



Tribal Politics Of Assam: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract:

The tribal politics has a special impact on the politics of Assam. The tribes have sometimes demanded a separate state within the boundaries of India. Some tribal youths have supported terrorism and others have taken the path peaceful non-violent agitation and some have demanded autonomy. among other tribes and ethnic groups of the plains, the Mising, Tiwa, Rabha etc. initiated a political struggle to preserve their socio-cultural identity. The above tribal groups continue to struggle against the non-tribal for a separate political platform and constitutional status. Already the Bodo formed autonomous council under the provision of Sixth schedule of India constitution. Others plains tribes like Mising, Tiwa, Rabha, Sonowal also formed autonomous council without sixth scheduled. They still demanding sixth schedule. The British colonial rules were responsible for the development of such type of tribal politics of Assam.

Keywords: Tribal, Sixth Schedule, Autonomy, Ethnic groups, Non-tribal.

Introduction:

North East India includes Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya isolated and located some distance from the mainland of India. The North East is geographically and politically more important than any other state of India. This is because the region connects borders with various foreign countries such as China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. This entire region is a composite region of various ethnic groups with their own socio-cultural Identity.

Assam is a land of various indigenous communities and tribes. These groups are rich in their own languages and cultures. A part of these communities is the tribal people. The indigenous tribes of Assam are constitutionally classified in two categories- Scheduled Tribes (Hills) and Scheduled Tribes (Plains). Hill tribes are Bodo- Kachari, Karbi, Dimasa, Kuki, Hmar and various Naga tribes. Major plain tribes are Bodo, Mising, Deori, Rabha, Sonowal-Kachari, Tiwa etc. According to 2011 Census the total population of Assam is 31205576 and out of them 3884371 people are Scheduled tribe which is 12.44% of the total population of Assam. According to Census 2011, the population of the scheduled tribe of Assam is shown below:

Sl.no	Name of scheduled tribes	% of total ST population
1	Bodos	35.05
2	Mising(Miri)	17.51
3	Mikir(Karbi)	11.08
4	Rabha	7.62
5	Sonowal Kachari	6.52
6	Lalung(Tiwa)	4.70
7	Dimasa	2.65
8	Deori	1.12
9	Others STs	13.75
Total Scheduled Tribes		100%

Objectives:

1. To find out the historical causes of tribal politics of Assam.
2. To find out the factors of autonomy demand by the tribes of Assam.
3. To find out the factors of tribal politics of Assam after Independence.

Methodology:

Basically this paper is descriptive and analytical based on the secondary sources of data. The major sources are the printed books, journals, newspapers' articles, magazines and some web materials available in Google web pages.

Tribal and Non-Tribal Politics in the time of British Rule:

Prior to British rule, this North East Region was independent sovereign region in various small areas and some areas were ruled by local people. During the British rule, the entire region was brought under a single administrative group and after independence the region was known as Assam. From 1980s the process of state re-structuring began in the North East. This resulted in the separation of Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1972), Arunachal Pradesh (1972), Mizoram (1972) into various state and union territories. The hill tribes began to settle in the newly formed hill states and union territories with their own traditions, culture and social systems and demanded complete separation from the leadership of indivisible plains of Assam. It is noteworthy that the hill states were created with the intention of fulfilling their socio-political aspirations. The hill tribes suffered terrible from insecurity in greater Assam. In fact, they were not happy with the leadership of the plains during the British rule. After independence the exploitation and betrayal bed by the plains hurts the minds of the hill tribes and this resulted in the creation of the hill states and union territories. These hill states separated but the some inferiority complex and mental anxiety still prevails in the minds of some as a result of which anti-Assam and its adjacent hill states continue today.

Already we mentioned that in the time of British rule, all the hill states of the North East were united under a single administrative system called Assam. For example in 1938, the British annexed the Khasi and Jaintia Hills to Assam. Similarly, the Garo hills in 1871, the Naga Hills and Lusai Hills (Mizoram) in 1890, and 'NEFA' (Arunachal Pradesh) were annexed to Assam.

According to ethnic theory, the hill tribes are Tibetan and Mongolian groups. Before the British rule they never wanted to be subordinate to any central power. They lived separately from the plains and were governed by their own language, culture and various Socio-political Institutions. Although the hilly areas were annexed to Assam by the British, they were not attached to administrative system of Assam and they followed the traditional system of governance. Until 1937, the hill areas were excluded from various constitution reforms. According to the government of India act, 1935, they were divided into two administrative divisions. One is a partially excluded area and other is a completely excluded area. The Garo hills district, Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Mikir Hills were partially excluded areas. These areas could send representatives to the assembly and were under the control of the Governor. The Naga Hills and Mizo Hills are excluded areas under the direct control of Governor. Therefore under British rules, the hill tribes had very little opportunity to maintain relation with the people of the plains.

Non-tribal was prohibited from entering the excluded areas without special consent; such obstacles deceived the hill tribes from the plains and left them economically backward. The lack of smooth relations with the plains created a huge gap between the hill tribes and the people of plains. In fact, the hill tribes became isolated from the socio-cultural tribe of the plains and from the mainstream of Assam due to their social cultural and political differences from the people of the plains. It may be a policy of not harassing the hill tribes.

The British had contributed significantly to the disruption relations between the hill tribes and the people of the plains. The hill leaders suspected that the post Independence leadership would exploit them father after Independence. Therefore the sub-committee constituted by the constituent Assembly

of India on the North East stated that “If a statutory measure is not taken against the people of plains there will be conflict between hills and plains. Such doubts and concerns were the cause of anti-Assam attitudes in the minds of some hills tribal people. So that after independence a group of hill tribes protested before the state Reconstruction commission that the Assamese as the single majority in this entire North East society not only dominate the administration, but also tend to impose Assamese language on non-Assamese. Hill tribes are never force to adopt the language and religion of the plains.

The British incited the hill tribes against the Indian independence movement. As for example during World War -II the border mountains regions of Burma and Assam were declared as crown colonies to separate the hills tribes from the plains. The British regime increased the level of exploitation by emphasizing the separation of the mountains and plains in order to further strengthen their imperialism. Such repressive policies of British deteriorated good relations between the people of the hills and plains and showed the seed of suspicion and conflicts between tribes and non-tribes of North Eastern states of India.

Post Independence Tribal Politics in Assam:

The British colonial rules were responsible for the separation of the hill states from Greater Assam. Under the influence of Christianity and western education many hill tribes stood up against the plains and non-tribes. They initiated a tribal struggle and as a result the sixth schedule was included in the constitution of India. In 1960, Assam Government announced the state official language bill and adopted Assamese as the official language. The tribal like Khasi, Garo, Naga, Mikir, Monipuri etc. opposed the bill and expressed their interest to secede from Assam. The tribal of plains of Assam such as Boro, Karbi, Mising, Tiwa and Deori have also promised to maintain their own language and culture. As a result of various ethnic conflicts, tribal and non-tribal conflicts have begun and impact the social and political atmosphere of Assam.

After the separation of the hill states the tribes of the plains began to demand separate autonomous state within Assam. The Bodos are organised with their own language and culture and continue to fight for a separate Bodo State in 1967 plains tribes’ council of Assam sent a memorandum to the president of India demanding full independence for the plains tribal areas.

In the time of declaration of Assamese language as the medium of education in 1972, the plain tribal council of Assam connected a massive protest against the Assamese language as medium of education. The all Bodo students Union (ABSU) and Plain tribal Council of Assam have demanded English as the medium of education Instead of Assamese. Later, Bodos, formed the United Tribal National Liberation Force Struggle (UTNLF) and the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF). Similarly, among other tribes and ethnic groups of the plains, the Mising, Tiwa, Rabha etc. initiated a political struggle to preserve their socio-cultural Identity. The above tribal groups continue to struggle against the non-tribal for a separate political platform and constitutional status. Already the Bodos formed Autonomous Council under the provision of Sixth schedule of India constitution. Others plains tribes like Mising, Tiwa, Rabha, Sonowal also formed Autonomous Council without sixth scheduled. They still demanding sixth schedule.

Conclusion :

From the above discussion it is clear that the struggle of the hill or plain tribes for political advantages has contributed to the creation of a violent, fratricidal and bloody environment in the North East. Entire North East region is disadvantage region of India. The people of North East are facing economic problems especially non-industrialisation, limited production, floods landslides, erosion etc. Tribal and non-tribal political struggle in the name of language, culture, self-determination of different ethnic groups have complicated the restoration of peace and disrupting the development of this region.

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