

Merapani Town: A Bordering Space Growing in the Disputed Area of Assam and Nagaland

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The paper discusses the development of Merapani Town situated in the disputed region between Assam and Nagaland. This border town, located within the Disturbed Area Belt (DAB), has historically experienced conflicts due to the disputed boundary line. This Dispute is mainly because of the drawing of a faulty border between the two states since the formation of the state Nagaland from Assam. The major violence incidences are the 1965 Kakodanga Reserve Forest conflict, the 1979 Doyang Reserve Forest conflict, the 1985 Merapani conflict, and the latest 2014 conflict in the villages bordering Naga Hills. The border dispute and subsequent conflict are still prevailing where the state government's frequent involvement and faulty decision-making has made the conflict more unresolved. The contemporary conflicts that evolved around the recourses and land sharing in the area created more complexity. However, due to being an advantageous economic zone, having rich natural resources, the border area has the aspect of higher potential political manipulation for the states to gain their interest, which is another important aspect in the longstanding Assam-Nagaland border conflict.

The ongoing conflict has created an unpleasant situation in the border area which it largely impacted the Assamese and Naga relationship. However, despite the prevailing conflict situation, Merapani has emerged as an important trading and logistic hub for the people of Assam and Nagaland. The major transactions are like the daily essential food items and trading of forest resources which move across the state through this border town. However, having a space full of economic opportunities the town is unable to create a friendly environment for the socio-economic development of the local inhabitants. The prime reason is due to the past conflict situation which created the displacement of the original inhabitants, where the local Assamese Naga people relocated to a safer place from the borderline. Subsequently, migrants from Northern India took the opportunity and established thriving businesses, shaping the town's economic landscape. This has had a crucial impact on the relationship between the border inhabitants of Assam and Nagaland, where they are unable to hold the economic opportunities generated by the town.

The paper understands this growing space on the border as a commercial town through Henri Lefebvre's idea of how the Merapani town created the socio-economic co-existence between the border inhabitants of Assam and Nagaland where the area has the experiences of past conflict.

It examines how conflict influences the potential for growth in an area and its impact on local inhabitants, particularly focusing on the inability to foster a friendly environment for socio-economic coexistence. Also, the paper seeks to understand how the local border inhabitants are situated in this growing space where the area can be a way to build a friendly relationship. Using a case study approach, the paper examines how conflict influences a region's potential for growth and its impact on local inhabitants in their socioeconomic development. By using Henri Lefebvre's theoretical framework, the paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between conflict dynamics, urban development, and social aspects, offering insights into bringing peace and prosperity in conflict-affected areas.