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The Source Of Tribal Movement In Assam- A Case Studies On Historical Legacy.

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Abstract

North-East India is a multy ethnic society with different tribes. During British Raj the Government of India Act 1919 provided that the Governor General in Council might declare any territory in British India to be a Backward Tract. The Government of India Act 1935, based on the recommendations of the Simon Commission, had done away with the terminology of Backward Tract and rechristened these areas as "Excluded Areas" or "Partially Excluded Areas". So far as the administration of the above two areas was concerned, the British Indian government had never included this area under their government's jurisdiction. Thereby, no government development work or activities were done, nor any tax levied from the hills. So the tribal areas of N E India remain aloof from modernization for long time.

Today this region has witnessed the growth of strong ethno-centric tribal movements. North –East India has been a homeland of various religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups. In these circumstances various ethnic, linguistic and religious groups demand their separate identity and organising identity movement, autonomy movements, secessionist movement etc. In this paper, an attempt has been made to evaluate the various factors responsible for the politics of identity movement in North East India especially the state of Assam.

Introduction:-

North-East India is a malty ethnic society with different tribes, race, caste, etc. North-East region is rich in biodiversity and natural recourses but slow in industrial growth. The region is well reputed for its mineral deposits, 52% forest cover, 34% of countries water resources, horticultural products, traditional handlooms and handicrafts items etc. The region has 98% international borders with Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, Bhutan and Nepal. But despite these economic resources and international boundaries North-East India industrially one of the poorest region of the country. The region yet to fail to attract Maltly-National or Trance-National corporations for investment. Truly, the Northeast has now become an area of violence, insecurity, trafficking, and corruption. In other hand the fascination of easy-money earning by local youths and lack of job culture/white colour job culture etc. are other causes of economic backwardness of this region. For some regional parties and groups this region is neglected child of India. Today this region has witnessed the growth of strong ethno-centric tribal national resurgence. After Independence, the leaders of new India adopted a federal polity reflecting the diversity of Indian Nation. Articles 371 to 371-J in Part XXI of the constitution contain

special provisions for twelve states¹ viz., Maharashtra, Gujarat, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Sikkim, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa and Karnataka. The intention behind them is to meet the aspirations of the people of backward regions of the states or to protect the cultural and economic interests of the tribal people of the states or to deal with the disturbed law and order condition in some parts of the states or to protect the interests of the local people of the states.

But in the post independence period, these tribal ethnic groups have raised the demands for separate administrative homeland for themselves with greater degrees of self-rule. This emerging tribal ethnic nationalism has significantly influenced the political development of this region subsequently.

Assam was reorganized on several occasions owing to such demands by the tribal ethnic groups. Even today, in Assam, the tribal ethnic groups inhabiting in the state are continuing with various political demands. In this analysis, an attempt will be made to make an empirical analysis of the growth of Tribal ethnic nationalism among various tribal ethnic groups in Assam.

Analysis

The tribal population in India, though a numerically small minority, represents an enormous diversity of groups. They vary among themselves in respect of language and linguistic traits, ecological settings in which they live, physical features, size of the population, the extent of acculturation, dominant modes of making a livelihood, level of development and social stratification.

While tribes have a distinct culture and history, they also share commonalities with other marginalised sections of Indian society, such as the lack of adequate political representation, economic deprivation and cultural discrimination.

The category of 'tribe' entails a social and cultural dimension **but the Scheduled Tribe** category has politico-administrative implications. A majority of the Scheduled Tribe population is concentrated in the eastern, central and western belt covering the **nine States** of Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal. **About 12 per cent inhabit the North-eastern region**, about five per cent in the Southern region and about three per cent in the Northern States.

Political & Administrative History:

Tribal rebellions in the nineteenth century resulted in British policy of exclusion of Tribal areas from the operation of general laws. In the Northeast region, the British put in force **the Inner Line Regulation in 1873**, as the point beyond which general laws for the colony would not be applicable and entry of **subjects living outside the area was strictly prohibited**.

The colonial rulers established the Assam province on 6th February 1874 by separating it from the management of the Lt. Governor of Bengal, placed under the direct control of a Chief Commissioner. At the same time the colonial masters have introduced the Scheduled District Act 1874, by which it is decided to remove the remote or backward tracts (North Eastern Region) of British India from the operation of General Acts and Regulations. This was the beginning of the separation of tribal communities from the mainstream of Assam which is followed more vigorously in subsequent policies of the colonial rulers especially under the Government of India Act 1919 and the Government of India Act, 1935. As per the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded areas) Order, 1936 the Backward Tract areas under the Government of India Act 1919 were regrouped as : Excluded Areas:

- 1) North East Frontier (Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur) Tract
- 2) The Naga Hills Districts
- 3) The Lushai Hills Districts
- 4) The North Cachar Hills Sub-division of Cachar District;

Partially Excluded Areas:

- 1) The Garo Hills District
- 2) The Mikir Hills in Nowgong and Sibsagar Districts and
- 3) The British portion of Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts (other than Shillong Municipality and Cantonment). As per the rule, in the governance of

these areas, the powers of the provincial legislature were not extended to these areas. Thus, the Colonial Rulers had adopted a different policy for the governance of the tribal areas in North East India, devoid of

the general administration of mainland Assam which had infused a sentiment of differentness of those peoples from the rest.

During the time of Independence Gopinath Bordoloi, then premier of Assam persuaded the Hill tribe leaders to accept the accession to the Union of India. However in order to satisfy the demands of the Hill leaders of North East India the Constituent Assembly of independent India appointed a committee called "North East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas" under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi. The recommendations of the Bordoloi committee were incorporated in the Sixth Schedule to the constitution of India. According to Section-20 of the 6th Schedule of the Constitution the „tribal areas“ of Assam were specified in Part -A and B of a corresponding table.

Part-A included-

- 1) the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills
- 2) the Garo Hills
- 3) the Lushai Hills
- 4) the Naga Hills
- 5) the North Cachar Hills and
- 6) the Mikir Hills.

Part-B included-

- 1) North East Frontier Tract including Balipara Frontier Tract, Abor Hills and Misimi Hills Districts and
- 2) the Naga Tribal Areas.

According to the Section-19 of the 6th Schedule of the Constitution, the Governor was to ensure constitution of an Autonomous District Council for each of these above areas. Speaking in favour of the Sixth schedule of the Indian Constitution, Gopinath Bordoloi in the constituent assembly debate explained in clear terms that the Tribal peoples of North Eastern India must be allowed to develop themselves in their own way.

Post independence, groups and communities identified and enumerated as tribes during British rule came to be re-classified as **Scheduled Tribes** after the Constitution (Article 342) was adopted in 1950. Areas where Schedule Tribes are numerically dominant, two distinct administrative arrangements have been provided for them in the Constitution in the form of the **Fifth and Sixth Schedules**.

5th Scheduled Areas under the Constitution is “such areas as the **President may by order declare** to be Scheduled Areas”. **At present, 10 States** namely Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Telangana have Fifth Schedule Areas. The provisions of the Fifth Schedule have seen further legal and administrative reinforcement in the form of **Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996** for more democratisation.

The **Sixth Schedule** areas are some of the areas which were ‘excluded’ until the Government of India Act, 1935 in the erstwhile Assam and other tribal-dominant areas which became separate States. These areas (6th schedule) have also been given special provisions under **Part XXI** of the Constitution.

The British philosophy of maintaining status quo and **isolation was replaced by policies of development and integration** of the Northeast through the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution**. The Sixth Schedule provides for the creation of **Autonomous District and Regional Councils** and accords a host of legislative, executive and judicial powers to these autonomous bodies. It (6th Schedule) **applies to certain tribal areas of the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram**. Apart from the Sixth Schedule, there are other constitutional provisions in the Northeast such as **Article 371-A (Nagaland), Article 371-C (Manipur), Article 371- G (Mizoram)**.

Two types of Autonomous District Councils: (1) **set up under the Sixth Schedule**, (2) **& established by various Acts of the State Legislative Assembly**.

Autonomous District Council

Assam: Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, Bodoland under 6th schedule.

Entire State of Meghalaya except Shillong area is covered under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule- Khasi Hills, Garo Hills, Jaintia Hills.

Mizoram: Chakma, Mara, Lai

Tripura: Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council

Established by Acts-Assam(6), Manipur(6)

State	Legal and administrative structure
Arunachal Pradesh	Article 371H. No Autonomous Councils, Panchayati Raj Institutions
Assam	Sixth Schedule, Article 371B. Three Autonomous Councils
Manipur	Article 371C, Manipur Hill Village Authority Act and Manipur Hill Areas District Council
Mizoram	Sixth Schedule, Article 371G, Three Autonomous

However, the political autonomy provided under the 6th Schedule of the Indian Constitution could not fully contain the political aspirations of the Hills tribes of North East India. The growth of tribal ethnic nationalism is a very complex issue for Assam which leads to the emergence of many tribal movements since independence. During the time of independence of India, our national leaders have decided to keep the large variety of ethnic groups of North Eastern region into one federal unit, the state of Assam. However, in the new constitution of post Independent India, under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, provisions were made for autonomous administration for some of the tribal communities (Hill Tribes) to preserve protect their identity, culture and to ensure development through self-rule. But such arrangements could not contain the ethnic aspirations of the Tribal communities in Assam (North East India) and a strong sentiment of tribal nationalism based on their ethnic identity has emerged. This tribal ethnic nationalism has been asserted by the respective tribal groups by raising various demands i. e. demand for autonomous district councils, separate statehood and even independent sovereign state. Eventually these developments have led to the emergence of many issues, even lead to the re-organization of the State on several occasions. The present North Eastern States like Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram etc. were created as a process of re-organisation of Assam after a long history of Tribal Movements. Even during recent times some tribal ethnic groups i.e. Bodos, Rabhas, Tiwas, Mishings etc. have raised various demands for self-rule and thereby to protect their ethnic identity.

In fact, soon after independence a rift was emerged between the leaders of the Hill Tribes and the Assam Pradesh Congress party. In 1960, the All Party Hill Leaders Conference, a common platform of hill tribes leaders was formed which stood for creation of an „Eastern Frontier State“ comprising all hill districts of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. However in later stage, separate demand for statehood was raised by the leaders from the regions of Mizoram, Nagaland, Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills and Meghalaya. Subsequently, the State of Assam was reorganised, on 21st January 1972

Mizoram was declared Union Territory and became Indian State in 1987. Meghalaya was carved out of Assam on 21st February 1970 and become a State. The state of Nagaland thus came into being by the 13th Constitution amendment on 1st December, 1963. Two Hill Districts under the Sixth Schedule Autonomy of the Indian Constitution namely Karbi Anglong Autonomous Hill District and the North Cachar Hill District (presently

Dima Haso) remain with the re-organized Assam. But in Assam, besides the Hill Tribes, there are some other tribal ethnic groups living in the Plains areas of Assam known as Plain Tribes. These tribal groups have enormously contributed to the growth of Assamese nationality by adopting the culture and traditions of the caste Hindu Assamese society. Unlike the Hill Tribes, in the post independence period, these tribal groups were never enjoyed any special constitutional privileges either under the 5th Schedule or under the 6th schedule of the Indian Constitution. Gradually, a feeling of deprivation and identity centric new awakening was emerged among these tribal communities.

After independence the region was reorganised due to identity assertion amongst various tribal groups leading to the creating of several new states like Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1971), Mizoram (1986) and Arunachal Pradesh (1986). From last 1960s the situation of Northeast India is very much sensitive due to the growing assertion of identity by various ethnic groups.

Inspite of being divided many times on the basis of ethnic identity the demands such as constitutional safeguard, creation of separate statehood etc are still being raised by many plain and hill tribes. For

instance, the Karbis of Karbi Anglong district and the Dimasas of Dima Hasao Autonomous District have been agitating for granting of a separate state on the basis of their ethnic identities. From the 1980s onwards the Bodos have been demanding a separate 'Bodoland' state on the basis of their linguistic and ethnic identities. Similarly, the Koch Rajbanshis are demanding 'Kamatapur' as a separate state for preserving their distinct identities and political entities etc.

Some Demands

Udayachal:

In 1967, these Plain Tribals of Assam were united politically and formed an organization in the name of the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA). The PTCA, submitted a memorandum to the President of India on 20th May, 1967 demanding autonomy in the predominantly Plain Tribal areas of northern tracts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar Districts including all the tribal belts and blocks of those areas. In 1973 the PTCA

revised its demand for "the Udayachal" a Union Territory. However, the PTCA gave up the agitation for a separate homeland after it joined the Janata government in 1978-79.

Demand for Bodoland:

In 1987, the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) renewed the demand, raising the slogan, Divide Assam FiftyFifty. Following an agreement in 1993, Bodoland became an autonomous administrative unit constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India administered by the Bodoland Autonomous Council. On January 27, 2020, a new peace agreement was signed between the Centre and the Assam government on one side and the National Democratic Front of Bodoland, ABSU and United Bodo People's Organisation on the other. Under the terms of this agreement, the boundary of the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District would be redrawn, and the area would be renamed Bodoland Territorial Region.

Demand for a separate Karbi Anglong state:

Karbi Anglong District Council was formed on 17 November 1951. Later changed to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council on 23 June 1952, after signing of M.O.U. between Government of India, Government of Assam and United People's Democratic Solidarity, it was renamed to **Karbi Anglong Autonomous Territorial Council**. However, Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), originally Peoples Democratic Front, was set up as a mass organization with the aim of statehood for the Karbi Anglong region of Assam.

Demand for a separate 'Dimaraji' state.

The **North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC)**, also known as **Dima Hasao Autonomous Council**, is an autonomous district council was constituted under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India to administrate the Dima Hasao district and to develop the hill people in the area. Its headquarters is in Haflong, Dima Hasao district. But, demand for a separate 'Dimaraji' state still going on.

Kamatapur:

The autonomy movement by the Koch Rajbanshis seeks creation of a separate Kamatapur state comprising same areas of present North Bengal and Assam under the constitutional provision. The movement also looks for the recognition of Kamatapuri or Koch Rajbanshi language under the Eight Scheduled of the constitution of India along with the demands of cultural and socio-economic development of their community. In case of Assam, the movement also demands Scheduled Tribe status for the Koch Rajbanshis living in Assam

Taking the instance of the Bodo movement and its consequent political success, some smaller tribal ethnic groups particularly the Tiwas, the Mishings and the Rabhas have asserted their political aspirations for autonomy during 199's.

To meet the demands of the indigenous tribes, the Government of Assam concluded a series of accord with tribal leaders and passed a numbers of acts for establishment of Autonomous Councils.

The Mising Autonomous Council was established under the Mising Autonomous Council Act, 1995 passed by Assam Legislative Assembly with its H.Q. at Gogamukh, Dhemaji. The Mising Autonomous Council Act, 1995 provides that the Mising Autonomous Council shall be constituted “comprising of Satellite Areas and Core Areas for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement of the Mising and other Scheduled Tribe communities residing therein.”

The Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (RHAC) was constituted by the Government of Assam in 1995. It was constituted for development in the areas of economic, educational, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of Rabha people residing in the council area. RHAC has different tribes such as Rabha, Bodo, Nepali, Assamese, Bengali etc. The majority of the population in RHAC is Rabha. Currently the RHAC head office is located at Dudhnoi Assam.

The Tiwa Autonomous Council (Tiwashong) was constituted by the Government of Assam in 1995 with headquarter at Morigaon.

The Deori Autonomous Council (DAC) was established under the Deori Autonomous Council Act, 2005 passed by Assam Legislative Assembly with its Headquarter at Bhimbor Nagar, Narayanpur.

The Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council (SKAC) was established in 2005 by the state legislation Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council Act, with its Headquarter at Mankata road Dibrugarh.

The Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council was established in 2005 by the state legislation

In 2020 the government of Assam decided to form four new autonomous councils.

The Moran Autonomous Council, Matak Autonomous Council, Bodo Kachari Welfare Autonomous Council, Kamatapur Autonomous Council, Bill 2020 was tabled in Assam Legislative Assembly on 24 March 2020 and it was passed in September 2020.

In other hand at present in Assam there have 33 development councils. The elite class of different communities in the State are participating in planning, monitoring and implementation of different schemes in grassroot level through the Development Councils.

Those development councils are:

1	Barak Valley Hill Tribes Development Council
2	Sarania Kachari Dev. Council
3	Amri Karbi Dev. Council
4	Bengali Speaking Dev. Council
5	Kalita Dev. Council
6	Karbi people outside Karbi Anglong Dev. Council
7	Brahmin Dev. Council
8	Jolha Dev Council
9	Goria Dev. Council

10	Barman Dimasa Kachari Dev Council
11	SC Dev. Council
12	Hindi Speaking Dev. Council
13	Tea Garden & Ex Tea Garden Dev Council
14	Bishnupriya Manipuri Dev. Council
15	Maimal Dev. Council
16	Moran Dev. Council
17	Motak Dev Council
18	Moria Dev Council
19	Gorkha Dev. Council
20	Adivasi Dev. Council
21	Koch Rajbongshi Dev. Council
22	Chutia Dev Council
23	Nath Yogi Dev Council
24	Tai Ahom Dev Council
25	Mech Kachari Dev Council
26	Manipuri Dev Council
27	Sadharan Jati Dev. Council
28	Singpho (Man Tai) Dev Council
29	Sut Dev. Council
30	Kumar Dev Council
31	Modahi Dev. Council
32	Hajong Dev Council
33	Chaodang Dev Council

Present trend

Six Assamese communities are demanding ST status. The six Assam communities that are ST status are Chutiya, Koch-Rajbongshi, Matak, Moran, Tai-Ahom and 'Tea Tribe'. Some of which are reserved as the Other Backward Classes (OBC).

Demand for more autonomy, demand for ST/SC status, demand for separate state like Bodoland, Kamatapur, Karbi State, Dimaraji, Barak state ect. are common slogans in Assam

Since the colonial rule, a newly emerged "middle class" or the political elite groups in the tribal societies of North East India had articulated the sense of identity consciousness in their respective societies. This very class of people played a pioneering role in unfolding, consolidating and then spreading an identity consciousness among the members of their society. Consequently a clash of interest and contradiction between the „middle class“ elements of core Assamese and peripheral Assamese (tribal) societies has emerged. Moreover the alleged social discriminations, superiority complex of the caste-Hindu Assamese peoples and the caste-based social stratifications gradually started to push the tribal peoples away from the proximity with the core- Assamese society. Such an atmosphere of neglect and indifference provided the fertile ground for the competitive "middle class" in the tribal societies to politically mobilize the tribal communities on the issue of ethnic identity. The hurt-sentiments of the tribal "middle class" realised that without political power, no malady could be remedied and as a result bargaining for political power had started.

But these policy measures could not yield the enduring results to the tribal problems in the states. A handful of leaders only are getting the benefits of this transfer of powers. These policies of the Government have encouraged the tribal elites to raise new movements for more powers after achieving one stages of power. Moreover, due to this aspiration of power of the tribal leaders, the unity and integrity of the state has been shaken.

Conclusion:

The British were applied divide and rule in India in order to extend their imperial rule. Today the situation is different. We have a democracy. Autonomy is an important safeguard to protect the demographic balance of a region. Indigenous culture and tradition can be better preserved in an autonomous administration. However bifurcation of existing state and destruction of unity among divergent ethnic groups is not acceptable.

Granting autonomy to particular ethnic groups in a particular region and even the formation of separate state for some communities would not yield desired results due to misuse of funds, corruption and lack of awareness among the concerned peoples.

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