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## Northeast Cultural Values and Principles, Good Governance and Conflict Reduction: A Bodo Socio-Cultural Framework

*Leon Miller\**

**Abstract:** *This article proposes a solution to problems occurring in Northeast India that result in conflict – that are the consequences of the prior approach to development and governance. The article argues that the problems can be solved in a way compatible with micro level cultural values and that benefit stakeholders at the local, regional, and national levels by integrating Amartya Sen’s approach to freedom with the Creating Public Value Theory (i.e. state-of-the-art strategies for freedom and good governance). The article uses an exploratory study of relevant literature as a method to analyze the dynamics of Northeast India and to explain how recent scholarship on Development as Freedom, multi-level governance, Creating Public Value, and social networking contribute to conflict reduction and peacebuilding. Bodo culture is used as a context to demonstrate the viability and applicability of the model. The article contributes to literature on good governance, interethnic relation, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding.*

**Key Terms:** *Development Problematique, Bodo Customary Law, Distributive Justice, Public Value, Baada (Taboo in Bodo Language)*

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### Introduction

Many of the cultural groups of Northeast India are accused of violently resisting migrants, outsiders, and those of another ethnicity. The problem appears as a clash over differences between an established indigenous group and new ethnic groups migrating into the region. Conflict in Northeast India is often regarded as resulting from shifts of populations for economic reasons, population shifts due to the depletion of natural resources (droughts cause people to escape environmental crises – which creates environmental and climate refugees/migrants), and due to historical factors all of which result in large numbers of immigrants and migrants packed into a limited geographical area and competing with local tribal groups over scarce resources and space.

This article argues that the clash between ethnic groups and conflict over which group has the legitimate right to political power and authority is not merely a matter of conflict over resources and differences in values (The Asian Center for Human Rights 2012, 14; also see The Elixir Journal of International Law 2014, 24150). The problem has more to do with populations on both sides of the border being victims of decisions that were made about progress, development, and governance that failed to take cultural values and identity into consideration (Singha 2016, 498). Problems resulting from the prior

approach to development, social-formation, and governance are referred to as the development problematique. The development problematique is defined as the consequence of regional and national planning created by the top down approach to development and authority which come in conflict with local social goals for inclusiveness of culture, identity, and self-determination (Zhang 2003: 3; Ahmed and Biswas 2004: 5).

The failure to include the relationship between the local people’s cultural heritage, their identity, and their relationship with their environment resulted in developmental strategies that promised independence and prosperity often causing conflict (Wallerstein 2007: 434-435; Mirovitskaya 2014: 1; Redclift 1993: 3; &Costanza et al. 2007: 268). The development problematique results from the failure of experts and authorities to take into account the disruptive impact of the top-down approach to authority, governance, and development(e.g. how it would impact the relationship between territory and identity of a tribal group) – thus it failed as an approach to governance that provides a social-economic strategy that “makes justice and peace possible” (Shiva 2014: 13) plus resulted in economic, environmental, and climate crisis that prompted an increase immigration, interethnic clashes, and conflict.

This article argues that the problem not only occurs in various parts of Northeast India but are multi-level problems that exist at the level of tribal villages, municipalities, and at regional, national, and international levels (Sarma 2017, 32). The problem stems from a perspective on governance, political economy, power, and authority that dominated from the post-colonial period until recently. The prior approach to governance was based on power exercised by a top down approach to development. In the prior paradigm regional, national, and international authorities were considered the experts who informed local people of what is in their best interest. In many instances this meant that the interests of powerful regional, national, and international agents were satisfied while the living conditions of local tribal groups were disrupted.

The problem of the prior paradigm can be described as confusing means and ends. In the prior paradigm the domination of nature and the application of industry and technology toward generating wealth were regarded as the end within itself not as a strategy for improving the well-being of local people. For the 70% of India's rural agricultural population "economic prosperity is no more than one of the means to enriching the lives of people. It is a foundational confusion to give it the status of an end. Secondly, even as a means, merely enhancing average economic opulence can be quite inefficient in the pursuit of the really valuable ends" (Sen 1989: 41 & 42). Many authorities planning post-colonial development in India followed the top down instruction of national and international experts who placed the focus on means rather than ends (Sen 2005: 3-4).

This meant that a failure to take essential *value ends* into account resulted in strategies promising to increase independence and human rights resulted in diminishing them. Conflicts occurred due to "neglecting issues such as the character, agency, and the needs of civil society actors" (Richmond 2006:291). The problems were heightened because the development problématique prompted an increase in migrants attempting to escape the consequential problems. However, this intensified interethnic conflict over the rights to, use of, and fair distribution of resources and over fair power distribution (Wallerstein 2007: 434-435; Mirovitskaya 2014: 1; Redclift 1993: 3; & Costanza et al. 2007: 268).

The challenges imposed by such conflicts are complex. "The complexity is due to the fact that they persist, they are protracted and intractable, because the nature of such conflicts involve the structural inadequacies of political systems, because they include power confrontations, clashes of interests, and can be rooted in a clash of identity, values, and ethnicity" (Miller 2017a: 167). Consequently, resolving the dichotomy between the human rights of the large number of people who migrate in search of a

better life and the human rights of tribal groups who feel imposed on is a major challenge. This article proposes a solution to the problem by integrating the progressive theory of *Development as Freedom* proposed by India's Nobel Prize Winner in economics – Amartya Sen (Sen 1999; & Nussbaum 2000 & 2011) with a contemporary state-of-the-art approach to good governance that creates beneficial and satisfactory outcomes for stakeholders involved in various levels of interaction– based on Gerry Stoker's *Creating Public Value Theory* (2006).

*Development as Freedom* is defined as empowering individuals and social groups so that they live in accordance with "the various things [they] value doing or being" (Sen 1999: 75) as well as the things a culture believes will enhance well-being and flourishing. This approach to social formation promotes freedom by increasing the capabilities of individuals and social groups. Capabilities are the things that enable individuals and social groups "to lead the kind of life they have reason to value" (Sen 1999: 87). However, it should be noted that Sen's approach to freedom is the focus in this article in that his ideas about freedom are complementary with his ideas about development. Creating public value is defined as increasing positive social outcomes by employing social networking to integrate the interests of diverse multi-level stakeholders and to reconcile what often seem to be irreconcilable differences (Miller 2017a: 2). This approach has contributed to moving the – Cyprus conflict off deadlock – the longest running peace-keeping mission of UN history – and plays a role in establishing a Green Zone in Cyprus (Louise et al. 2013, 7; also see Miller 2017c, 171-172). Thus, this article builds on the Cyprus model.

This article explains how integrating Sen's approach to freedom with Bozeman's for improving governance reduces the problems that occur when individuals within a geographic context are competing over the resources of the area (see Agarwal 2010: 80-81 for an analysis of the issue regarding use of forest resources). Because the right to land and its use is also related to the issue of the right to and use of resources, environmentalism, sustainability, and climate change it is an example of multi-level concerns that demand a concerted response by integrating the interests of stakeholders at the micro, regional, national, and international levels (Sen 1967: 122).

This article focuses on the Bodo culture of Assam to demonstrate that what appears to be a clash between the established aboriginal population and migrants – due to irreconcilable incompatibility – is, in fact, a complex multi-level issue that includes the perceived threats to identity and existence. An effective resolution requires the application of a fuller range of strategies for generating settlement (which include meta-theoretical, integrative, and interdisciplinary approaches)

(Lederach 1999: 21). That is to say that resolution involves effectively integrating the interests of social actors at multi-levels by co-creating outcomes that demonstrate how peacebuilding can be more satisfactory, beneficial, and profitable than conflict. This article introduces a model for supplementing the state-centric approach to managing conflict in the Northeast by including the mutual accommodation approach to reconciliation and by applying a theoretical model for creating a new public value sphere where conflicting parties interact in a collaborative process of establishing shared values, common goals, and shared principles.

Section two of the article explains the theoretical and methodological basis for claiming that principles underlying Sen's and Stoker's theories can be integrated with Bodo values to decrease conflict, promote peace, and satisfy the interests of stakeholders at the various levels of engagement. Section two also explains the method by which the concepts and principles of the theories can be applied as factors that create the desired outcome. Section three outlines the possibility of compatibility between the concepts and principles of Bodo culture and the interests of the multi-level stakeholders. Section four explains how the factors derived from triangulating the foundational principles of Bodo culture with Sen's model for freedom and Stoker's for good governance can be applied as a theoretical model for conflict reduction and peacebuilding. Section four also concludes/summarizes the article by explaining its applicability to the literature on good governance, democratizing value creation, and integrating the interests of various stakeholders in Northeast India.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Framework**

This article develops a theory for good governance that reconciles what seems to be irreconcilable interests of stakeholders at multi-levels. The theory also explains how to resolve the discrepancy between Bodo aspirations and the prior approach to development and governance. The assumption is that a triangulation of information provided from the literature indicates the possibility of creating a complementary congruence between Bodo aspirations and stakeholders at the micro, meso, and macro levels – which provides a basis for common goals. Thus, the exploratory study of the literature indicates factors effective for satisfying stakeholders and contribute to conflict reduction and peacebuilding. Specifying the factors generates a model of freedom and good governance that is in line with state-of-the-art explanations for increasing public value, the values and principles of Bodo culture, and with the liberating approach to social-economic planning outlined in *Development as Freedom*. Thus, the method provides a conceptual framework or factors that reflect values that stakeholders at various levels will agree on, would like to put into practice, and agree are effective for shaping social reality.

“Theory is a structure of general statements that explains some phenomena and permits predictions about them” (Risjord 2014: 38–40; Mouton 1996: 35). Theory development involves explaining the conceptual framework “upon which research in a particular area builds and more fully develops. The framework serves as the conceptual or ideational foundation from which a phenomenon is researched” (Miller 2017b: 172). The concepts and principles provide the foundation for determining conceptual categories and articulating them in the form of factors that can be applied by other researchers interested in testing the viability of the theory. In this case developing a theory for reducing conflict in the Northeast involves integrating the foundational principles of Bodo culture with the prescription for *Development as Freedom* and a state-of-the-art model for good governance.

This article's approach to theory development involves explaining how cultural values can have liberating power. That is to say that they are the source for determining values that can be articulated as conceptualizations of how a region achieves sustainable peace and prosperity. Cultural values shape social formation, they reflect principles proven to be satisfactory and beneficial for stakeholders interacting at various levels, and they contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Because co-creating public value involves the network theory approach to participatory democracy developing a theory for conflict reduction and peacebuilding includes the social network approach to co-creating social reality. In this respect theory is an explanation of how to employ networking in order to generate the knowledge needed for creating outcomes that “enhance the ability of stakeholders to achieve their desired outcomes and that enable the individuals of the society to make the necessary adjustment to complex and dynamic demands” (Miller 2017a: 5).

Theory development is necessary in this case for several reasons: e.g. although there is literature explaining the problems of Northeast India (especially in terms of resistance groups and conflict) there is a scarcity of literature proposing a viable solution that engages stakeholders in a network that generates a type of knowledge/power that can be used to establish compatible values and goals between conflicting segments and levels of Indian society (Miller 2017a: 8). In addition, although there is much literature on the desire of Northeast cultural groups to gain autonomy there is little literature explaining how the ethics, values, and principles of a culture can be put forth as a model for achieving the culture's aim for liberation, for good governance, and to live in accordance with its aspirations. Thus, there is a need for a theory that provides practical but state-of-the-art solutions to the problems of the Northeast – a model rooted in the cultural convictions and identity of the local people but

compatible with the interests of other members of the local, regional, and national society. In this respect “generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research” (Glasser and Strauss 2006: 2).

Thus, theory development is a means for determining values that serve as factors that stakeholders will agree upon as common goals to work toward and the theory involves developing a framework by which the validity of the claims proposed can be verified or tested. In this respect theory provides a means for devising knowledge from information collected from conceptual data. The conceptual data are conjoined by employing a triangulation methodology to provide the categorizations needed for theory development. Triangulation is chosen as an essential aspect of the methodological framework for determining the conceptualizations of good governance put forth by a culture, those involved in helping individuals to live in accordance with their values, and principles for improving the quality of democracy. These categorizations are then stated as a framework for determining factors that will increase public value, reduce conflict, and promote peace in Northeast India. Triangulation is especially relevant because this article is intended to analyze the validity of the claim that the theoretical model produced increases benefits for stakeholders at the local, regional, and international levels (Harrison & Wicks 2013: 101–118).

### ***Integrating Cultural Values, Good Governance, and Sen’s Approach to Freedom***

This section of the article provides conceptual data to verify the claim that cultural values are congruent with state-of-the-art strategies for freedom, social flourishing, and the principles of liberal democracy. The data is derived from an exploratory study of Northeast cultural literature plus the literature explicating Sen's and Stoker's theories. Determining the factors that contribute to good governance, conflict reduction, and peacebuilding is achieved by integrating Bodo cultural principles, principles for a progressive approach to social-formation, and the theory for co-creating satisfactory benefits for a larger number of social stakeholders (see section 3.3 for an explanation of the Bodo principles also see the list of basic Bodo principles that correspond with those of a liberal democracy – table one on page 9).

Section 3.1 explains Sen’s approach to freedom, autonomy, and self-determination (i.e. his Capability Theory which is based on self-cultivation but results in the ability to experience valued *functionings*). Section 3.2 explains how to operationalize Sen’s principles by means of applying Stoker’s approach to good governance – this includes addressing the issue of the desire for autonomy and self-determination, on the one hand, and

the fact of multi-levels of authority, power, and governance on the other hand. Section 3.2 also emphasizes Stoker’s approach to resolving the problem of seemingly irreconcilable differences in the interest of the various stakeholders. In addition, section 3.2 describes the role of social networking in co-creating outcomes regarded as satisfactory and beneficial for the various parties in interaction. Section 3.3 applies the principles of *Development as Freedom* and creating public value to the Bodo cultural context to illustrate their compatibility.

### ***Sen’s Approach to Freedom and Self-determination***

Sen’s capability approach – a strategy by which individuals develop their capabilities and experience certain desired functionings – is a value-based approach to the self-determination and the freedom of individuals and socio-cultural groups (Sen 1987: 23). Sen’s approach to freedom is an aspect of his ideas about social economic development. Sen defines capabilities as the *substantive freedoms* a person enjoys: e.g. being “unfettered, exercising our own volitions, and interacting with – and influencing – the world in which we live” (1999: 14-15). Individuals and social groups realize their capability when they have the “freedom to achieve desired value outcomes and experience desired functioning” (Sen 1992: 41). In his view the development of capabilities – i.e. the enhancement of freedom – is the primary aim of a liberal democracy thus of governance (Sen 1999: 37). Capabilities involve the human rights of individuals and their entitlements. Functionings involve the ability to experience one’s chosen intrinsic end values merely by exercising one’s freedom of choice. “It must be significant for evaluating the opportunity aspect of freedom that a person [has] prefer[ences], and preferences – and the reasons for preference –make an immediate and substantial difference” (Sen 2002: 13-14). That is to say that “capability is thus a kind of freedom to achieve the functioning combinations from which a person can choose – functionings reflect her actual achievements” (Sen 1999: 75).

His approach to creating social reality appeals to tribal groups in Northeast India because it is a strategy by which they can live in accordance with what they value most, it is focused on freedom, and defines human rights as the ability to experience what they value being and doing. In fact, he reflects on these issues in relationship to the complexities of Northeast India (Sen 2013: 244-248 & 299-331). What is particularly relevant in terms of the problems of the Northeast is that Sen proposes a perspective on self-determination (i.e. human rights) that is in line with the principles of living in a pluralistic liberal democracy. His theory offers a strategy for reconciling the difference between competing notions of social justice and governance (which is a major concern where there are multi-levels of conceptualizations of justice, rights, and governance). Thus, the application of

his idea of rights and justice (e.g. “the freedom to choose our lives”– Sen 2009: 18) would resolve much conflict and play a role in establishing an infrastructure of peace.

The application of Sen’s capability approach results in increasing social security for individuals and cultural groups. He argues that social security is achieved by means of a participatory approach to democracy. Social security occurs when the members of society are not only active in drawing attention to their general needs but are actively engaged in networks that co-create appropriate and effective solutions. Sen points out that the participatory approach to co-creating social reality offers the possibility of realizing Ambedkar’s vision of democratizing value creation because citizens co-create the means for the equitable distribution of power and benefits (Sen & Drèze 2013: ix-xi & 11, 12 & 16; & Sen 2009: 3). There is a growing body of literature substantiating the claim that participatory democracy integrates the seemingly irreconcilable differences of interests between the traditionally-minded members of society, the progressive-minded, the commercial sector, public authorities, and the culturally-minded (Aristotle 1959: 9-13; Mann 2005: 2-4 & 310-313; also see Porter & Kramer 2006; Miller 2017a; Miller 2018; Tarman 2017; Etchells et al. 2017; Damgaci & Aydin 2018; Martinová & Andrysová 2017).

Sen defines freedom as the ability to pursue the goals that one values as well as the ability to act as a social agent to bring about the realization of the desired goals (Sen 1999: 14-19). Development can only create the type of freedom that reduces conflict if an infrastructure for peace is established on the basis of governance that expands “the real freedoms that the citizens enjoy, [when they are empowered to] pursue the objectives they have reason to value, and when their human capabilities are expanded” (Sen 2002: 35). “The exercise of freedom is mediated by values, but the values in turn are influenced by public discussions and social interactions, which are themselves influenced by participatory freedoms. Such an approach also allows us to acknowledge the role of cultural values and prevailing mores, which can influence the freedoms that people enjoy and have reason to treasure” (Sen 1999: 9).

In this respect his approach to governance creates social processes that empower individuals to realize their higher aspirations (Sen 1999: 53; Sen & Drèze 2002: 347). He argues that the impediments to peace in the Northeast stem from a failure of the prior development paradigm to deliver the more highly valued primary goods: “basic liberties, freedom of choice, powers and prerogatives of office and positions of responsibility, and the social bases of self-respect. The advantage of focusing on primary goods arises from the fact that a person’s actual freedom depends on holding primary goods [thus] primary goods can be seen as an index of freedom” (Sen 1988: 277).

Sen’s concept of valuation prioritizes intrinsic value over instrumental means. He describes the value-based approach to freedom as empowering individuals and social groups with the ability to realize their preference regarding particular states of affairs (Sen 1992: 32). He acknowledges that individual, traditional, and cultural values and aspirations influence the preferences of individuals. It is this aspect of Sen’s Capability Theory that makes it especially complementary with the state-of-the-art good governance principles of liberal democracy, the value preferences of stakeholders at multi-levels, and Bodo cultural values (as will be explained in section 3.3). In Sen’s formulation conflict is reduced when individuals and social groups engage in democratic deliberation, when they realize that it is in their best interest to take-into-account the interest of others, thus when they agree to co-create the common good (Sen 2002: 33-37).

In this respect the application of Capability Theory demands interactive, participatory, and Constructivist-type processes for co-creating value outcomes that are shared. Freedom is derived from social interactions based on trust, and openness – “the freedom to deal with one another under guarantees of disclosure and lucidity” (i.e. especially in terms of the guarantee of transparency) (Sen 1999: 39). Where established aboriginal people are confronted by other ethnic/immigrant groups and migrants – all struggling to shape out of the social-economic, political, resource, and environmental constraints of the region the realization of their entitlement to human rights (particularly in the Northeast) – the Constructivist-type democratic process is essential. “Constructivist-type dialogic processes are effective for reducing differences and increasing the prospect of realizing the common good. Constructivist engagement creates positive results because it calls for generating a normative basis for establishing common interests and shared values – which offset power confrontations over conflicting interests” (Miller 2017:173).

Thus, an exploratory study of the literature reveals the principles that will contribute to achieving desired aspirations and promote freedom: self-cultivation (i.e. the freedom to develop one’s capabilities and realize desired functionings), participatory democracy, and balancing human rights with social justice. In addition, the principles underlying his Capability Theory determine the conceptual categories which can be applied as factors by which Sen’s principles can be implemented to test the viability of the claims made by this article.

### ***Creating Public Value***

The creating public value concept broadens and operationalizes Sen’s approach to liberation and self-determination. The concept also proposes a strategy for increasing capabilities but expands the theory to include not only the capabilities of individuals and cultural

groups but of the entire social system. In particular, the concept provides a strategy for reconciling conflicts resulting from “politics of contention.” People engage in politics of contention due to feeling “a mixture of disappointment, anger, and fear” in contexts where intrusion causes cultural groups to believe they are being deprived of what is rightfully theirs (Stoker 2019: 138 & 148). Resentment in the Northeast is caused by “the fear of being culturally and politically ‘swamped’” (The Government of India 2008: 146).

The resentment sparks the pursuit for self-determination but, a tribal group’s higher aspirations can deteriorate into identity politics – resulting in bifurcation in what should be a pluralistic society (Sen 2006: 76). The politicizing of identity in a liberal democracy backfires because it creates two undesirable consequences for the tribal group seeking autonomy: first, it results in isolating the tribal group politically because it seems to seek gaining political power by promoting ethnic monoculturalism (i.e. promoting the culture/rights of a single ethnic group) and secondly, consequentially other cultural, ethnic, and social groups establish a coalition to counter the perceived threat to their identities and political power. The countering coalition will be supported by forces that consider monoculturalism a threat to liberal democracy. The political power base of the opposition will be strengthened by claiming to be protecting the ideals of Liberalism and multiculturalism.

The proponents of The Creating Public Value Theory stress that it is effective where decisions regarding migrants involve many levels of authority/power: e.g. “international, national, state, local, and grass roots [with] decision-making and action distributed across this whole matrix” (Moore 2017: 227). Social theorists point out that the difficulty of the migrant problem lies in the fact that it involves a complexity of multi-level processes (e.g. the vested interest of macro, meso, and micro level stakeholders) and because the public authorities necessarily has concerns that are of a different nature than those of its grass-root constituents –thus, a social network strategy works best for reconciling the differences. The social networking strategy integrates the interests of the multi-level agents by engaging the participants in a process that transforms prior contentions into shared values and common goals. That is to say that social networking – as a strategy for addressing the migrant issue –engages social agents in “collaborative innovation as a possible means of facilitating cross-sectoral and local–global (transnational) connections which might help reframing issues and deliver [more desirable] results” (Moore 2017: 621).

The social networking approach is proving effective in contexts impacted by multi-level governance because its Constructivist-type processes generate inclusive participatory efforts to co-create social value and in

doing so integrate “different authorizing environments, activate different organizational capacities, and integrate the values pursued by different audiences and publics” (Bryson et al. 2016: 643). When put into practice social networks promote an inclusive bottom-up approach to decision-making, collaborative partnerships, mutuality, and they generate knowledge of how to maximize benefits for a larger number of people (Stoker 2006: 41). It addresses the problem of conflicting interests in settings where there is a plurality of actors and the multi-level governance system is not able to integrate the interest of stakeholders to create a solution (Stoker & Chhotry 2009: 3).

Thus, the theory increases the possibility of realizing the future hoped for by Northeast stakeholders: e.g. a future rooted in their cultural heritage, a future that draws from the inherent human desire to work together toward achieving the common good, and a future that satisfies both material and higher order socio-cultural value needs (Miller 2016: 63). However, reconciliation occurs when certain values/principles are adhered to. That is to say that the values are “judged in terms of whether they are consistent with ideas about justice, fairness, and right relationships in society” (Moore et al. 2017: 624). This strategy reconciles conflicts in contexts where there seem to be competing interests, where migrants and interethnic relations are issues, and where there are struggles for autonomy. Planning social action on this basis proves to transform the prior top-down authoritarian approach to governing into an open, participatory, integrated social network approach to multi-level governance. Applying the Creating Public Value Theory results in democratizing value creation. Thus, such principles can be listed as factors that enhance the quality of democracy: participatory decision-making, self-determination, active civil society, collaborative problem-solving, sustainability, and integrated networks. In the Bodo context the values derived are also consistent with Bodo cultural values, principles of governance, and future aspirations.

### ***Integrating Bodo cultural values with Capability Theory and Creating Public Value***

Bodo people settled into the foothills of the eastern Himalayas at a time in antiquity that is believed to match that of the Vedic Indo-Aryans. Bodo is a name that – when traced back – is also connected with the name Kachārī. “Kachārī is a generic term for a number of groups speaking a more or less common dialect or language and claiming a common mythical ancestry. And others regard the Kachārī as aborigines, or the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley” (Endle 1911: 24). The Bodo are believed to be the first to establish settlements in Assam and the first to cultivate rice and silkworms. The Bodo are the largest minority group in Assam and are reported as being amongst the top ten largest scheduled-tribe (ST) groups in India. At

the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the Bodo were recorded as representing 5.3 percent of the population of Assam (i.e. 1.2 million people).

The Bodo have been engaged in a socio-political awakening that has been evolving for over a century. The awakening was sparked by an increasing need to devise a viable response to the various pressures imposed by the prior development paradigm: e.g. the impact of colonial and postcolonial tea plantations; the fact that the labor demand of the plantations, the labor demands of the commercial farms, and that of the industries increased the number of people migrating into the region; postcolonial five years plans pushed for larger scale commercial farming (industrial scale farming, mechanized farming, chemical intensive farming, and cash crops); the five years plans included industrialization; unplanned urbanization; and eventually an increasingly restrictive regime of 'boundaries'. Yet, in spite of the challenges imposed on Bodo people they have maintained a cultural continuity up to the present time – in terms of adherence to certain normative values, principles, and social ethics. The earliest records, anthropological reports, and missionary accounts portray Bodo people as having a type of innocence (e.g. "honest, truthful, straightforward, and general trustworthy") that is characteristic of indigenous people who have not lost their sense of pristine humanness (Endle 1911: 3). In fact, leaders of the Bodo cultural community argue that in addition to the pursuit for self-determination Bodo people should strive to revivify their pristine innocence.

The foundational normative values shaping the Bodo cultural worldview are rooted in the belief that adherence to the principles shaping the natural order – i.e. principles that political philosophers refer to as natural law – create peace and harmony between the members of society and with their environment. Bodo people believe that adherence to natural law (e.g. principles such as the natural forces of Hailong, Agrang, Khwila, Sanjabwree, and Rajkhumbree) is the basis of justice, perpetuates the good life, and creates prosperity. Thus, in accordance with the principle of human rights – which, some political philosophers argue are based on natural law – Bodo people practice respect for the natural rights of each individual and the concept of mutuality that accompanies it. Thus, customary law is a basic aspect of Bodo governance and violations against it are considered taboo/*Baada* (i.e. the Bodo concept *Baada* can be translated as taboo).

Customary laws are normative principles that prescribe how to maximize the benefits the members of society enjoy in relationship to each other and with the forces shaping the natural order. Bodo customary laws are normative rules of conduct that shape social action within traditional Bodo communities. In this respect Bodo cultural principles are in accord with the world's most

cherished perennial philosophies. Bodo customary laws are based on the belief that well-being, social solidarity, and the flourishing of society result from the self-cultivation of the individual. Self-cultivation is tantamount to shaping one's character in accord with the principles of Loathi in order to experience elevated thoughts, Saithi to experience peace, and Nalathi to experience Holistic well-being – in other words Bodo's associate peacefulness with the fundamental principles of life and the foundational normative values shaping the Bodo cultural worldview.

Bodo principles of governance designate a place for public officials (e.g. the gaobura) however officials do not exercise authoritarian power. Social power is derived from a process of collaborative engagement that takes place within networks involving various forms of interaction with relevant stakeholders (The Government of India 1980: 31). Decisions are made in a council of elders who collaborate regarding the welfare of the village, how to manage surplus village resources for collective benefit (Raijwni Afad or Raijwni Mithing), and what is best in social-economic terms (Raijwni Bakhri).

A culture's customary traditions represent a conceptualized and institutionalized prescription for integrating its everyday practical life with its normative ethos so that they are in accord – e.g. customary laws reflect a "general conception of the order of existence" and a means of actualizing a culture's highest value aspirations regarding self, society, and nature" (Geertz 1973:112& 127). "The tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood" are all reflections of a culture's customary traditions and normative ethos (Geertz 1973: 127). In the Bodo context customary traditions and normative ethos are based on the realization that it is in the best interest of the individual to promote the common good: e.g. a good example is the concept *Saori* which has meanings related to the building-up of and the flourishing of the community. It should be noted that there is congruence between Bodo customary law and the principles proposed by Liberalism (see Table one below). Thus, the question that remains is how Bodo cultural principles apply in relationship to others living in the same proximity in communities that have become diverse multi-ethnic social settings.

This article stresses that the issue is not diversity, interethnic relations, and living in accordance with the principles of liberal democracy. The problem is the interface between living in accordance with customary laws and how to achieve a sense of autonomy – given the fact of ethnic diversity. However, it must be kept in mind that the desire for autonomy was sparked by an approach to governance and development that is now recognized as outdated. Reconciliation begins with taking steps toward



instituting a contemporary approach to social-formation that integrates Bodo cultural values with Sen's approach to freedom and the social networking approach to creating public value. Autonomy and peace within a liberal democracy occurs by empowering tribal groups with the ability to experience their full human rights: e.g. in accordance with tribal group's right to self-determination, in terms of rights outlined by The UN's

Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and human rights according to India's constitutional law. In addition, Article 1, paragraph 1 of the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights states that "all peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue economic and cultural development" (UN 1976: 1).

<b>Principles that apply both to Liberalism and Bodo Customary Law</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Cooperation</b></li> <li><b>2. Mutuality</b></li> <li><b>3. Reciprocity</b></li> <li><b>4. Interdependence</b></li> <li><b>5. Shared concerns and problems</b></li> </ol>

Box 1: Listing of the basic principles and propositions of Liberalism to illustrate their congruence with the Bodo principles of governance and customary law.

In the Northeast India establishing congruence between the right to self-determination (the desire for autonomy) and the conviction to promote human rights as prescribed in a liberal democracy demands reconciling the differences between tripartite forces operating at multi-levels: e.g. the micro level pursuit for autonomy and self-determination; the state level intention to protect state identity/integrity, to resolve the problems created by the development problematique, promote a new approach to sustainable social-economic development and governance, and effectively manage its indigenous, immigrant and migrant populations. In addition there must be a reconciliation between the central government's endeavor to maintain national integrity by means of establishing the legitimacy of a regional multi-ethnic, diverse, and stable liberal democracy and the concerns of the international community for protecting the rights of tribal peoples while, at the same time, providing humanitarian aid to and promoting the human rights of migrants (e.g. UN). The solution is to apply a social networking model of conflict resolution that proves to create improved outcomes in The United Nations longest running peace-keeping mission— e.g. in Cyprus – by establishing a "green zone" (see Figure 1 below for an illustration).

**Conclusion**

Although prior approaches to dealing with Bodo conflict did not successfully resolve the concerns of Bodo people the conviction that social networking could establish a green zone is more effective is based on lessons learned from its success in some of the world's most protracted conflicts – Cyprus (Fisher 1996: 8; Burton 1969 & 1987; Kelman 1979), Northern Ireland (Hain 2007), Bosnia (Buric 2000; Thompson 1999), and Rwanda (Kimani 2007; Staub 2013). Social networking

– as a strategy for establishing a green zone and for establishing the foundation of an infrastructure of peace – is effective because it reconciles the dichotomy between the Indian state-centric approach to conflict management and the human needs participatory/interactive problem-solving approach to conflict resolution (Miller 2017a: 167).

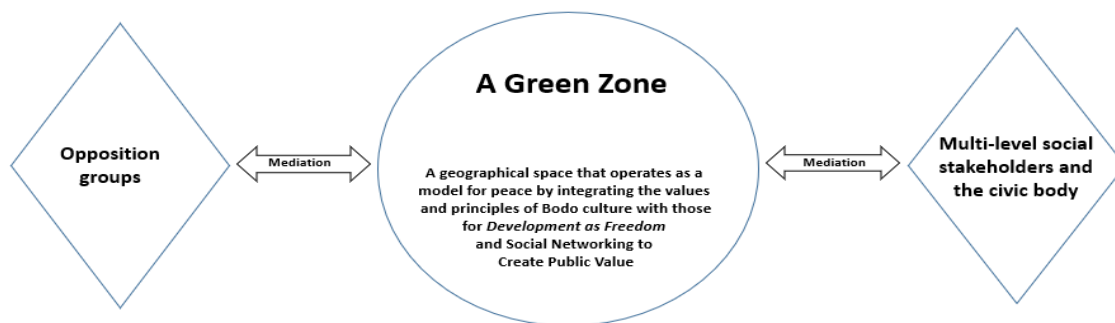
The research on social networking to establish the green zone indicates that there are six factors that make it successful for conflict resolution and peacebuilding:

1. It offsets tendencies for conflicting parties to use force to fight against force (Hain 2007).
2. Social networking integrates the interests of a disparate public (Mawlong2016: 7; Aristotle 1959:9-13; Mannheim 1979: 53-57; Mann 2005: 2-4 & 310-313). It establishes a *social network for peace* and lays the foundation for an infrastructure of peace. But, as well, contributes to effective policy-making (Moore 38: 71; Bozeman 2007: 13).
3. It establishes a public value creation sphere (e.g. a green zone) where common values, and shared goals can be enacted within the neutral space (Bar-Siman-Tov 2004:232-233).
4. It involves civil society in attempts to reconcile the divisiveness between communities, end conflict, and promote peacebuilding. In other words, taking a participatory multi-track approach that creates a "social power force – one that is too powerful to be ignored by the rival parties" (Das 2007: 43 & 55). The overall public has much at stake if conflict persists yet, at the same time, the civic body is in an excellent position to understand the nature and causes of the conflict and possibilities for resolving the seaming deadlock between the conflicting parties.

5. It creates a new type of social space in the Northeast based on cultural values (i.e. customary law), democratizing value creation, and structuring a geographical space (green zone) where the value commitments of all the parties are realized.
6. The green zone can also be a digital space that acts as a strategy for mediating the relationship between

conflicting parties. In fact, Bodoland University's Center for Peace and Conflict Studies has already indicated an interest in facilitating such a digital social network and in doing so establish a digital approach to mediating conflict.

## Green Zone Model of Peacebuilding



(Based on the "green zone" model established for the Cyprus Conflict)

**Figure 1:** A model for peace based on establishing a locale where the members of the community live in accordance with Bodo cultural values but, as well, in alignment with the most progressive state-of-the-art approach to sustainable social-economic development and multi-level good governance.

When the factors derived from the three sources (Bodo culture, Sen's strategy for freedom, and Stoker's social networking approach to good governance) are integrated/triangulated the concepts, principles, and values outlined in this article can be shaped into conceptual categorizations that indicate factors that contribute to freedom and good governance in the Northeast. In this respect it is possible to develop a theory for a more effective approach to conflict reduction and peacebuilding in Northeast India.

Thus, a theory for increasing peace in Northeast India reads:

Freedom for individuals and social groups is the ability to realize, do, or be what they aspire to, cherish, or value most in spite of opposition. In terms of the experience of indigenous groups in the Northeast it is the ability to live in accordance with their cultural values and identity. By applying a strategy for social-formation that integrates customary law with Sen's strategy for freedom and Stokers social networking model for good governance Northeast people can live in futuristic-type peace zones that are exempt from conflict, operate on the basis of public-policy and authority that is compatible with state-of-the art model of good governance, and resolve what heretofore was the seeming incompatibility of the interests of the multi-level stakeholders.

The conceptual data collected from literature on Bodo culture, *Development as Freedom*, and a social networking approach to creating public value can be integrated to determine factors that can be applied to reduce conflict and establish peace in the Northeast:

1. A participatory approach to decision-making and shaping social reality (Stoker 2006: 41 &51)
3. The ability to choose goals and the power to act to bring the goals about (agency)
4. Self-cultivation - the freedom to develop one's capabilities and realize desired functionings.
5. Congruence between individual and collective goals/values
6. Self-determination (Stoker 1996: 6)
7. A strong actively engaged civil society that interacts within integrated social networks (Stoker 2006: 47-48)
8. Sustainability – increased nature-human beneficial interactions (Stoker 1996: 26)
9. Integrated networked partnerships (Stoker 2006: 41 & 47)

Social networking is a means of establishing a green zone (i.e. an infrastructure for peace) thus a model for freedom/self-determination where Bodo people can freely live in a peaceful zone with the confidence that their highest aspirations can be realized in ways compatible with the interests of other stakeholders. In this respect this article contributes to peacebuilding in the Northeast by emphasizing the prospect of creating a new

public value sphere – that would be tantamount to establishing an autonomous zone – because it is compatible with thus satisfies the interests, values, and convictions of all of parties involved.

This article explains an approach to peacebuilding that integrates the various interests of the stakeholders of the different regions of India by establishing shared values and an agreement to build a satisfactory approach to good governance that is complementary with Bodo cultural

principles and a state of the art model for freedom. In addition, the article contributes to the literature on peace research by explaining a model of co-creating a new public value sphere where conflicting parties interact in the collaborative process of creating satisfactory and beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders. Thus, this study explains the role of the green zone in creating a new public value sphere as an essential contribution to offsetting conflict.

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