

ETHNIC DIVERSITY, PEACE & CONFLICT OF DEMOCRACY IN NORTH EAST INDIA

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Abstract

The North Eastern states of India are the hub of ethnic diversity. The ethnic diversity of north east India is a resource for ideal democracy. Normally, we have the tendency to treat ethnic diversity as threat to democracy. We discuss the efforts of ethnic identity, as the law and order problem and threat to democracy. The problem of threat to democracy or national integrity lies elsewhere. The ethnic diversity of north east India is a resource for ideal democracy. Peace can be defined as the absence of violence. It requires the non-violent management. The conflict among the ethnic groups of North East India mainly the issues of socio-cultural and political identity crisis, underdevelopment, non employment etc. All the issues are address in this paper.

Key word: ethnic diversity, peace & conflict and North East India.

The Paper

The moment we start a discussion with a heading of ethnic diversity in an ideal democracy, the problem of this or the problem of that are come to our mind and we confined our minds to a limited set of parameters. Likewise, if we look at the question of ethnic diversity and democracy in the N.E. India everybody want to look it as problem of democracy and we see it from a limited angle. Normally, we have the tendency to see any effort or political safeguard for the ethnic identity, as the law and order problem and threat to democracy. We try to solve the problem accordingly. The problem of threat to democracy or national integrity lies elsewhere. But we have treated ethnic diversity as a problem and have taken one pain killer without any positive outcome. The ethnic diversity of north east India is a resource for ideal democracy. It is a fact by considering the historical data that in the eight states of north east India including Sikkim there are nearly 200 different communities' lives in this small corner of the country. There is hardly one or two special cases of communal clash compare to the rest of the country in the last 60 years of independent India.

This part of the India is the best example where the different communities live peacefully. Almost all the communities have their own cultural identity and had their own political set-up before the advent of the British. These small states we can call as the ethnic states were accepted by the big states of the Brahmaputra valley like Ahom, Koch etc. In the colonial

role for the first time the whole North East India comes under one administrative umbrella. During these days the different ethnic political administrative practices were not responded in the British administration. Therefore, different ethnic groups revolt time to time against the British administration seeking independent of their own states. In these political processes they also lost their cultural identity. They lost the right to use their own language in the administrative work. After independent, the state formation process also failed to protect the ethnic identity of different tribes of the north east India. For example, in Assam in case of the Karbi's ethnic identity question arises when the state government tries to introduce Assamese language as the medium of instruction up to the college level in 1972-73. The Karbis felt that they will loose their own ethnic identity in the process of *assimilation* by the state government. They also feel isolate in the platform of *Assam Sahitya Sabha*. There are some other factors responsible for ethnic unrest like deprived of constitutional right and development, But threat to loose the cultural identity was the key factor for demand of ethnic identity. This is the history of one tribe. Similar is the case with other tribes. In the process of searching for the ethnic identity almost all the tribes of North East India aer seeking special constitutional safeguard or own state where they can rule their own people. In an ideal democracy, fight for constitutional right in a democratic way is not the threat to the democracy.

Peace can be defined as the absence of violence. It requires the non-violent management. Violence means "to violate the harmonious social order". Violence can be verbal, psychological, emotional and spiritual as well as physical. South Asia is a turbulent, complex region with a prominent place of ethnic diversity. India has long historical relationship with South Asia especially from the time of King Ashoka, through Buddhism. The major South Asian states were the cultural and religious colonies of ancient India. Along with the Hindu religion the Hindu art and architecture were also dominated the South Asian states like Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Burma etc. The architectural style like Ankorvat brought revolution in architecture to the region. The region is characterized by multi-ethnic societies with striking internal divisions along linguistic, regional, communal and sectarian lines, externally linked to one another across national boundaries. Even though it has a common cultural background and shared political experience, many groups have been fiercely fighting with each other, challenging the national governments and frustrating their nation-building efforts, such as in India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Malaysia. All these conflicts and violence are occurring in South Asia despite the fact that the 'Ahimsa of Goutam Buddha', Gandhian principles of non-violence originate from this region.

The information technology era has brought people across the world nearer to each other. It has also brought civilizations and cultures closer together, providing novel arenas for more intense dialogue and more communication platforms for mutual and sustained understanding. The notion that ours is a global neighborhood has become reality. Along with the awareness that the global neighborhood is now upon, there is the realization that any war, conflict, serious disturbance, or oppression in any one part of the world affects every other part of the world. Globalization means the interconnectedness and fellow-feeling of people in situations of suffering and want.

Misery in any corner of the global neighborhood affects the peace and well-being of everyone else. We can justifiably quote the American peace maker Martin Luther King who famously said that “injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere”. However, there are still forces that focus on a fragmented world and emphasize old positions, historical events, divisive concepts and views that fuel conflicts around the globe. Is it possible to counteract these forces and build a new, cohesive civilization in which deadly conflicts will not survive and more harmony in diversity prevails, which will lead to a greater understanding and acceptance between cultures! Conference on Peace and Reconciliation in South Asia will aim to find answers to these questions and to establish a new avenue to overcome these well-known intra-national problems and issues confronting South Asia.

India, the largest democracy in the world, has experiences of violence from *Naxalites*, variously referred to as extremist Maoists revolutionaries, from the Sikh revolution to the separate groups of Kasmir and North Eastern States. One third of the districts in India are currently under their influence and many observers consider *Naxalite* violence as the greatest threat to the Indian nation. Why such an extremist movement thrives in an open and democratic society is a puzzle to many.

There seems to be no question that everyone in the country wants democracy. The issue is how to achieve stable democracy in the face of unremitting political violence and religious extremism, problems that have continuously disturbed the country since its creation as a nation-state. In Sri Lanka, meanwhile, the violent conflict of the last three decades has by now claimed around 80,000 lives. The economic costs have also been immense. A similar violent conflict that exists in Nepal and Myanmar has resulted in terrible brutalities.

The military regime in Myanmar is considered a totalitarian dictatorship because of its absolute denial of fundamental rights and freedoms to the Myanmar people. The prolonged absence of democracy and human rights in this Buddhist country has long been on the high political and diplomatic agenda of the international community. Not so notorious is the issue of human rights violations in Manipur, Malaysia, an economic powerhouse in its own right in the region. Serious concerns have been raised about how ethnic and religious minorities are systematically oppressed and marginalized. Such problems in these countries have certainly received their fair share of international attention and mediation efforts to realize immediate as well as long-term solutions.

Although the underlying issues involved are many (conflict along ethnic and religious lines, extremism, violence, and oppression), Asia has certainly the cultural resources at its disposal to help resolve these problems.

The ancient Indian philosophy of Ahimsa can be the answer to the violence. World Conference on Peace with aim to establish a new avenue to overcome the well-known intra-national problems and issues confronting South Asia can help in bringing the peace. South Asia has to re-discover the power of its rich heritage, more and more faith-based resources have to develop and deployed to address the political issues and international problems for better understanding & rediscover the peace of Rama Rajya. Faith-based tools and resources, such as non-violence, compassion, eco-friendliness, acceptance of differences, sincerity and integrity, prayer and meditation, international tourism, cultural exchange programme, formation of Asian

Union with common Asian currency, open international trade and business among the Asian countries may be the new dimension in the peace and reconciliation in the south Asian states.

Going to the roots of the problem of democracy in the North East India is not a very easy task. Probably the beginning of insurgency and the North East can be traced to the Naga movement for independence during India got her independence from the Great Britain. The historical facts shows that the memorandum submitted by the then Naga Club to the British administration outlining their demand for a separate state. This memorandum submitted on January 10th 1929 to the Simon Commission made the demand of the Naga very clear. After the end of the Second World War the then Deputy Commissioner of Naga Mr. Pawsey formed the Naga-Hill district Tribal Council in 1945. In 1946 it is renamed the Naga National Council. This institution proved to Naga independent movement under A.Z. Phizo declared Naga independence. It is another matter that Naga independence never materialized and the Nagas included in the Indian union. Since then, history has been witnessed to one of the most long drawn and bloody insurgency movement in the world.

In addition to Nagaland, if we look at the case history of insurgency in the North eastern states like Assam, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura etc. numbers of common factors emerges as the threat to the democracy. In all cases if we analyses carefully, not as because of the different ethnic groups having separate identity they are going for any kind of revolution rather it is because of their sense of insecurity, economic causes, political causes, vested interest etc. We can pin point some of the major vested interest like political parties used insurgency not only to win elections but also to embarrass political opponents. The allegations are openly made in the local daily newspaper, that during AGP first term in the office it was soft towards the ULFA. Then in the subsequent elections when congress came to power it was alleged that the same insurgence helped them. We do not want to say that all the facts are true. There are also allegations against the Bodo movement that the Bodo militants were supposed to have been trained by the RAW when the congress was in power in center and AGP rulling the state. It is said that center wants to dismiss the AGP government by pointing out the breakdown of law and order situation with the help of Bodo militants. No denials were ever used nor defamation case filed. Should this lead us to believe that there was some truth in the allegation?

Though it is said that the constitution of India has created a unitary state with federal features, yet in reality the unitary structure is dominant. Under the prevailing system smaller states haves virtually no say over policy matter. For instance most of the northern states have only one or two MPs in the Parliament. In fact all the North Eastern has lesser number of MPs than larger states like Bihar, U.P. etc. In this situation the voice of the region is often not heard. The constitution had tried to overcome these problems by creating the upper house or Rajya Sabha but the purposes were again defeated when equal representation for all stated was not given. This political inequality has also led to severe economic problems for instance all the financial matters of the states are made by center. Development not comes into force similarly. There are many other roots of the problem threat to the democracy in the north east India. No

study about any field of democracy found defines ethnic diversity of the north east India as the causes, problem or threat to the democracy.

In an ideal democracy the ethnic diversity of north east India, is a resource. From the time of Ahom rule (i.e. the 13th century onward) north east India has the history of unique example of ethnic unity in diversity except the cases of Muamoria rebellion in long six hundred years. It was a political revolution rather than an ethnic revolution. The history of Ahom Monarchy was the best example of north eastern India where different ethnic groups lives together peacefully.

In an ideal democracy we talked about the rule by the own people. But in reality, in Indian democracy different communities are deprived for last 61years of independence from their political right. In Assam the 'Panchayati Raj' implemented only in last six years with some limitations. However, the practices of different autonomous councils are serves the democratic political purposes into some extent. Therefore, we found it very much practical to prevail the democratic rights of the different ethnic communities through establishing the autonomous councils with or if not possible without territorial boundaries. This will not only help in exercise the democratic right, it will gives the opportunity to the ethnic groups taking part in the process of development and preserve their own ethnic culture.

It is also found that when the different ethnic tribes get the opportunity to take part actively in the policy making for their own communities they will be more responsible and respectful to the democratic political process.

The unique ethnic diversity of north east India is a resource for the Indian democracy. But the preservation of this unique culture of the country is a big question to reply. Every community has the right to get respects for their own cultural identity in all sphere of life. It can be advocating that the special constitutional safeguard for a limited period such as special economic zone, special cultural package, some short of rights in case of land reservation etc should be given, so that the people of north east India can come forward with faster development along with the rest of the country. We feel that the federal structure of the Indian constitution will serve the purposes of all the states equally.

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