# A Study Of The Relationship Between Social Conflict And Media In Meghalaya

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Abstract

This paper presents an integrative analysis of societal conflict within Meghalaya, a northeastern state in India marked by ethnic diversity and a complex political history. The state is predominantly inhabited by the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo tribes, yet it also harbours a multitude of other tribal and non-tribal communities. This study elucidates the intricate dimensions of conflict in Meghalaya, including political fragmentation, tribal identity politics, land disputes, and inter-tribal tensions exacerbated by migration. The research critically evaluates the ambivalent role of media in the region, highlighting its function as both a facilitator for dialogue and a potential vector for misinformation.

This study also underscores the pressing need for academic scrutiny into the nuanced interactions between media and conflict dynamics. This article adopts a sociological theoretical framework to contextualize these conflicts within broader global paradigms. The paper concludes by advocating for comprehensive media analysis to ensure accurate and objective portrayal of Meghalaya's multifaceted social landscape. Recommendations include multi-stakeholder interventions that span governmental policies and grassroots community engagement to holistically address the multifarious nature of conflict in the region.

## 1. Introduction

Situated in northeastern India, Meghalaya exhibits a unique political lineage shaped by the amalgamation of indigenous tribes and historical colonial impacts. Established as an independent state in 1972 following its separation from Assam, Meghalaya is chiefly populated by three principal ethnic groups: the Khasis, Jaintias, and Garos. Each of these communities possesses its own distinct linguistic, cultural, and political attributes. The state also shares an international boundary with Bangladesh, that spans roughly 423 kilometers.

Several historians, such as David Scott (1835) and Alexander Mackenzie (1884), have explored the complex histories of the Khasi and Jaintia kingdoms. It is posited that the Khasis originated from the banks of the Mekong River and regions near Cambodia (Bareh, 1967), with their language connected to the Austro-Asian language family. The Garo tribe, on the other hand, traces its lineage to Tibeto-Burman groups that migrated through Tibet into Eastern India and Burma.

Furthermore, Meghalaya is also home to various other tribal communities, including the Bodo-Kacharis, Hajongs, Hmars, Rabhas, Dimasa-Kacharis, Mikir, Mizo (Lushai), Naga, and Kuki tribes. The state additionally hosts a variety of non-indigenous communities, including Bengalis, Marwaris, and Nepalis, as well as individuals originating from diverse regions across India.

Meghalaya's political landscape is marked by a blend of national and regional political forces, with tribal politics playing a central role (Bareh, 2001; Lyngdoh, 2007). Political fragmentation and shifting alliances have characterized the state's politics, impacting its governance and stability (Bhattacharjee, 2018). Tribal identity forms the backbone of social structure in Meghalaya, and its interplay with politics has been thoroughly examined (Lyngdoh, 2007). Land disputes, particularly concerning customary tribal lands, have led to significant social conflict within Meghalaya (Roy, 2004). Yadav's study (2019) on the National Green Tribunal's intervention in banning rat-hole coal mining illustrates the

tension between environmental concerns and tribal rights, resulting in social unrest.

Subba (2003) emphasizes the cultural dimensions of such conflicts and the role of local tribal councils in mediation. Urbanization and migration have created new dynamics of social conflict. Sharma and Barbora (2010) examine tensions arising from the influx of non-tribal migrants into Shillong, leading to calls for protection of indigenous rights and occasional violence.

Media in Meghalaya has often acted as a platform for dialogue and discussion. By providing a space for various stakeholders to voice their opinions, it has facilitated conversations between tribal leaders, politicians, activists, and the general populace. The media's role as a mediator, albeit an indirect one, can foster understanding and potentially reduce conflicts. The media's portrayal of tribal politics can both illuminate and complicate social dynamics. By highlighting the role of traditional institutions like the Dorbar Shnong and Nokma, media can educate the public about the unique governance structures within Meghalaya (Laloo, 2016). However, oversimplification or bias in reporting can misrepresent these complex dynamics, leading to misunderstandings and potential escalation of conflicts. There is a clear need to study diverse media coverages to ascertain how they have portrayed or, in some cases, misrepresented these intricate tribal interactions.

While the present study refrains from making explicit claims about media distortions, the multifaceted issues under consideration indicate the potential for media outlets to succumb to reductive simplifications, prejudicial slants, or sensationalized narratives.

### 1.1. Social Conflict Theory

Marx (1848) posited social conflict as an antagonism among divergent classes in society, identifying it as a seminal force in the progression of social structures. According to his theory, this form of conflict emanates from discrepancies between the instrumentalities and the organizational structures of production, catalyzing a class struggle between the ownership class (bourgeoisie), who control the means of production, and the laboring class (proletariat), who do not. Oberschall (1978) defines social conflict as a "conflict in which the parties are an aggregate of individuals, such as groups, organizations,

communities, and crowds, rather than single individuals, as in role conflict... in which the means chosen by the parties in pursuit of their goals are likely to inflict damage, harm or injury, but not necessarily in every case" (p.291).

## 1.2. Media Slant

Although professional journalism advocates for objective and neutral journalism by abiding to certain set of norms and rules, as set by PCI in case of India, Kahn & Kenney (2002) note that "not all news stories are neutral in tone" (p.383). They observe that news stories often favour one party or a group or organization over the other, especially in a contest or competition. This is referred to as 'slant' or 'media slant', which can also be characterised as a news report leaning or supportive towards one individual or group over the other.

## 2.    Identifying social conflicts of Meghalaya

Conflict has manifested as a significant concern in Meghalaya, a state distinguished by a multifaceted array of social and ethnic configurations. The ethno-diversified makeup of the state, predominantly featuring the Khasi and Garo ethnic groups, has engendered a spectrum of conflicts that span from questions of identity to disputes over resources.

Scholarly analyses by Devi and Bhattacharjee (2017) point to the aspirations for separate states among the Khasi and Garo communities, fueled by perceived disparities in development. Such ethnically-oriented aspirations have been manifested through calls for the creation of 'Garoland'. The landscape of social conflict in Meghalaya is further complicated by the active participation of local student unions like the GSU and KSU, who are engaged in advocating for these divisive agendas.

The history of Meghalaya is punctuated by episodic violence and riots, a result of the underlying ethnic tensions between the Khasi and Garo groups (Bareh, 2001; Das, 2018). Charges of infringement on tribal rights, land, and resources have exacerbated these tensions. Simultaneously, the state's considerable Christian population has not been exempted from inter-religious conflict and tensions, with instances recorded of friction between Christianity and other religious communities (Bhaumik, 2016; Das & Lyngdoh, 2019). This religious dimension adds an additional layer of complexity to the state's already fragile social cohesion. Finally, instances of vigilantism and mob justice have been documented (Das &

Ghosh, 2018), often motivated by a perception of threats to tribal rights or alleged resource encroachment. Thus, Meghalaya serves as a complex case study of how ethnic, social, and religious factors can interweave to create a multi-faceted landscape of conflict and discord.

Among the most important societal conflicts in Meghalaya is land dispute. Due to the complicated land tenure system with numerous rules and regulations controlling land ownership and use, land disputes in Meghalaya have frequently led to conflicts between different communities (Roy, 2013; Sharma & Singh, 2019). For instance, tensions and violence have been created by land disputes between the Garo and non-Garo tribes in the West Garo Hills area and between the Khasi and non-Khasi populations in other parts of the state.

The relationship between Meghalaya's indigenous tribal communities—primarily the Khasis, the Jaintias, and the Garos—and non-tribal settlers has undergone a discernible transformation over the years. While the period from 1972 to 1992 was characterized by a comparatively amicable relationship, a sense of hostility has escalated in subsequent decades. According to Madhu (2014), this change was precipitated by fears among the indigenous tribes of demographic, cultural, and economic subsumption by non-tribal communities. This anxiety led to an increase in societal issues such as vigilantism and mob justice, including acts of violence committed under the purported aim of preserving tribal rights.

The exacerbation of tensions is further influenced by discord over land tenure and political enfranchisement. Indigenous communities often view non-indigenous inhabitants as jeopardizing their cultural distinctiveness and traditional lifestyle. Historically, the entry of non-native demographic groups into Meghalaya can be traced back to the colonial period, during which labor forces such as Nepalese and Bengalis were introduced by British authorities for diverse industrial activities (Roy, 2017). Statistical data from the Indian Census substantiates the perpetuation of this pattern, indicating an increase in the non-indigenous population from 2.8% of the overall population in 1951 to 16.7% in 2011.

Concerning the Nepalese population in Meghalaya, their initial arrival in the region can be traced to the early 19th century, a

time when they were engaged as military servicemen by British colonial governance (Roy, 2017). In contrast, Bengali immigration has been largely propelled by economic incentives, accentuated by subsequent influxes in the wake of India's partition in 1947 and the Indo-Pakistani war of 1971 (Hynniewta, 2013; Roy, 2017). This demographic change has perpetuated tensions between tribal and non-tribal communities, particularly concerning land ownership, political representation, and cultural identity (Roy, 2017). Therefore, Meghalaya presents a complex landscape where various social and historical factors converge to create a milieu rife with inter-group tensions.

Another social conflict has been the religious conflicts, most notably those that have taken place between the followers of indigenous faith called Niam Tre, Christians, Muslims and even Hindu. Even though a sizeable portion of the state's population identifies as Christian, there has been violence, historically there have been friction between the followers of the indigenous faith and those of Christianity.

The Khasi Hills region has a predominantly Christian population, which has caused problems with the non-Christian populace (Kaushik, 2019). The state's political structure has also led to disputes over power-sharing and resource allocation between independent district councils and the state government (Razdan, 2017). Conflicts in Meghalaya manifest along multiple dimensions: identity-related conflicts pivot around linguistic, cultural, and ethnic disparities; resource-centric conflicts revolve around contestations over land and other natural assets; ethno-religious conflicts pertain to disputes rooted in ethnicity and religious affiliation; and political conflicts emanate from struggles for power and representational equity.

The multifaceted social conflicts within Meghalaya have engendered governance complexities and destabilized social equilibrium, subsequently affecting individual lives and economic sustenance. Various approaches, such as dialogic initiatives, legislative frameworks, and peace-promoting interventions, have been deployed to facilitate justice and reconciliation among disparate groups. One particular challenge exacerbating the situation involves the proliferation of disinformation and spurious narratives through social media platforms. Media plays a crucial role in social conflict resolution

and management. According to Kenneth Burke, a prominent Western theorist, media is a tool for persuasion and communication, allowing various groups to present their perspectives on the conflict to a broader audience (Burke, 1969). This helps to bridge the gap between different communities and encourages dialogue and mutual understanding.

In recent years, misleading material has been disseminated on social media, especially concerning community tensions and violence. This has resulted in strains, terror among communities, and acts of violence (Sahoo, 2020). Moreover, the inadequate portrayal of marginalized communities in Meghalaya's mainstream media remains a subject of concern. In specific cases, journalistic entities have omitted the perspectives and opinions of indigenous tribal communities, leading to a homogenized media environment (Laloo, 2017).

Media reporting has the capacity to illuminate fundamental catalysts of conflict, such as disparities, prejudicial practices, or competition over resources. Such illumination can engender increased accountability and cognizance among the concerned entities, thereby serving as a preventive measure against the recurrence of disputes. Herbert Gans emphasizes the pivotal role that diversity within media plays in addressing societal conflicts. He believes that media coverage should be fair and balanced and represent the interests of all parties involved. Media coverage can help build bridges between communities, encourage empathy and understanding, and facilitate conflict resolution (Gans, 2004; Siriyuvasak & Goyal, 2013).

## 3.  Media coverage of Meghalaya's social conflicts

In Meghalaya, the media has been pivotal in scrutinizing social conflicts—ranging from inter-ethnic tensions to land disputes and religious altercations. These conflicts emanate from various dimensions, including religious, linguistic, cultural, and political disparities. As an information disseminator and societal watchdog, the media has been key in spotlighting these frictions and their root causes.

Scholarly examinations into the role of media in Meghalaya's social conflicts are numerous. For example, Ubonrat Siriyuvasak and Yugank Goyal (2013) in their work "Media and Conflict Reporting in Asia," scrutinize the modus operandi of

media organizations in the region. They argue that the media narratives often display a propensity towards bias and sensationalism, thereby escalating and polarizing existing conflicts. Moreover, the media commonly focuses on immediate triggers of conflict rather than examining foundational factors like economic inequities or political marginalization.

In a similar vein, Khonglah and Sahu (2018) in their research, "Media and Conflict Resolution in North East India," assess the media's capacity to facilitate dialogue and understanding among warring factions in Meghalaya. They emphasize that while the media can act as a conduit for conflict resolution, it must remain impartial and exercise restraint, avoiding sensationalism and exaggeration. These scholarly investigations collectively emphasize the crucial function media serves in not only illuminating but also potentially mitigating social conflicts in Meghalaya. Concurrently, they advocate for a media approach that is judicious and accountable in order to cultivate a climate of peace and stability in the region.

In the field of journalism in India, the Press Council of India (PCI) sets the guidelines for impartial and balanced reporting. Despite this, research studies such as those by Kahn & Kenney (2002) highlight that media reports often exhibit a clear tilt, showing preference for one side over another in various issues. Such slanting is not merely a rhetorical flourish but emerges from calculated decisions at the editorial level within news organizations (Duggan & Martinelli, 2011). The manifestation of this slant often includes the utilization of emotive language with the intent to influence the audience's views (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010).

Media's approach to social conflict in Meghalaya is multifaceted, whereby local and regional news outlets such as The Shillong Times and The Northeast Today have comprehensively covered ethnic tensions, disputes over territory, and the resource allocation's social implications (Bora, 2016; Kasynbong, 2016). These outlets explore a gamut of social tensions, from the Khasi - Jaintia and Garo tribes' calls for separate statehood to the conflicts among the Garo, Rabha, and migrant communities.

Crucially, in Meghalaya, the contestation over resources stands as a significant driver of social conflict (Ranganathan, 2018).

## 4.  The Media and Land Tensions in Meghalaya

Meghalaya confronts a range of social issues encompassing land disputes, ethnic discord, religious strife, among others. These conflicts frequently escalate into episodes of violence, forced relocations, and fatalities, thereby constituting a significant impediment to the state's stability. As outlined in a scholarly article by Kharlukhi (2021), land tenure in Meghalaya has been a topic fraught with controversy and sensitivity. Media outlets have been instrumental in illuminating various dimensions of this issue, notably covering activism and protests by diverse organizations and communities in Meghalaya against proposed legislative changes to land tenure laws.

In Meghalaya, the system regulating land ownership is particularly intricate, influenced by both matrilineal inheritance traditions and communal ownership paradigms. Land tenure in this state can typically be categorized into three main forms: private or individual land, communal or collective land, and state-administered land. Unlike other regions in India where patrilineal systems often regulate property rights, Meghalaya's matrilineal tradition ensures that inheritance is channeled through the female line of descent. Typically, the land and property are transferred from the mother to the youngest female offspring, commonly referred to as the "Ka Khadduh" (Nongbri, 2001).

Lands commonly held by the community, known as "Shnong" in the Khasi Hills and "A'king" in the Garo Hills, are overseen by traditional institutional mechanisms. The District Councils, an administrative body established under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, also exert some regulatory control over land utilization. However, their jurisdiction is limited and does not extend to these types of community-held lands (Bareh, 2001).

Land under government control is set aside for various uses such as development projects, conservation efforts, and public services. Importantly, traditional tribal land practices persist because the Indian Land Revenue Act doesn't apply here (Roy, 1986).

After Meghalaya gained statehood in 1972, disputes over land tenure surfaced despite constitutional protections like the Sixth Schedule, which aimed to safeguard indigenous land rights. These disputes often intensified when the state government sought land for economic projects, leading to confrontations with local communities (Kharbuli, 2018).

During the 1990s, new regional political parties emerged to represent the interests of different ethnic groups in Meghalaya. However, this did not quell land disputes, which frequently saw the different communities in conflict with each other. These disputes often escalated into ethnic and communal tensions (Chakravarty & Saikia, 2014; Das & Paul, 2019). By the early 2000s, conflicts had expanded to include environmental concerns, specifically around coal mining and hydropower initiatives. Often conducted illegally by small-scale operators, these activities resulted in environmental harm and strained relations with local communities (Bora, 2017; Das & Paul, 2019).

The media has brought attention to the land conflicts in Meghalaya by reporting on the numerous events and concerns associated with these conflicts. In recent years, the media have reported on demonstrations and campaigns opposing proposed revisions to land laws, demonstrating that the media have been actively covering current events linked to property issues (Chakravarty & Saikia, 2014; Das & Paul, 2019). Media coverage has devoted attention to the historical and sociological antecedents precipitating these confrontations, including the rise of ethnically oriented political parties in the 1990s that championed the interests of various ethnic communities.

In the year 2011, Meghalaya's government instituted the Meghalaya Land Transfer Act, a legislative measure that proscribed the sale of tribal land to non-tribal individuals (Das & Paul, 2019). While the act aimed to safeguard the land and resources of indigenous communities, it also engendered controversies among diverse groups concerning land ownership and utilization (Chakravarty & Saikia, 2014; Das & Paul, 2019).

Additionally, the state's different land laws sometimes contradict one another, resulting in uncertainty and

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misunderstanding over property ownership and usage. The fight between the Garo and non-Garo people in the West Garo Hills area is an example of a land dispute in Meghalaya.

According to Das and Paul (2019), the media emphasises land disputes in Meghalaya through focusing on a variety of events and concerns associated with these conflicts. The media has covered protests and campaigns against planned revisions to land laws, as well as individual instances, such as conflicts between communities over land ownership and use. In addition to reporting on current occurrences, the media has also covered historical and societal reasons that have led to these conflicts, such as the state's complicated property tenure system and the inadequate application of land laws.

Moreover, the media has presented scholarly viewpoints on the topic, including the colonial legacy of community land ownership and the environmental effects of land conflicts. The media also exposes the inadequacies of the state administration's efforts to resolve land disputes; including the uneven application of land rules and the inconsistency of several land laws (Das & Paul, 2019).

The media's approach to reporting these issues has been impacted by several variables, including their prejudices and objectives, the political atmosphere in the region, and viewer needs.

According to Conflict theory, social conflict emerges when resources are unequally allocated, and various groups strive for control of these resources. The battle in Meghalaya is over land and its resources, and the media's depiction of this conflict has frequently been slanted in favour of the government and companies. This coverage supports the marginalisation of indigenous populations by perpetuating the existing power structure (Jones, 2016). Postcolonial concept investigates the legacy of colonialism and its influence on modern society (Lee,2018). In Meghalaya, land ownership and control are linked to the colonial past and resource exploitation by external forces.

## 5. Ethnic Tensions in Meghalaya and Media

The media may either exacerbate or alleviate ethnic tensions in a country. One manner in which the media may contribute

to ethnic conflict is through biased reporting that reinforces stereotypes and fuels unfavourable views against specific populations (Kutner, 2012). In addition to sensationalising news items and giving a forum for radical viewpoints, the media may also prolong disputes (Soley, 2013).

Conversely, the media may encourage understanding and conversation between diverse ethnic groups by offering fair and balanced coverage and emphasising cooperative and collaborative efforts (Kutner, 2012). The media may provide a forum for disadvantaged perspectives and enable debates on delicate issues (Soley, 2013). The coverage of police shootings of African Americans and the following demonstrations in the media in the United States have been condemned for contributing to the nation's ongoing racial tension and bigotry (e.g. Crenshaw, 1991; Entman, 1992). And also, media in Myanmar, controlled by the state, has been accused of stoking anti-Muslim sentiment and contributing to the violence directed at the Rohingya minority (Glasser& Sullivan, 2017).

Meghalaya serves as a residence to a multiplicity of indigenous groups, notably the Khasi, Garo, and Jaintia tribes, among others. Each of these ethnic collectives possesses its own unique cultural, linguistic, and traditional heritages, handed down through successive generations. Nevertheless, the state's ethnic heterogeneity has given rise to inter-tribal disputes and ethnic tensions that sometimes escalate to violent encounters.

One salient factor contributing to these ethnic pressures is the residual impact of colonial governance. The British government encouraged migration from other parts of India, resulting in the indigenous communities' displacement from their land (Baruah, 2019).  Migration is a sensitive topic in Meghalaya, where tensions have existed between tribal communities and non-tribal migrants for many years. Migration flows have incited a contestation over resources and opportunities, frequently culminating in discord between the native populations and newcomers (Pegu, 2020).

Roy, Dutta, and Datta (2020) delineate conflicts between the Khasi tribal group and the Bengali community in Meghalaya, highlighting incidents in which physical altercations between the two groups led to injuries. The Khasi Students' Union (KSU) has articulated demands for the expulsion of unauthorized

Bangladeshi immigrants and the instatement of an Inner Line Permit system in the state, thereby generating confrontations with the Bengali populace. This strain between the Bengali community and indigenous tribal entities in Meghalaya is partially perceived as a consequence of the Bengali presence as external individuals exploiting local resources. This dynamic traces its origins to historical frameworks, as the Bengalis were introduced to the region as laborers and clerical staff during British colonial rule (Roy, Dutta & Datta, 2020).

Furthermore, scholarly work by Chakravarty, Bhattacharjee, and Rehman (2014) explores episodes of violence between the Khasi and Bengali populations in 1979 and 1987. These violent events are attributed to the perception that Bengalis failed to assimilate into the indigenous ways and instead sought to superimpose their cultural norms upon the local community. Media reports have elucidated these communal tensions, and the demands articulated by the KSU, but have also delved into the historical context of these issues, encompassing the notion that Bengalis are external elements exploiting local opportunities, as well as their historical role as laborers under British colonial administration (Roy, Dutta & Datta, 2020; Chakravarty, Bhattacharjee & Rehman, 2014).

The Nepali population in Meghalaya's Jaintia Hills possesses an extensive history of migration, initially introduced as labor forces by British colonial administrators in the 19th century. This community confronts an array of challenges, including but not limited to, issues of discrimination, marginalization (as cited in Bhattacharjee, 2017; Nongbri, 2018), land tenure, limited access to basic public services, and questions surrounding their ethnic identity. The group is frequently perceived as non-native, engendering discriminatory practices and prejudices emanating from the indigenous tribal communities.

Media outlets have spotlighted the enduring history of the Nepali inhabitants in the Jaintia Hills and the multifaceted challenges they encounter, such as issues of discrimination, lack of formal acknowledgment, and complexities surrounding land tenure and ethnic identification. Incidents of violent conflict and altercations between the local Nepali populace and the indigenous Jaintia community have also been brought to public attention through journalistic reporting (Bhattacharjee, 2017; Nongbri, 2018).

The proposition of an Inner Line Permit (ILP) system in Meghalaya has constituted a longstanding friction point, manifesting in demonstrations and inter-group confrontations over several decades. In 2018, state authorities announced plans to enact the ILP framework, eliciting mixed reactions. While tribal groups generally welcomed the decision as a protective measure for indigenous land and cultural preservation, some non-tribal factions critiqued it as a detriment to commercial activities and broader developmental objectives (Sharma, 2021). Subsequently, in 2019, the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) intensified their advocacy for the expansion of the ILP framework to encompass the entire state, including both the Garo and Jaintia Hills districts. This campaign materialized in a series of public protests that resulted in widespread civil disturbances and disruption of quotidian activities within the urban areas (Ghosh, 2013).

In 2020, the socio-political landscape of Meghalaya was notably punctuated by escalated confrontations between the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) and non-tribal groups in the Ichamati area of the East Khasi Hills district, wherein the KSU members had gone for a rally. The situation turned violent as the KSU clashed with the non-tribals, resulting in the death of one of its members in the incident (The Indian Express, 2020).

According to Sharma (2021), media institutions have played a double-edged role in the dialectics surrounding the ILP. While some outlets have obliquely promulgated factional stereotypes, thereby contributing to the ossification of prejudices, others have cultivated a milieu for constructive discourse and cooperative problem-solving.

Given this dual role of the media, there emerges an imperative for a calibrated analytical framework that not only gauges the media's efficacy in accurately reflecting the complexities inherent in the ILP issue but also scrutinizes the media's propensity to either inflame or mitigate extant social cleavages.

## 6. Religious Tensions and Media: A Historical and Contemporary Review

The media have a vital influence in fostering or reducing religious strife. People might experience fear and anxiety in

response to alarming religious news, escalating tension and conflict (Chang & Chuang, 2011). Media can propagate preconceptions and biases against certain religious groups, fostering enmity and mistrust across communities (Al-Kodmany & Ali, 2017). Another way the media might contribute to religious strife is by providing a forum for extreme viewpoints. Normalising such attitudes among a portion of the public might exacerbate conflicts between various faith communities (Kunelius & Yagodin, 2016). Moreover, biased reporting can exacerbate conflicts by misrepresenting facts and opinions (Sriram, 2013).

Moreover, a lack of media coverage can also lead to religious strife. Neglecting to report on events and concerns about religious groups might contribute to marginalisation and neglect within those communities (Malik, 2016). Inaccurate or erroneous reporting of religious events or incidents can exacerbate misconceptions and intensify tensions. On the other hand, the media may play a crucial role in supporting interfaith communication and fostering unity among religious communities (Kunelius & Yagodin, 2016). Such activities might result in a lack of communication and understanding among groups, which can contribute to religious conflict (Al-Kodmany & Ali, 2017).

Across the 1990s, the media in Northern Ireland played a significant role in aiding peace talks and encouraging understanding between Catholics and Protestants. The BBC's war coverage was lauded for its fairness and objectivity, contributing to developing a climate of trust and discussion (Freedman, 2008). Similarly, in India, the Babri Masjid-Ram Janma bhoomi issue has led to communal tensions for decades. Still, in 2019, the media played an essential role in spreading the court's ruling and fostering interfaith unity. Several media sources planned events and campaigns to promote communal harmony, while news networks and newspapers urged the public to accept the verdict and maintain peace (The Economic Times, 2019).

In Meghalaya, where the predominant faith is Christianity, various episodes of religious discord have negatively affected the region's societal unity, resulting in the loss of life and assets. Meghalaya's religious conflicts date back to the colonial era when the British introduced Christianity to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The conversion of the Khasi and Jaintia tribes to

Christianity exacerbated tensions between the state's Hindu and Muslim groups. Throughout the post-independence period, incidences of violence have been documented in various regions of the state.

Many reasons are identified as contributing to religious disputes in Meghalaya. Demographic change, namely the influx of non-tribal inhabitants into the state, is one of the primary drivers. This has resulted in rivalry over land and resources, frequently sparking violent group conflicts. Many indigenous tribes feel disenfranchised and excluded from the advantages of economic growth due to economic inequities. This has led to anger and unfairness, fueling community tensions. Political rivalry and power struggles also play a significant role, with various political parties and organisations attempting to rally support along religious lines. Cultural differences, especially regarding religious practises and beliefs, have also led to religious tensions in the state (Singh, Dutta, & Ahmed, 2018).

The religious disputes in Meghalaya have had a severe impact, including loss of life and property, population displacement, and interruption of economic operations. The arguments have also influenced social cohesiveness and contributed to the erosion of community trust. Initiatives aimed at fostering social unity and peace in the area have encountered substantial challenges. According to a study by N. Nandy, R. Mukhopadhyay, and S. S. Majumdar (2019), various strategies have been deployed to enhance societal harmony and stability in Meghalaya. These include interfaith dialogues, community-driven programs, and policy measures by the government. Notably, the Catholic Church has been a proactive entity in fostering inter-religious collaboration. Moreover, grassroots organizations focusing on youth and women have contributed to strengthening social ties. State interventions have aimed to address the foundational factors that exacerbate religious tensions, such as initiatives to ameliorate economic disparities. One of the most severe religious confrontations in Meghalaya was the 1979 Shillong riots, triggered by a contentious issue of land ownership between Khasi and non-Khasi communities, resulting in numerous fatalities and the displacement of thousands.

### 7. Conclusion

Meghalaya has faced numerous social conflicts arising from identity, land, and resource disputes. Historical and sociological factors, including migration, religious differences, and political structures, have influenced the escalation of these conflicts. Territorial conflicts in Meghalaya have longstanding historical antecedents with far-reaching social, political, and ecological implications. The complexity of these disputes can be attributed to the legacies of colonialism, including communal land ownership, inadequate governmental intervention, and inconsistent land legislation. These disputes have led to violence, ethno-racial discord, and environmental degradation.

Media bear the responsibility of adopting an equilibrated and judicious perspective, giving equitable attention to diverse standpoints and underscoring collaborative initiatives aimed at establishing social tranquility. The media, which plays a crucial role in moulding public opinion and distributing information, has helped bring attention to these disputes and their root causes.

Advocates and organized social efforts must exercise prudence in interacting with the media ecosystem. This involves fostering alliances with media professionals, articulating lucid and targeted messages, and employing digital platforms to extend their communicative reach and influence wider audiences. Through synergistic efforts among governmental bodies, media outlets, and civil society organizations, the intricate challenges pertaining to land rights and ethnic discord in Meghalaya can be constructively addressed, laying the foundation for a more inclusive, fair, and ecologically sustainable milieu.

Interventions in Meghalaya, ranging from educational programs and scrutinies of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system to ensuring equitable resource and opportunity access for non-residents, could contribute to enhanced social tranquility and a more promising future for its residents.

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