

**ETHNIC CRISIS AND DEMAND FOR SELF-
DETERMINATION IN NORTH-EAST REGION IN THE
SPECIAL CONTEXT OF ASSAM**

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Abstract

Almost all societies today are multicultural and likely to remain so far the foreseeable future. It is best seen as a perspective of human life instead of political doctrine or a philosophical theory of man out the world. We grow up within a culturally structured world where we recognize our social relations in terms of its system of meaning out significance and place considerable values on their cultural identity. That is why, one of the most difficult and pressing question of the political era we are entering at the down of the 21st century in where a modern constitution can recognize and accommodate culturally diversity or not. The question can said to characterize the coming era, for when it is not described in relation the preceding period, as a post imperial or post-modern age, it is often described in its own terms, as an age of culturally diversity. The question is not whether one should be for or against cultural diversity. Rather, it is the prior question of what is the critical attitude or spirit in which justice can be rendered to the demands for cultural recognition. This is in so far as culture's relation to itself shapes and is in term shaped by its relation to others and reinforces each other. A culture can't appreciate the value of other cultures; it appreciates the plurality within it. Since a close relationship of culture defines its identity in terms of its differences from others and jealously guards it against their influences, it feels threatened by and avoids all contact with them.

The same is the situation in Assam where the demands for cultural recognition by diverse ethnic groups have received a great deal of attention and has been a living phenomenon in the region. Assam is one of the most heterogeneous states in the country with more than a hundred

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ethnic groups living in the state and the state government has been playing divisive politics, instead of inclusive politics over the years. A number of Autonomous council has been created on a basis of ethnicity, but instead of solving the problems, have gradually given rise to new problems and created more rift. Even if the govt. creates more than a hundred autonomous councils for all the ethnic groups of the state, the problems would not be solved in so far as the people of one ethnic group don't live together in any particular area in the besetting multicultural Assam.

Introduction:

Almost all the societies today are multicultural and like to be remaining so for the foreseeable future. It is best seen as a perspective of human life instead of a political doctrine or a philosophical theory of man out the world. We grow up within a culturally structured world where we organize our social relations in terms of its system of meaning out significance and place considerable values on their cultural identity. That is why, one of the most difficult and pressing question of the political era we are entering at the dawn of the 21st century in whether a modern constitution can recognize and accommodate cultural diversity or not. The question can be said to characterize the coming era, for when it is not described in relation the preceding period, as a past imperial or post modern age, it is often described in its own terms, as an age of cultural diversity. The question is not whether one should be for or against cultural diversity. Rather, it is the prior question of what is the critical attitude or spirit in which justice can be rendered to the demands for cultural recognition. This is in so far as culture's relations to itself shape and their internal and external pluralities presuppose and reinforce each other. A culture cannot appreciate the plurality within it. Since a close relationship of culture defines its identity in terms of its differences from others and jealously guards it against their influences, it feels threatened by and avoids all contact with them.

Objectives and significance of the study:

The problem undertaken here is entitled as 'Crisis of Identity and Movement: Political Game of Bargaining Self- Determination' which will make an endeavour to find out the nature of 'politics of identity assertion' by different groups inhabiting the part of North-East particularly in Assam has given birth all round anxieties in the land. Hence, realizing the situation, our paper

makes an attempt at deriving an integrative and dynamic representation of the phenomenon to develop a commonly shared identity and different ethnic collectivities.

Statement of the Problem:

Anxiety's about 'identity', a catch all term for a variety of contradictory perceptions and passions by a people about themselves and the 'other', and political mobilization exploiting such worries are not unique to any one part of the country. Such mobilizations in Assam and its neighboring hoods are seen as threatening regional and national stability and security. However, this is not a recent phenomenon, nor is it region specific. However, the articulation of ethnicity in Indian political idioms is a more recent phenomenon. For instance, though the term was not used, the consciousness of a unique identity that could not co-exist with the firang was a crucial element in the mobilization of the 1857 uprising the struggle for Pakistan, the land of the pure, though essential a political struggle of non-denominational Muslim national assertion, was articulated almost entirely in terms of the threat Muslims of the subcontinent faced if they could not secure of physical and political space exclusively demarcated for them.

However, post independence, the linguistic reorganization of India was closely related to anxieties about protection and advancement of a people's language, which required a clearly demarcated [political space coinciding with real or imagined historical memories, caste as weapon of political mobilization has been a permanent given in Indian polities, reflecting an inescapable reality of social and political divide.

If religion and languages were the markers of such anxieties during the freedom struggle and in the decades following independence, these are now being articulated citing threats to a variety of other identities (caste and tribe, very broadly) which for want of a better word, are claimed as 'ethnic identities; the impression of the latter part of the expression compounded by the introduction of an equally imprecise elements of 'ethnicity'. For 'ethnicity' encompasses and transcends 'religion' and 'language' and 'caste' and 'tribe' and other identity markers even while introducing new elements into its struggle vocabulary. The ethnic and racial diversity of societies and the increasing connection among these societies have raised the issue of identity and rights to the forefront in social movement, individual experiences and in public policy.

The same is the situation in Assam where the demands for cultural recognition by diverse ethnic groups have received a great deal of attention and have been a living phenomenon in the region. Assam is one of most heterogeneous state in the country with a large member of ethnic groups living in the state and the state government aided and abetted by the central government has been playing divisive politics instead of inclusive politics over the years. A number of autonomous councils have been created on a basis of ethnicity but instead of solving the problems, have gradually given rise to new problems and created more rifts. Even if the government creates more than hundred autonomous councils for all the ethnic groups of the state, the problems would not be solved in so far as the people of one ethnic group do not live together in any particular area in the besetting multicultural state.

The identity structure in Assam is a complex process in which the traditional meanings of 'Asomiya' or 'Assamese' constitute a dominant force in the state. The very word 'Asomiya' has over the years been identified with a particular ruling and dominant economic elite which has inspired the other tribes and ethnic groups as well to mobilize themselves to demand a greater political and economic autonomy so that they can attain the status of a state within the state of Assam.

In the fresh crisis that is engulfing Assam following the Telengana announcement, much angry rhetoric is being spewed. The demands for ST status, separate statehood or greater space, captured both political and media headlines, disrupted life and impact the fabric of the society. The idea of cultural fundamentalism, which is a motivating factor of the socio-cultural arena of the entire India, may not work properly in the North-East, particularly in Assam for the impediment of polyethnicism and reciprocated living hood. Assam is a region where cultural syncretism has been operating in the socio-cultural and linguistic continuum creating new formations both through the process of inclusion and exclusion along with the processes of generic identity formation.

Inspiring the announcement of Telengana, a number of organizations including the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao, Konch-Rajbonshis etc. in Assam have launches mass movement for the creation of separate states, demanding for a constitution of a second state Re-organization Commission, referring to North-East that half of the problem is caused by illegal migration. Lands have been grabbed by the illegal migrants and

demography changed by influx. The creation of separate state hood for them would stop the influx, deported the immigration and the natural resources would be at their own disposal, they asserted.

The mounting clamour for separate 'homeland' by the three agitating groups- The Bodos, The Karbis, The Konch-Rajbonshis, in a multi-ethnic entity such as Assam raises the all important question as to how far it is possible to accommodate such extreme demands within the existing set up. Given the complex ethnic diversity of Assam, creating more states on ethnic lines is for from tenable. The complex ethnical diversity of state which is habited by a number of communities is such that acceding to the demands of one groups would effectively negates the right of the others. Parallely, the demand for Scheduled Tribes (ST) status by six ethnic groups including the Konch-Rajbonshis, The Tai-Ahom, The Moran, The Chutiya and The Tea-community raging the political issue in the state. However, the Union Ministry for Tribal Affairs rejecting their demand of ST status as these communities could not meet the required criteria for Scheduled Tribes, i.e., the primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact, backwardness etc. This is a complicated situation but has to be seen in the light of the fact that the socio-economic condition of a community in a state may differ from those of their counterparts in another state due to factors rooted in history and the local socio-economic situation.

The politics of Balkanizing Assam is the result of the divisive policy of Delhi taking advantage of a weak federation. The central government consumes its overwhelming power, undermining the dismembering Assam and also without calculating the financial resources of these carved out states in running their own administrations. These carved out states are not financially viable and instead become entirely dependent on central funds. These states are simply draining out India's economic growth out strength. The mindless exercises is dismembering Assam are costing the Indian exchequer dearly.

The haphazard carving out new states out of Assam created bitterness along the boundaries and fuelled separate state movements. The border conflicts of Assam are associated with all the carved out state. Border clashes have flared up violently and many lives have been lost in the last five decades of the divisions. The carved out states are again facing their own

armed insurgency or separate state movement. It clears now that the division of Assam did not reduce the conflict.

Findings and Discussion of result:

Are the smaller states suitable for better governance, gaining more investments or better utilization of its resources at own disposal? The prevailing unstable conditions in Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh which were carved out from UP, Bihar and MP in 2000 have experienced this beyond doubt. The demands for separate states should be addressed by taking all the ethnic groups and tribes as well, and minorities inhabiting the affected areas into confidence without further division of Assam. The state should be empowered with a true federalism to solve its own internal problems. The key to lasting peace and development in a multi-ethnic region lies in evolving a truly federal structure of governance that can accommodate the interest of all and none feels any sense of alienation. The government of Assam should instead make sincere effort to address the legitimate grievances of the agitating groups through grant of more autonomy and decentralization of power.

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