



# SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE MIDST OF REGIONAL CONFLICT: A STUDY OF NORTH-EAST INDIA

Submitted by-

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## ABSTRACT

**Social entrepreneurship** is an approach by individuals, groups, start-up companies or entrepreneurs, in which they develop, fund and implement solutions to social, cultural, or environmental issues. Social entrepreneurs, however, are either non-profits, or they blend for-profit goals with generating a positive 'return to society'. Social entrepreneurship typically attempts to further broad social, cultural and environmental goals often associated with the voluntary sector in areas such as poverty alleviation, health care and community development. Again, **Regional Conflict** refers to any kind of disagreement or dispute or difference between ideas, preferences, interests, beliefs, philosophies, etc. of two or more states or regions or countries. In conflict regions or divided societies, social entrepreneurship can be an effective strategy for regional development if it is integrated with conflict engagement. Integrating social entrepreneurship and conflict engagement impacts regional development by redefining inter-group relationships, enhancing social networks, activating social capital, leveraging diversity and challenging existing power structures. Social entrepreneurship in conflict regions is important generally because it helps in talent utilisation, employment generation, innovation, infrastructural development, promotion of equality, sense of unity and self-dependence, utilisation of scarce resources, broadening the overall view, etc. The objectives of this descriptive study are- to illustrate the causes behind regional conflict in North-east India; to state the social entrepreneurship movement in the said region; and to analyse measures for healthy growth of social entrepreneurship movement in the region.

At the end, many suggestions have been forwarded, some of which are- all the problems that are hindering growth of social entrepreneurship in the conflict regions should be carefully analysed by all the parties concerned and the causes behind those problems must be removed or reduced. Massive infrastructural development is a must for healthy growth of social

entrepreneurship. Besides, Media can help in this aspect to a great extent by giving high and wide publicity to the contributions of present social entrepreneurs in the region.

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**Keywords:** Social entrepreneurship, Regional Conflict, Return to society

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

In very general way, a **society** is the aggregate of people living together in a more or less ordered community. It is a community, nation, or broad grouping of people who have common traditions, institutions, and collective activities and interests. A human society is a group of people involved in persistent social interaction, or a large social grouping who share the same geographical or social territory, typically subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations.<sup>1</sup> A society possesses the characteristics of similarities as well as dissimilarities, interdependence, dynamism, abstract, accommodation and assimilation, and comprehensiveness of culture. A society is characterised by both cooperation and conflict. Cooperation avoids mutual destructiveness and results in economy in expenditure. Like cooperation, conflict is also necessary for society. Conflict acts as a cementing factor for strengthening social relations. In a healthy and well developed society, both co-operation and conflict co-exist and hence, society is formed.

In almost every society, some people are found to be more privileged or creative or innovative in their nature and attitude than others. Some are richer while some are poorer. Some are backward and some are advanced. Diversity among perceived unity i.e. conflict amongst the united is a major characteristic of any society. The more privileged or advantageous and innovative section of a society always has a duty towards the leftovers along with duties towards themselves. This section is endowed with unwritten responsibility of providing social benefits to the society as a whole, including themselves. They are responsible to contribute positively to the society. One section of such persons is the entrepreneur.

An **Entrepreneur** is an individual who, rather than working as an employee, runs a small business and assumes all the risk and reward of a given business venture, idea, or goods or/and services offered for sale.<sup>2</sup> An entrepreneur is a business leader, organiser, innovator of new ideas and business processes, allocator of resources, risk bearer. And when the entrepreneur carries on business for dual purpose of earning profit for himself/herself and also contributing something really good to the society, then it becomes **Social Entrepreneurship**. Social Entrepreneurship is an attempt to apply business techniques to find solutions to social problems. It is a combination of passion for a social mission bringing some social benefits as well as profit for the entrepreneur involved. It is a blend of not-for-profit and for-profit elements. Conventional entrepreneurs typically measure performance in profit and return, but social entrepreneurs also take into

account a positive return to society. Social enterprises are social mission driven organisations which apply market-based strategies to achieve a social purpose.

Now, **Regional Conflict** refers to any kind of disagreement or dispute or difference between ideas, preferences, interests, beliefs, philosophies, etc. of two or more states or regions or countries. Every society or every nation has its own set of norms, ethics, beliefs, preferences, likes, dislikes, etc. The societies or nations in the world differ in demographic, political, social, cultural, moral, economic, technological, legal and religious aspects too. Such inter-national differences in important aspects or areas sometimes may become the ground of conflict between two or more nations, especially when such aspects are found to be contradictory to each other among neighbouring or competing nations. Regional conflicts present their own set of unique challenges to the international community. These conflicts may be political, economic, environmental, or social in nature, but are deeply tied to a sense of place. These conflicts can only be resolved with multiple nations' involvement.<sup>3</sup> Conflict does not occur because people are unreasonable or uncooperative or because they are unwilling to live properly and decently with others. But it is rooted in social differences of class and status, of wealth and opportunity, of material interests, where scarce resources are unequally shared.

### **PROFILE OF NORTH-EAST INDIA:**

**North-East** (abbreviated as NE) **India** is the North-eastern-most region of India. Geographically this region is connected to the rest of India via a 22 km strip of land in West Bengal called the 'Siliguri Corridor' and shares international border with Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar and China. The North-East region of India comprises of eight states – Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura and Sikkim- known as the 'Eight Sisters'. The states are officially recognised under the North Eastern Council (NEC). The total population of NE is around 45,772,188 and total area under the region is 2,62,179 km<sup>2</sup>.<sup>4</sup>

### **1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

This study is a purely descriptive one.

The objectives of the study are-

- To illustrate the causes behind regional conflict in North-East India;
- To state the social entrepreneurship movement in the said region;
- To analyse measures for healthy growth of social entrepreneurship movement in the region.

## **2. TYPES AND CAUSES OF REGIONAL CONFLICT:**

We get to see different regional conflicts in the society. All these may be encompassed within two broad divisions-

- Inter-regional conflict
- Intra-regional conflict

Inter-regional conflicts occur between two or more different regions or nations. Such conflicts may occur due to differences in economic, political, social, cultural, moral, legal, ethical, religious aspects among different societies or regions or nations.

On the other hand, intra-regional conflict occurs within the periphery of a particular region. Here, conflict is present among the people of the same region or a broader society where sub-groups are present. The factors acting behind such conflict are- difference in perceptions and beliefs; educational, social and financial backgrounds; low knowledge and awareness level regarding burning issues of the society; exploitation of the weaker section, etc. among different sub-groups of the broader society. Intra-regional conflict destroys and empties a society from within by loosening the bond of unity among people and spreading hatred and intolerance and gradually weakens the society to such an extent that the region or society becomes vulnerable to inter-regional conflicts. This is the case of North-East India.

## **3. IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP MOVEMENT IN CONFLICT REGIONS:**

Entrepreneurs are the wheels of human civilisation. And social entrepreneurs add more value to the concept. Social entrepreneurs are individuals with innovative solutions to society's most pressing social problems. Rather than leaving societal needs to the government or business sectors, social entrepreneurs find what is not working and take steps by themselves to rectify that. Social entrepreneurs act as the change agents for society, seizing opportunities and improving systems, inventing new approaches, and creating solutions to change society for the better.<sup>5</sup> They pursue poverty alleviation goals with entrepreneurial zeal, business methods and the courage to innovate and overcome traditional practices. Social entrepreneurs find the niche markets left untouched by the government's bigger schemes or corporations' social responsibility tasks and do business therein- offering great benefit to the society.

In conflict regions or divided societies, social entrepreneurship can be an effective strategy for regional development if it is integrated with conflict engagement. Integrating social entrepreneurship and conflict engagement impacts regional development by redefining inter-group relationships, enhancing social networks, activating social capital, leveraging diversity and challenging existing power structures.

The importance of social entrepreneurship in conflict regions can be explained as follows--

- **Talent utilisation:** Social entrepreneurship is the best way to utilise the creativity, enthusiasm, zeal and skill an individual possesses. It surely benefits him/her and the society at large.
- **Employment generation:** Social entrepreneurs, through their enterprises and works, try to train and employ the potential workforce of the society. In this way, they offer the inhabitants of the conflict regions a chance to develop their present condition.
- **Innovation:** Social entrepreneurs, like other entrepreneurs, innovate new products and bring new ideas to the society, hence giving the other parts too of the conflict region to think for development rather than continuing unrest.
- **Infrastructural development:** Social entrepreneurs drive social innovation and transformation in fields such as education, health, sanitation, building, transport, environment and enterprise development. Social entrepreneurs attempt to improve basic infrastructural facilities in their own style to benefit themselves and the society.
- **Promotion of equality:** Social entrepreneurship can reduce the problem of unequal distribution of wealth, power and property in a conflict region by establishing valuable enterprises in undeveloped deprived regions and employing local human and physical resources there.
- **Sense of unity and self-dependence:** By their activities, social entrepreneurs can inculcate a strong sense of unity and self-dependence among the people of conflict region and hence reduce their extent of dependence and expectation on/from government.
- **Utilisation of scarce resources:** Social entrepreneurs utilise local scarce resources in the most proper way so that these resources can be useful in improvement of present socio-economic condition of the local people in the region.
- **Broadening the overall view:** Social entrepreneurs can bring awareness among the people of the conflict regions about the burning issues there and help them analyse

reasonably and neutrally the root causes behind all the social evils by keeping aside all the agony, frustration, anger and misunderstanding- hence providing a broader viewpoint to the people of the conflict regions. This is a way to resolve social conflicts.

In the world of social entrepreneurship, emphasis is placed on selling products to the poor, overlooking the spending limitations that lower income families face. Governments need to fill this gap in the most effective way possible, and social entrepreneurs are the solution. Creativity and social purpose are hardwired into the system of social entrepreneurship in a way that is elusive to the more established players. Only through disruptive innovation they are able to systemically impact people in the most difficult regions. Values are the engines that motivate entrepreneurs to fix seemingly unsolvable social problems.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4. REGIONAL CONFLICT AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP MOVEMENT IN NORTH-EAST INDIA:**

NE India is one of those regions of the Earth that are endowed with plenty of natural resources. The region is very rich in agricultural and mineral resources offering great opportunities for various industries as well as amazing natural beauty and places of historical importance that can be strong platform for the region's tourism industry too. But the region is not being able to utilise these resources up to the fullest extent for its rapid development and self-dependence. In reality the NE region is a setting for massive amount of conflict that is weakening the image of India as a prosperous and functioning democracy and there are a number of strong reasons behind this.

In their internet blog, **Hasina Kharbhih** and **Sanjana Janardhanan** (2012) have written about the challenges and opportunities for enterprise in the North East. They pointed that- for decades, the NE India has been a black-hole for business and enterprise. The sustained conflict, geographical isolation, militarisation and migration have led to a drying up of investments, and the lack of economic and social development in the region. This is despite the richness of natural resources in the region, presenting a huge opportunity for investment, and the growth of enterprise in the region. The North East is situated in a geographically vulnerable zone. Almost 98% of the North Eastern borders are international ones – connected to Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar. A major risk associated with this unique geo-political location is that of cross-border human trafficking. Adding to this are factors of unemployment, gender-based violence, armed conflicts, and oppressive social structures. Additionally, the region is suffering

from poverty. Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, and Tripura have been suffering from ethnic violence for decades. Such sustained violence led to a lack of opportunity for people to exercise their entrepreneurial spirit. The fertile mountains of the North East conceal not only the odd militant, but also a rich culture of art and handicrafts passed on from generation to generation. The eight states stand out individually, both in terms of geographical distance, but also in cultural diversity. In addition, the markets in each state differ considerably - from consumption patterns to the kinds of goods and services produced by that region. Seasonal variations and demand fluctuations also determine the activities that people are engaged with. Depending on these factors, people work in areas of art and crafts, agriculture or tourism.<sup>7</sup>

This region between Bangladesh, China and Myanmar has not developed economically as much as the rest of India. There is a high rate of unemployment and few available jobs yet the people are well educated and most often, English speaking.<sup>8</sup>

The region has certain distinct advantages. It is strategically located with access to the traditional domestic market of eastern India, along with proximity to the major states in the east and adjacent countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar. The region is also a vantage entry point for the South-East Asian markets. The resource-rich NE with its expanses of fertile farmland and a huge talent pool could turn into one of India's most prosperous regions. Yet, owing to its unique challenges, we believe that conventional market-based solutions may not work here, given the issues related to poor infrastructure and connectivity, unemployment and low economic development, law and order problems, etc. The region is witnessing a series of insurgencies and is alienated from the economic renaissance that the rest of the country is experiencing. The World Bank describes conditions in the region as a low-level equilibrium of poverty, non-development, civil conflict and lack of faith in political leadership.<sup>9</sup>

In case of **inter-regional** conflict being faced by NE India with its neighbouring countries and also with the mainland India, we see the following prime aspects-

- **Indo-China conflict:** At present, border issue is the only major territorial dispute that is yet unresolved. This is severely harming the lives of inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh and nearby areas of Assam.
- **India-Bangladesh conflict:** Continuous illegal migration of people from Bangladesh to the NE states and border problem are the main issues of conflict here.

- **India-Bhutan conflict:** No significant conflict but insurgents of NE region take shelter and training in deep forests of Bhutan.
- **India-Myanmar conflict:** Border conflict specially significant in Manipur-Myanmar border.
- **North-East India and Indian mainland conflict:** There exists some socio-political conflict between NE region and the mainland India to some extent due to various reasons. One of the prime reasons is that our NE region was historically an independent country and it accidentally became mere collection of states during British rule. This loss of and sometimes will to regain sovereignty and independence is a reason of insurgency too in the region. Perceived political and economic exploitation and lack of attention towards the burning problems of the region from the Central Government are constantly fuelling this internal conflict.

Again, as we see, the prime causes behind **intra-regional** conflict in NE India are-

- The region is home to a large number of different tribes, sub-tribes, castes, etc- each having different ideologies and socio-cultural and political background;
- Ethnic clashes between various tribes for decades;
- Political instability;
- Critical geographical location and topography of the region;
- Insurgency problem;
- Unequal distribution of resources, power and property;
- Severe unemployment;
- Inferior leadership quality and administration in an average;
- Mass corruption at almost all stages,
- Action by people without proper and accurate knowledge of sensitive issues;
- Indifference and passive role of the elite class towards social problems;
- Lack of infrastructure like school, colleges, health centers, hospitals, road etc. specially in hilly areas;
- Attitude problem of people in general and lack of dignity of labour;
- Negligent nature of central government towards critical issues of the region- hence fueling the insurgency problem in the region;
- Land acquisition and border dispute among the states of the region, etc.

This is worth mentioning here that all the problems mentioned here have distinct exceptions in some areas or states of the region.

India's North-east is the location of the earliest and longest lasting insurgency in the country. Except Sikkim, all the seven states have many insurgent groups born due to many valid socio-economic reasons in the past.

Any person intending to start business in this region is prone to get numerous problems like- security problem, syndicate-raaj culture, various illegal and unauthorised taxes demanded by numerous parties, etc. Earning from business often becomes insufficient for solving social problems single-handedly. Lack of knowledge and awareness about social entrepreneurship and its benefits and people's straight expectation for only government jobs after acquiring formal education are some issues that are hindering the growth of social entrepreneurship. The continuous unrest in the region has also called for more military activities and this is giving birth to numerous other problems. Some particular problems add up for the women entrepreneurs. The local insurgent groups in the region often harass entrepreneurs intending to start enterprises here in many ways and at some times, they are kidnapped and even killed.

Despite such an adverse socio-economic environment, entrepreneurship is blooming silently in various areas of the region in the hands of local social entrepreneurs. And social enterprises are also increasing in number and range of activity too.

As **Gouri Agtey Athale** (2008) had pointed out- "A traditional society, depending on traditional industry is finally moving out of a fixed, traditional mould. Young entrepreneurs in the north eastern states of Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram are keen that their states progress economically, and without any government handouts. And they are doing this through their own entrepreneurial initiative in small ways."<sup>10</sup>

Here we can mention the names of Utpal Bora of Jorhat in the field of farming, Abhijit Barooah in the field of liquid nitrogen manufacture and supply, Pranjal Baruah in the field of Mashroom farming, Rakhee Choudhury in weaving industry, Dr. Pradip Sarmah in small-scale animal husbandry, Dr. Bibhab Kumar Talukdar in environmental issues, Joseph Lalngaihawma Ralte of Malsom Bamboo and Mizo Entrepreneur Network (MEN), Daniel Hauhmar of Zokrafts Bamboo, Zohmangaiha of Mizoram Apex Handloom and Handicraft Cooperative Society (MAHCO) and his wife Ralmani, Theja Meru, etc. are excellent examples of social entrepreneurs in the region.

## 5. SUGGESTIONS:

It is a very tough task to suggest measures for the growth of social entrepreneurship in NE region which is undergoing conflicts in so many aspects. A huge responsibility in this area lies on the shoulders of both the central and state governments, specially the state governments. Entrepreneurship needs a healthy environment to successfully grow. And to survive and grow in a conflict or disturbed region- that too with the motive of social benefits- needs deep study of the environment and root causes responsible for the conflicts. Entrepreneurship is about taking advantage of the disadvantages in a target area profitably. And social entrepreneurship aims at contributing directly and positively to the benefit and development of the society, in addition to earning profit for the entrepreneur him/herself. Below are some suggestive measures for growth of social entrepreneurship movement in the midst of regional conflict of the North-East-

- Governments are the most powerful bodies in reducing regional conflicts. In NE too, the central and State governments of respective eight states should take the issue of growth of social entrepreneurship more seriously and create a healthy environment for its rapid growth.
- All the problems that are hindering growth of social entrepreneurship in the region should be carefully analysed by all the parties concerned and the causes behind those problems must be removed or reduced.
- Massive infrastructural development is a must for healthy growth of social entrepreneurship.
- Stronger and widespread promotion of prevailing government schemes for the benefit of social entrepreneurs should be made.
- All the classes and tribes spread in the region should be made aware about the benefits of unity and self-dependence through the medium of social entrepreneurship.
- Creative and innovative business ideas must be heartily welcomed and encouraged from all the parts of the larger society.
- Efficient and eligible ideas must be tried to give a concrete shape by providing all the needed financial, technological and managerial help from government and other concerned parties.
- Some contests, competition etc. can be arranged for encouraging business ideas for social entrepreneurship in the region.
- Media can help in this aspect to a great extent by giving high and wide publicity to the contributions of present social entrepreneurs in the region.

- The concerned bodied should give high importance to commerce education and promotion of social entrepreneurship as a respectable, prestigious and high-earning occupation in the region.
- A strong sense of responsibility and contribution to the society should be inculcated into the children and youth through the curriculums. Attempts should be made at these levels so that they realise the value of and be attracted to social entrepreneurship.
- The central and state governments should take necessary steps as soon as possible to resolve all the conflicts peacefully with the region's neighbour countries.

## 6. CONCLUSION:

As far, we have seen the role of social entrepreneurs in a conflict region like NE India and limitations of functioning of the social entrepreneurs in the region. Social entrepreneurship is one of the best ways to cure regional conflict to some extent and initiate and continue an all-round development of the conflict society. Social entrepreneurship can enhance unity and mutual respect among the sub-groups of a larger society and ensure self-dependence and growth in all respect. The Central Government of India and the eight State Governments in the region have already taken many steps and have been formulating various schemes in this regard. Government's 'Look East Policy' is one of such good steps. Hence we get that with their cordial wishes, cooperation, strong intention and effort, concerned governments, big corporations, all social groups and the general inhabitants of any conflict region can ensure proper growth of social entrepreneurship and prosperity through it.

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## ANNEXURE:

Annexure 1: POLITICAL MAP OF NORTH-EAST INDIA



Research Through Innovation