the key identity that dominates, and is identified with Hinduism (79.80 % of the population), Muslims (14.23 %), Christian (2.3 %) and Sikh (1.72 %) each. Linguistically, there are nine major languages each spoken by over 25 million people and several minor ones like Punjabi and Kashmiri. Tribal identities include those outside or on the margins of Hindu society, now referred to as Scheduled Tribes and recognized tribal populations in the Himalayas and the northeastern states are often considered racially distinct.<sup>2</sup> The people in India like to identify their ethnicity based on their religion rather than caste and creed.

### 2.1. Ethnic Consciousness and Ethnic Conflict:

Ethnicity emerged through interaction between different peoples; it was initially a product of conquest, colonization and immigration. That is, ethnicity implies dislocation from one's original country, region, or nation, that is, homeland. In contrast, the nation inevitably alludes to a people belonging to a specific territory whose moral claim to political authority over it is perceived as legitimate. The 'ethnification' of a nation takes place precisely when it does not have the resources for state formation, namely a homeland and legitimate political authority over it.<sup>3</sup> In the course of time, ethnic consciousness emerged out of intersectionality leading to conflict between various communities and conflict with the state. In other words, the intersectional discrimination created by the faulty modernization is considered to be one of the reasons for ethnic conflicts. As Wolf argues that neither ethnicity nor nationalism in itself causes ethnic conflict but when the state ignores the legitimate political, social and economic grievances of the disadvantaged groups leading to ethnic conflicts. Wolf further adds that 'ethnic conflicts are a form of group conflict in which at least one of the parties involved interprets the conflict, its causes, and potential remedies along an actually

<sup>1</sup> Stefan Wolff, *Ethnic Conflict: A Global Perspective* ( New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 33-34.

<sup>2</sup> Gurharpal Singh, "Reassessing 'Conventional Wisdom' : Ethnicity, Ethnic Conflict, and India as an Ethnic Democracy" in *Critical Issues in Indian Politics: Ethnonationalism in India, A Reader*, ed. Sanjib Baruah (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 100.

<sup>3</sup> T.K. Oommen, Nationality, Ethnicity and Modernity: Clearing the ground in "Modernity and Ethnic Processes in India", ed. D.V. Kumar (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2014), 8-9.

existing or perceived discriminatory ethnic divide.<sup>4</sup> Hence, in order to get recognition and preserve their identities they began to form their own political group to maintain their unique culture, belief and tradition.

## 2.2. The Informal Nature of Political Ethnicity:

Contemporary ethnicity is the result of intensive interaction between ethnic groupings and not the result of complete separation. This is contrary to what one may call ‘the glue theory of tribalism’ which has been suggested by some writers. This theory states that during the colonial period, the colonial powers had acted as ‘glue’ in sticking together within the framework of new, artificially established, centralized states, some diverse ‘tribal’ groups, and that once the glue was removed when the colonial powers withdrew, each package state began to disintegrate and to fall into its original parts. Ethnicity is essentially a political phenomenon, as traditional customs are used only as idioms, and as mechanisms for political alignment. If mankind do actually quarrel seriously on the grounds of cultural differences it is only because these cultural differences are associated with serious political cleavages. Finally, ethnic grouping is essentially informal. It does not form part of the official framework of economic and political power within the state. It is only when, within the formal framework of a national state or of any formal organization, an ethnic group informally organizes itself for political action, that we can say that we are dealing with ethnicity.<sup>5</sup> Politically the ideology and beliefs of different ethnic tribes in our country are often divided and it creates a huge gap of misunderstanding and results in clash.

## 2.3 The Zeliangrong Heraka Movement:

The *Heraka* movement was founded by Haipau Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu in 1929 from the Bhutan Cave.<sup>6</sup> *Heraka* is a reformed religion out of the old traditional belief of *Paupaisie*. It emerged as a reformed faith and also a political movement for the cause of the Zeliangrong people in order to liberate themselves from the rule of British colonialism and establish supremacy of their religion. They believe through the propagation of *Heraka* faith they will accomplish in building a Zeliangrong homeland; where there will be only indigenous people of their own living as an independent people. The movement coincided with the India’s political movement against Britain ruler, and the leader of *Heraka* movement Rani Gaidinliu was well connected and renowned by then first Prime minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru and his heir Indira Gandhi and so on. The *Heraka* ideology is that they can only be the true inheritance of its ancestral land and tradition, where once their leaders have fought for their identities and recognition.

A pioneer named N.C Zeliang, the first theological graduate among the Zeliangrong tribes and also the Choir member during Billy Graham crusade at Kohima 1972: went on to become founder-president of the Zeliangrong Heraka Association (ZHA). He also formalized the *Heraka* faith, composed the *Heraka* hymnal and liturgy, developed the *Heraka* “pastoral” handbook, compiled the religious text, and wrote religious tracts.<sup>7</sup> He promoted *Heraka* faith at the national level and made close link with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Today, most of the *Heraka* adherents identify themselves as a Hindu rather than indigenous faith which they possessed.

<sup>4</sup> V. Bijukumar, Modernity and Ethnicity: An Intersectionality Analysis in “*Modernity and Ethnic Processes in India*”, ed. D.V. Kumar (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2014), 121.

<sup>5</sup> Abner Cohen, Ethnicity and Politics in “*Ethnicity*”, ed. John Hutchinson & Anthony D. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 83-84.

<sup>6</sup> Ramkuiwangbe Newme, *Tingwang Hingde* (Guwahati: Regional Zeliangrong Heraka Association, 1991), 17.

<sup>7</sup> G. Kanato Chophy, *Christianity and Politics in Tribal India: Baptist Missionaries and Naga Nationalism* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2021), 295.

### 2.3. The Khasi Solidarity Movement:

The increasing awareness of the challenge posed by the social, political and economic hegemony of the plains people inspired the hillmen, especially the Khasis and Garos. The growth of nationalism among the Khasis was first found in 1923 when the Khasi National Durbar, the first political party was formed. The Durbar demanded the retention of an independent status for the Khasi states and advocated the development of national genius on indigenous lines. When the federation of Khasi states was formed in 1934, the traditional leaders, including the Chieftains, demanded establishment of an independent relationship between the Khasi States on the one hand, and the princely states of India on the other. The leaders demanded representation in the Central legislature and the Chamber of Princes. They reiterated their demand for the transfer of powers of the Deputy Commissioner to the federation. Despite the fact that Khasis did not succeed in getting their aspirations fulfilled, the movement stimulated political consciousness and the spirit of ardent nationalism. The Chinese aggression of 1962 turned Shillong into a busy transit camp for defence personnel; and this brought home to the Khasis the strategic importance of their land. This realization imparted greater nerve and incentive to their leaders to continue the solidarity movement for re-establishing the tribal identity of the Hill people. Rev. Nicholas Roy made unsuccessful efforts in a conference at Tura in 1950 for the formation of the Assam Hills Tribal Union. The formation of the Eastern Indian Tribal in 1954 welded together the hill people of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills, the Mikir Hills, the Cachar Hills and the Mizo Hills.<sup>8</sup> This movement has politically awakened the Khasis and Garos to fight for their land, culture and customs. Till today, the land of Meghalaya is a place where it is well functioned socially and economically utilizing the resources which they have inherited in their own land.

### 2.4. Bangladeshis and other Illegal Immigrants:

Today, there are millions of Bangladeshis and other illegal immigrants living in India. Most of them neither are born nor have attained Indianism. They have not gone through the much needed socialization process. Their inflow continues. They have illegally entered this country and have been living here for several years. According to an Intelligence Bureau document presented at the 38<sup>th</sup> Conference of Directors-General of Police, the number of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh settled in India is over 15 million and the influx of Bangladeshi nationals continues unabated. It presented figures as 80 lakh in West Bengal, 50 lakh in Assam, 4.75 lakh in Bihar, 3.75 lakh in Tripura, 4 lakh in Delhi and 80,000 in Nagaland.<sup>9</sup>

Due to the over influx of the illegal immigrants settled in Assam, there have been many border disputes with the neighbouring states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland; which has resulted in the loss of many lives and displacement. In 2021, 6 Assam police personnel were killed in *Vairengte* district of Mizoram in border disputes with the Mizoram police. The scarcity of land and mass infiltration has been the factor for many ethnic conflicts in the region. There is a threat like the indigenous *Tripuris* have faced in Tripura where they become minorities in their own backyard; the other tribal states may also become minorities in their own states where they now no longer hold the power to control their state.

<sup>8</sup> P.R.G Mathur, The Khasi Solidarity Movement in “*Tribal Movements in India*”, Vol. 1, ed. K S Singh (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2015), 189-91.

<sup>9</sup> S.L. Verma, *Beyond Hindutva* (New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2007), 347-48.

### 3. Emergence of Socio-Religious Movement in India

#### 3.1. The Seng Khasi Movement:

The Seng Khasi was formed by sixteen Khasi young men with Babu Jeebon Roy as the founder patron and a guide and mentor to this Association which was eventually formed on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1899. At the initial stage this association was named as *Ka Seng Samla Khasi* (The Khasi Youngmen's Association) and was made with purpose of developing the Khasis in mind, body and spirit. Thereafter, the *Seng Samla Khasi* came simply to be known as Seng Khasi. They focused on to foster the sense of brotherhood and unity amongst the Khasis and retain their socio-cultural and religious identities; enticing them to earn virtue of righteousness through the work of humanity and regulate the way of living and moral conduct. And their utmost priority was to promote the advancement of education among the Khasi society.

The emergence of Seng Khasi started during the British colonial rule to counter the missionaries activities of converting the Khasis to Christianity. Ka Seng Khasi accused the advent of Christianity in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills by the Western missionaries as the destroyer of 'Khasi Culture' and the folk who get converted into Christian started to divert from the mainstream Khasi ethnic cultural identities. This movement raised awareness about their preservation of culture and claimed that the religion and culture are inseparable. Due to the harsh method used by the Missionaries among the tribals that penetrated into their mind the culture and practices of the tribals as paganism was one of the main factors that Seng Khasi retaliated against the conversion and stood firm in their propagation of the movement in the Khasi-Jaintias areas. They began to counter and address the issue even among the Churches on the significance of the khasi culture and the possibility of extinction if they do not protect and treat as a way of evil ways as proclaimed by the missionaries against the practices of the ethnic tribals.<sup>10</sup> The missionaries who came to the Khasi land has penetrated into the minds of the converted Christians to renounce all their former cultural practices and this was also one of the reason for fuelling fire against the missionaries activities by the Seng Khasi. But the main priority was to revive the Khasi cultural heritage.<sup>11</sup>

The Seng Khasi movement was initially founded to bring together all the Khasis together and constitute a sense of brotherhood among them and free themselves from the influence of the foreign religion and culture. It aims in building and uniting all the Khasis under one platform to grow and work together politically in order to attain a sense of harmony and prosperity among themselves. Their concern was promoting their own unique identities to the national level and not aligning with the outside world in the midst of their own.

#### 3.2. Sanskritization Movement among the Bodos of Assam:

The Bodos are the single largest community residing within the North East constituting 6% of Assam's total population of more than 13 lakhs in number, settled in the area spanning from Rangia to Kokhrajor. Deprived and disempowered under the hegemony of the caste Hindu Assamese they have begun trying to revive their culture and identity on the plank of ethnicity.<sup>12</sup> The latest ethnic conflagration of the Bodos is

<sup>10</sup> Umeshwari Dkhar, *Protection of the Religious Practices of "Niam Khasi"/ "Niam Tre" A Legal Study* (Shillong: Ri Khasi Publications, 2015), 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> Bolinker Sokhlet, Understanding Religious Fundamentalism in the Khasi Socio-Religious Context in "Voices from the North East: Post Modern Reflection on Issues Confronting the Tribals of North East India", ed. Razouselie Lasetso and Lovely Awomi James (Jorhat: ILEMA- ETC, 2018), 110.

<sup>12</sup> Sajal Nag, Resisting Nationalist Discourses Ethnic Upsurge in Post-Colonial North-east India in "Conflicting Ethnicities: Locating the Local in the Global", ed. Kousar J. Azam (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distribution, 2013), 110-11.

directed against the outside settlers, their main grudge is against the outside settlers, and their main grudge is against the high caste ethnic Assamese people who control the state power of the Assam state. The Bodo community in the wake of experiencing the prolonged and historical domination in the hands of the caste-Hindu Assamese people raised the slogan that “Bodos are not Assamese” and challenged the Assamese chauvinism since the early phase of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact Kalicharan Brahma, one of the Bodos stalwarts took the lead to convert the Bodos into Hinduism so as to be able to withstand the Assamese onslaught. That was a time when the tribe went through a phase of Sanskritization. During the early period of colonial rule the Bodos tactically underwent through a phase of Sanskritization whereby they could associate themselves with the Assamese elites to oppose the British. Thereby they interpreted many of their gods and goddesses in terms of the Brahmanical ones. They in fact, came under the influence of the Vaishnavism as was propagated by Guru Sanakardev among the Assamese caste Hindu peoples.<sup>13</sup>

Once the indigenous faith of Bodos have become almost to an extinct and now have embraced the mainstream Hinduism where they are entitled to showcase their own identity and recognition under the umbrella of Hindutva and its various wings. The spread of Hinduism was rampant among the Bodos and are embracing vehemently for their political interest in the midst of disillusionment as they have encountered in the land of Assam.

### 3.3. Hinduisation of the Meities in Manipur:

The origin of the Meitei according to British administrator and well known scholars like McColloch, Damant, Johnstone, Hodson, Pembertone, and Brown are inclined to trace the origin of the Meitei from Tibeto-Burman who are settled in the valley. Bimol quoted P.V. Bhattacharyya remarks about the Meities identities as Hindus descent from ‘Babhruvahan,’ the son of Arjuna of Mahabharata. T.C Hodson also asserted that the degraded Brahmins who served the Meities invented a legend that makes them believe that the people were the descendants of Arjun.<sup>14</sup> Manipur in 18<sup>th</sup> century saw a great change in the social and religious life of the Manipuris. The period from the reign of Pamheiba (Garib Nawaz) to Chingthangkhomba (Bhagyachandra) and Maharaja Churachand Singha witnessed a marked change in Manipuri society, both in culture and religion. It was during this period that the Manipuris have embraced Hinduism by renouncing their own faith and religion under royal patronage. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the common Manipuri thought has been identified with Hinduism in the form of Vaishnavism which is associated with the school of Sri Chaitanya. Many scholars started to locate the Manipuris in the discursive pan-Indian social and cultural narrative and traced the roots of the Manipuris with that of Kiratas of the Vedic literature. A law book called ‘Wayel’ was written as Hindu Law Book of Manipur. It became a matter of pride for them to use Bengali and Sanskrit in their day to day lifestyle. These efforts to popularize the new religion caused the indigenous religion to fade out from the life of the people. It leads to the fact that Vaishnavism practiced in Manipur consequently became a peculiar Manipuri Vaishnavism in form, a syncretism of traditional culture and the new faith.<sup>15</sup>

The Brahmins who were brought in Manipur by the Maharaja from Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and their descendants of the entire Meitei population including the Royal family and clan belong to the

<sup>13</sup> J.J. Roy Burman, Ethnic Assertion and Counter-Sanskritization Movements among the Bodos and Meities of Northeast India in “*Religion and Ethnic Reconstruction Among the Tribes of Northeast India*”, ed. C.J. Sonowal (New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2014), 172-73.

<sup>14</sup> L. Bimol, *Christianity Among the Meities in Manipur: A Missiological Perspective* (New Delhi: CWI, 2018), 30-21.

<sup>15</sup> Dayamay Singha & Parag Moni Sharma, Religious Revivalism and Ethnic Assertion: A Study with Reference to the Meities of Assam in “*Religion and Ethnic Reconstruction Among the Tribes of Northeast India*”, ed. C.J. Sonowal (New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2014), 186-87.

Mongoloid race. Meitei claim to be Indo-Aryan race was obviously made after their conversion to Hinduism, a phenomenon which the anthropologists and social scientists call ‘Rajputization’. By the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D, when the Huns were taken into Hinduism as a Kshatriya caste, the Brahmins and tribals chiefs have been adopting this method of ‘making up, with the help of the Brahmins, a fictitious genealogy establishing mythological connection with the illustrious Rajput clans of North-Western India’.<sup>16</sup> King Gambhir Singh (1825-34) also played a vital role in expanding the Vaishnavism in Manipur. After his arrival the Vaishnava religious worship and festivals which were not implemented by his predecessors were being introduced. He introduced the images of Jaganath, Balarama and Subhadra, and their worship was done as in the Puri. Gambhir Singh also introduced a dance drama which was based on the tenth book of the Bhagavata Purana with the music known as Shan-shenba literally meaning, ‘tending of the cows’, which depicts the heroics acts of Sri Krishna and his brother Balarama while they were tending the cows.<sup>17</sup>

Today the majority of the Meiteis in Manipur identify themselves as Hindu sect of Vaishnavism and only small portion of their people have embraced Christianity. The Meiteis constitutes half of the population and settled mostly in the valley of Imphal. Whereas, the other dominant tribes like Nagas and Kukis inhabits the hilly area.

#### 4. Impact of Socio-religious Movement:

**4.1. Positive Impact-** The socio-religious movements started with a fundamental aim of reviving the age-old traditions with minor modifications and changes so that it can adapt to the changing environment.

4.1.1. Those movements have various merits like bringing the community together and also reviving their age-old traditions and cultures. Thus it is also on the process of reviving the old identity which was closely linked with their faith. As mentioned the religious beliefs and faith have great meaning for the people and it served as source of mental satisfaction.

4.1.2. The people of those communities who had changed their religion were not happy with the new found belief because many of them have converted into varied reasons like financial and psychological reasons. The satisfaction they found in the traditional religion was absent in the new found religion. Thus many of them reverted back to their old religion after the revivalist movements have started.

4.1.3. One of the most significant impacts of the movements is the changes in the socio-economic relationship between the Brahmins and the non-Brahmins. Earlier Brahmins enjoyed certain economic status legitimized by the notion of purity and pollution corresponding with their ritualistic and social position in society. The movement that started as socio-religious movement has greater implication on the socio-cultural identity of the movement is the general awakening of their pre-Hindu identity.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Johnathan H. Thumra, *Vaisnavism in Manipur* in “*Society and Religion*”, ed. Richard W. Taylor (Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1976), 106.

<sup>17</sup> Johnathan H. Thumra, *Vaisnavism in Manipur*.,113.

<sup>18</sup> Manoranjan Pegu, Religion and Ethnic Assertion among the Misings of Assam in ““*Religion and Ethnic Reconstruction Among the Tribes of Northeast India*”, ed. C.J. Sonowal (New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2014), 142-43.

**4.2. Negative Impact:** Despite having many good impacts after the socio-religious movement there were also consequences which those movements have often been targeted. Some of the reasons are explained below:

4.2.1. Some sections of the society see these movements as Anti-national elements and are operating for their own political interests and are diverting from the nation building interests.

4.2.2. Some of the movements had to resort to violence and illegal activities where they are accused of being outlawed and against the interest of the nation.

4.2.3. The people who operate under those movements face marginalization and also live in fear under the suppression of the authority. They face consequences of being considered traitors to their homeland and being executed.

## 5. Measures to Counter Ethnic Conflict

The North Eastern part of India is one of the most ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse regions in India. The region has witnessed the rise of ethnic consciousness and aspirations leading to tribal movements and ethnic unrest. The multi-ethnic and multi-cultural setting of India struggle to define its nationhood since the nationalist movement provided a fertile ground for the development of ethno-nationalism and other forms of identity quest. In the political parlance the region is almost characterized by ethno-political movements. Since independence every decade saw a new movement of political unrest, most of which turned into violent in extreme forms. The religious revivalism among the tribes is a milder form of ethnic assertion that can be accommodated within the larger trend of revivalism and political assertion.<sup>19</sup>

Some of the measures that need to be implemented to counter ethnic conflict are:

- 1) Through a peaceful dialogue with the government between the different parties who are struggling for their identity that can be solved through negotiable solution.
- 2) The Central government should provide more developmental policy and infrastructure in the concerned areas and among the people who are yet to acquire basic economic stability in their life.
- 3) The political leaders from the minority's communities need to seek more employment package for their youths and also encourage starting various works as an entrepreneur who can be self reliable and sustainable.
- 4) The minority's community must stress more on educational programmes and broad minded in approach of their work and seeking employment.
- 5) The state government needs to check the cross border infiltration and the influx of illegal immigrants in their state.

<sup>19</sup> Dayamay Singha & Parag Moni Sharma, Religious Revivalism and Ethnic Assertion: A Study with Reference to the Meities of Assam in “*Religion and Ethnic Reconstruction Among the Tribes of Northeast India*”, ed. C.J. Sonowal (New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2014), 84.

## 6. A Theological Response for Ethnic identities and Socio Religious movement:

Theologically when we reflect on the crisis of ethnic identities in India, it is one of the major contemporary issue and challenges that has been faced since post independence India. The various ethnic groups were initially formed in order to reclaim or gain the status of self identities. In order to liberate themselves from the dominance of the Brahmin, various socio-religious were activated through the aspiring needs of their people who were marginalized and suppressed from their rights. When we assert on the plurality of the culture and various identities we cannot deny the fact that centre also fails in its policy making for mending all the needs of various ethnic groups in North East India. With lack of infrastructure and depriving economic needs in most part of the region the people feels insecure and vulnerable in their own lands.

When we look back during the times of the Old Testament we could also hear about how the common people were also marginalized in the ancient Israel. The prophets like Isaiah, Amos and Ezekiel prophesied against injustice and suppression of the poor people which is against the law of God (Amos 3: 10, Ezekiel 22: 29-31, Isaiah 10:1-3). The God of Israel has been with the marginalized and oppressed Jews when they were in exile and living in their foreign lands. They were liberated and given enough freedom and identities through their faith in Yahweh. In the same manner, various ethnic groups in North East India are also looking for justice and enlightenment through the power of Christ finished work on the cross where he has redeemed and bought salvation for all mankind. So, as a Christian we should make our new generation innovative made a rational methodological shift in Indian theological thinking to indigenize missionaries approach and adapt in local cultures to preach and extend the message of peace and reconciliation among the people.<sup>20</sup> Acknowledging the injustice the colonial past has meted out put on Pluralistic country as India that created division and ethnic clashes; we should promote a better dialogue between different parties and groups for peaceful resolution and that can be a cornerstone for healing and harmony.<sup>21</sup>

In the mission of Jesus, he empowers the minorities like Samaritans and outcast people of the society. So in the same way various ethnic people would be empowered through the gospel and liberate them from all the fears and insecurities that they faced. And in fact, they should move forward and demand for the equal treatment and providence from the government. However, the Church also has a major role to play in delivering justice and reconciliation for various ethnic groups and ignite them in the process of building a great nation.

## Evaluation and Conclusion:

The Contemporary issue that we are facing today is due to the lack of understanding on the concept of plurality of existence among the peoples there have been grave consequences which results in riots, infiltration and the emergence of various movements which demands for their greater rights and liberty. The subjugation and hegemonic policy of the Aryans religion has also been the cause of division based on religion, region and identities. The various ethnic groups have stood up and strive towards for the better recognition and to claim their priority over their land against the dominant and possessive central powers that has often pushed them to the extreme corner in the promise of economic development, infrastructure and other packages.

<sup>20</sup> P.T. Subrahmanyam, "Incarnation as Avatar- Confusing or Clarifying? A Conceptual Critique," Vol. 9 No. 1 & 2. Indian Theological Journal (John Roberts Theolgical Seminary, 2015), 162-63.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Amalados S.J, *Making Harmony: Living in a Pluralistic World* (Delhi: IDCR and ISPCK, 2003), 153.

The Heraka movement, Seng khasi , Hinduisation of Meiteis, and Sanskritisation of Bodos have also paved the way for the assertion of their self identity and to become more realistic of their identities and not to assimilate themselves with the majority groups. Their fight initially is against injustices that has sidelined them from the mainstream. In order to raise their voice to the national level some groups has taken up a violent stage even to the extent of using arms and ammunitions.

Socio-religious movement is defined as a collective action either to initiate change or to resist change. The Zeliangrong Heraka and Seng Khasi movement are one of those indigenous religions which were established to protect their own culture, identity and belief system. It also creates an awareness among the folk where they have to protect and defend from the influence of foreign force which could tarnish and extinct their indigenous religion as well. So we can assert that those movements has ignite the community together and striving together forward for the upliftment and sustainability in the world's largest democracy. The Meiteis and Bodos of Assam on the other hand who once practiced primal religions of their own have connected themselves with Hinduism and has been merged successfully into Vaishnavism and other Hindu sects and identifies themselves from the lineage of the Vedas.

Hence, we can conclude that the formation and emergence of various ethnic identities and socio-religious movements are part of their demand and seeking enough justice as they could live with equal rights and integrity in their own inherited land with unique cultural identity.

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