



DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL CULTURE AND VIOLENCE IN NORTHEAST INDIA

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Abstract:

Northeast India is considered to be the land of Tribal. Before Independence this entire areas was known as Assam province. The region has a high concentration of tribal population. Time and again seven different states have been separated from the same 72 area. The states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram are mostly inhabitant by a numbers of native tribes, each tribe has its own distinct tradition of art, culture, dance, music and lifestyle. The North East states shares boarders with China in the North, Mynamar in the East, Bangladesh in the south west, Nepal in the west and Bhutan in the north-west.

Keywords: Northeast, art, culture, lifestyle, tribal population.

Introduction:

The landscape range of the communities and geographical and ecological and political diversity makes the North east quite different from other state of India. Assam is divided in to two physical units, the northeastern and central hills tracts and the valleys of the Barak and the Brahmaputra. On the north of Assam lie the eastern Himalayas reaching the highest altitude in the Northeast at Namchu Burwa 7,756 meters. The different part of the sub Himalayan regions, comparatively lower in elevation is named after the semi mongoloid tribes who inhabit in these hills: the Bhutias, Akas, Duflas, Abors, Miris and Mishmis. These ranges continue towards the southeast and join the Patkai hills, the natural boundaries between Assam and Burma. The Assam range in the middle is also occupied from east to the west by the various tribes of the Nagas, Jaintias, Khasis and Garos. On the south lie Chin and Lushai (Mizo) hills, Chittagong hill tracts and hill Tipperah. Though hemmed in on the three sides by mountain barrier, Assam was linked up with the neighboring countries by several routes. The physical division lead to the emergence in Assam of two distinct ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups, namely dweller of hills and those of the plains (Bar Pujari; 2007).

Northeast Tribal Governing Administration

The northeast tribal polity and administration is quite heartening to note that their time honored self-governing institution have remained more or less effected by main fold social changes and political turmoil in the courses of many centuries. The dynamics process of transaction from monarchy to aristocracy and unto democracy is unique features. The remarkable features of tribal living in north east India is a fundamentally the smooth functioning of their age- old legal and political but free and representative institution maintaining their republican character and sprit which indicates their highest attainment and skill in the art of self-government running throughout their whole history and stands in comparison and contrast with the ancient Hindu Republican forms of Governance and democratic system in various aspects i.e. equality before law, judicial procedure, crime and punishments, freedom opinion and expression, local governance in the villages, working patterns of councils and councilors etc. (Singh; 2009). Khasis and Jaintias had practice republican system of administration. Khasi syiems and other local heads of the administration have always carried on the administrative works in acclaim the concordance with the advice



and consent of council of ministers and other advisors in a better way than the system that existed in Hindu republics. The elaborate elective system of khasis and Jaintia Hills has its in genuine form and far more superior to what existed elsewhere in India during ancient period. Khasi 80 tradition clearly reveal the fact that in many states both male and females Syiems were elected various Khasi states had both electoral and executive councils. The clans, who laid the foundation of state, were jointly responsible in running the administration with the Syiem maintaining the right to elect their Syiems. The administration of Jaintia Hills who belonged to special clans and were elected. They were assisted by subordinate officers like Pators, Sangot, Dan and others. (Singh; 2009). The Kuki of North Cachar Hills had republican government. Villages are administered by a group of village officials, the Kalin or headmen, the Kabur or assistant headmen. According to report of surgeon Mccrea Kukis' nation was their principals hereditary chiefs but divided into clans each under its own chief, whose officers were elective not hereditary. Similarly, in Lushai Hills, although chieftainship was hereditary, but in the administration of villages the chief was assisted by a council of village elders. After the annexation of Lushai Hills, British also recognized the principled and value of election and put forward scheme of constituting of Durbar composed of elected chiefs, one each from administrative circles. In North Cachar Hills during the days of Kachari Rajas, the management of the hills was entrusted to Senapati or General and Chief Law Officer with a number assistance. Village headmen had been elected (Singh; 2009). In Manipur, during pre-independence period, tribal of Manipur had their own administrative system. It remains for long times, the system maintain law and order of the society but the system is varies from tribes to tribes. According to V. Venkata Rao, among the Chin-Mizo, Kuki, Singphos, Khamtis etc and authoritarian type of institution was exist and republican type existed among the Morpas, the Akas, the 81 Tangdas, the Adhis and the Naga of Manipur. The Nagas political institutions are more liberal than non-Nagas in Manipur (Ruolkhu Mzo; 2018). In Arunachal Pradesh the self-governing institution is prevailed. The people, composing the councils are accepted, the leaders of village and decision for those are not taken by formal vote but it goes towards discussions and debates until general achievement of unanimity. Since from last one thousand years, the idea of elected people is very familiar among Monpas of Kameng who practices village selfgovernment institutes. The Monpas general assembly is based on republican government nature whereas Apa-Tani buliangs acting as the representative of public opinion. The Tribal village council in North eastern Region also functions as an open court where the establish customs and customary laws decided according to disputes which heard through this courage action had been taken. In this open courts, all the male members and in some areas even women are allowed to take part in the trial of the case (Singh; 2009).

Insurgency in Northeast India

North East India possess of numbers of problems for the Indian states, the most serious being the problem of secessionist insurgency. This is no merely a law and order problem but a thread to the unity and integrity of the post-colonial Indian nation states. It is not only the question of the nation hood for all the communities of India but even question the legitimacy of Indian states to rule over marginalized communities like the Mizo, Naga, Bodo, Khasis, Karbis, Meithei, Dimasa and so on. They present themselves as a separate nation demand the right to self-determination and the right opt out of Indian union as a separate sovereign nation states (Nag; 2008). The north eastern region of India is faced with insurgency of separatist movement from last 60 years. Although each conflict has its own routes and antecedents, the issues raised included language and ethnicity, tribal rivalry, migration, control over local resources, access to water and widespread feeling of exploitation and alienation. The region had witnessed more violence in last 60 years than any other part



of the country (Raatan; 2006). Post-independence situation in the north eastern region of India has been dominated by ethnic reinsurance and it is because of political and economic instability, inequalities and sub-regional disparities. The complex geographical mosaic of the north east, explanations included impact of the historical patterns, integrative process and politicization of ethnic elements. This has been compounded by the emergence of 89 distinct middleclass in identity as factors in political, social and economic relations in the region (Gopal Krishan; 1997). Demography changes most immediate source of conflict in northeast India. Unwanted migrants on the move across the region, mass movement in traditional insular area invites linguistic, ethnic and religious strife. Settlement of an alien population leads to battle over resources, particularly land (Hazarika; 1997). The term insurgency which was used to characterized the violent challenge thrown to the government by the several ethnic groups in the northeast, has acquired a specific connotation, the process of emotional integration of all ethnic groups to forge for a common Indian identity i.e. the consciousness of a collective self-comprising all racial, ethnic, linguistic etc. groups has still remain incomplete. This process has been challenge particularly by educated elites belonging to some tribal communities of northeast. Insurgency in northeast implies armed uprising of an ethnic group against government seeking to established the rights to secede from the Indian Union, which according to the objective resolution passed by the constituent assembly comprised the territories that British India (Ganguly; 1997). The state of Nagaland bears the scars of the region's long drawn history of insurgency, which served as a precursor and a model for other constituent states of the region. The Naga tribes are divided by the state and national boundaries. The principal Naga militant group today, the Nationalist socialist council of Nagalim demands a united home land, Nagalim and claims a territory six times the size of present day Nagaland including most of Manipur as when as parts of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar. In 1950s Naga founder of Naga insurgency A.Z. 90 Phizo opened the Myanmar from to the insurgency. Phizo's group gradually established linked with Chinese and Pakistani leadership also (Raatan; 2006). After the independence of India in 1947, the Nagaland remain part of the province of Assam, Nationalist activities arose amongst Naga tribes who demanded a political union of this ancestral and native group damaged government and civil infrastructure and attacked government officials and Indians from other states (Barpujari; 2008). The seeds of the Naga problems were sown by the British colonialist. The Naga National Councils which emerged with the patronage of the British officials became instrumental in pleading the case of Naga Independence and representing Naga case before the case of Naga Independence and representing Naga case before the British government and the government of India. Nagaland demand that they, who had never been conquered by any other except the British, should not be thrust to the mercy of others and also demanded to left them alone to determine their future by themselves. So, there emerged a conflict between the Naga National Council and the Bordoloi sub-committee which ascertaining the future of the hill area of Assam (Maibam; 2016) The extremist Naga group argued that Nagas are not Indians as they have a diametrically opposite racial, cultural, political as well as religious background. The Nagas had have a statement that Nagaland were never a part of India and after British left over the region they were free to determine their own future. The ideology of Naga Nationalism grew over a period about 30 years since the formation of Naga club in 1918. It got further impetus with the formation of Naga National Council in 1946. The movement further slipped in to underground organization and give birth to ethnic insurgency with its defined goals, mass-base, charismatic leadership and well-knit 91 organization in both the political as well as military fronts. During the initial years of movement, the moderate force remained dormant in the face of violent mass upsurge in favour of Independence. After the government response on



it with the demand for independence, the moderate forces become active (Das; 1997). The Mizo insurgency lasted from 1966-1986, and their initial success they captured several towns including the capital of Mizoram, Aizwal and Radio Station and by 1980 the rebels were negotiating surrender. An accord was signed in 1987 between the govt. of India and Laldenga, President of Mizo National Front (Hazarika; 1997). The Mizo hills were devastated by great famine in 1959, the cause of famine was attributed to flowering of bamboos which resulted in a boom of the rat population. After eating bamboo seeds, the rats turned towards crops and infested the huts and houses and became a plague to the villagers. So by this, the famine was started in Mizo hills. In order to come up through this starvation and famine of darkness, many welfare organizations tried to help the villagers. In 1955, the Mizo Culture Society was formed in a leadership of Pu Laldenga. During the famine in 1959-1960, this society took leading demands for relief and managed to attract the attention to all sections of society. In September 1960, the society adopted the name of Mizo National Famine Front (MNFF). On 22nd October, 1961 MNFF became Mizo National Front (MNF) under the leadership of Laldenga, with the goal of achieving sovereign independence of greater Mizoram. The MNF took to violence to secure its goals of establishing a sovereign land, other political forces in the hills of Assam were fighting for separate statehood. The MNF was outlawed in 1967 and as a result the demand for statehood gained fresh momentum (Barpujari; 2008). With the demand of statehood for the Mizo, the Indian govt. offered the proposal of Mizo hills as a Union Territory to the delegates of Mizo District Councils. The Mizo leaders accepted the offer on condition that the UT would be upgraded as statehood sooner or later. The UT of Mizoram came into being on 21st January 1972. The state of Manipur has been under the grip of two major problems viz. the problem of insurgency and problem of ethnic conflict. The former was directed against the govt. and seeking for secession from the Indian Union and the latter is the struggle between the two major tribes- Kuki and Nagas. These two problems crippled the state development in all aspects, demolished the lives of thousands of civilians and ruined millions in annual financial allocation. Ever since 1948, the state of Manipur is characterized by a high degree of political, social and economic instability. The origin of insurgency movement is not a recent phenomenon but it is deep rooted in the post-independent era of India (Thomas; 1997). The multi-faceted conflict situations have been appearing since long back and more deteriorating with the coming up of ethnic based Armed opposition groups that have different objectives to strengthen their rights. During the last few decades, Manipur has been wrecked by armed conflict that has left thousands killed and rendered thousands of others homeless. In the 1990s, various ethnic clashes took place Meitei-Pangal, Naga-Kuki and Paite-Naga, apart from the decade's long insurgency and counter-insurgency operations. The state of conflict in Manipur may be described as 1. Conflict between state and non-state actors 2. Inter-Ethnic armed conflict and 3. Intra AoGs conflict. 93 After the merger of Manipur in Indian Union in 1949, the people of the states who belong to Tibeto-Burman Family who also have a separate culture and history have been struggling to regain the lost sovereignty. With this Hijam Irabot established the first ever armed revolutionary organization of Manipur and Manipur Red Guard (Sing; 2016). The Meiteis inhabit primarily in the valley of Manipur extending up to Imphal and along the Bishenpur axis in to the Cachar district of Assam. They considered themselves superior to all the other ethnic groups in Manipur intellectually, culturally and in all other aspects. They feel that they are being oppressed to meet the demands of the tribes inhabiting the hills and are antagonistic towards them (Mukherjee; 2008). The Meiteis do not belong to the Scheduled Tribe category while the hills tribes enjoy certain privileges like job reservation, protection of their land from settlement and ownership by non STs even if they are Manipuris. This has been strongly resented by the Meities who perceived that



the hill tribes are garnering benefits disproportionate to their population. Manipur was merged with Indian union on 1949 but became fullfledged state in 1972 and with the delay in granting statehood caused discontent among the Meiteis who felt that their identification with Hindu India brought them no political or economic benefits. This gave rise to secessionist tendencies among a section of the Meities and a number of separatist group emerged. The Meitei secessionist movement received a serious jolt when most of its leaders were arrested during the Bangladesh Liberation war in 1971. During 1979-81 Meitei insurgents stepped up their activities and unleashed a violent campaign looting banks and treasuries and killing many security force personnel. In order to tackle the situation, 94 the entire Imphal valley was declared a disturb area and Armed Forces Special Power Act, 1958 was imposed on the valley in September 1980 (Sadangi; 2008). Since from 1948, the state of Manipur is characterized by a high degree of political, social and economic instability. The main factors responsible to this instability are the problem of insurgency.

Counter Insurgencies Measures in Northeast India

Northeastern states of India witnessed many insurgencies which were related to ethnic, politics, linguistic etc. most of the movements was in violent nature and in order to solve the problems, government has taken several policies. In some cases, government tried to underline the movements and in other cases government try to find out the solutions by signing different accords with the particular insurgent groups. Above all this, government has introduced the measures and passed an Act on 1958 called Armed Forces' Special Power Act which dealt with the insurgents. This Act is considered to be the Draconian Act in which the security and army personals down the rank of noncommissioned officer and they have given a power to shoot and kill, without warrant they enter in to the houses and search and even arrest the people without any information (Maibam; 2016). The AFSPA gives the army weeping power to search, arrest and many a time, kill with impunity. Under this Act, in Manipur there have been practices of custodial killings of underground suspects and fake encounters. People protest against the misuse of this Act by security force in the name of counter insurgency. A huge protest against act has been carried out by the peoples of Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur and other state of NE India (Maibam; 2016).

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