The Clarion
International Multidisciplinary Journal

Ethnic movement in North-East India and its affect in human security of the region.

Violet Hazarika

Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, Guwahati, India

Abstract

India, more particularly the North-East India is a land of various ethnic and tribal groups. It has described as the cultural mosaic of diverse tribal communities, linguistics and ethnic identities. This very sensitive region has been in much debate prior to independence. It's because of the ethnicity and extremism prevailed in this particular region. When we are talking about the increasing frequency of the ethnic movement in the region we see a gradual deepening of insurgency and identity questions on the part of the diverse ethnic groups inhabited here. The State's response to the entire issue, in most of the times, the civil society organizations objected that, has converted a number of democratic movements into insurgency which results in political violence in the region. This eventually led a deficiency syndrome on the part of the state. The bigger question is that whether the state is really deficient or is working with a hidden agenda with resource exploitation is the top priority of the regime and people are not even the last component of the agenda. In most of the times the root of the ethnic identity movement could be traced to the colonial period, where the concept of Excluded area and partially Excluded Areas comes with the Act of 1935. The continuous wide spreading of these ethnic movements in the region raise the question of Human Security dimensions like food, education, cloth, shelter etc.

This paper broadly tries to overlook the issue of ethnic movement and the eventual question of Human Security and ongoing military operations in NE India.

Keywords: ethnic movement, insurgency, excluded area, partially excluded area, human security, military operation

1. Introduction

The NE India is not only a geographical location, besides the concept of NE India is closely associated with that of a distinct and diverse rich cultural mosaic to that of the mainland India. The NE India constitute about 8% of India's size, its population is approximately 40 million (2011 census) and linked with the mainland India with a chicken neck connection with 21 to 40 km.

But it's very unfortunate not only for this region but for the nation that the unique feature of ethnicity in North-East resulted in a dense and continuous ethnic movement or assertion on the part of the ethnic groups. Gradually ethnicity and extremism is became closely linked. The root of ethnic assertion can be found in the identity crisis of various tribal communities who extend over the territorial boundaries drawn by the Indian nation state. Most of the ethnic assertions are due to the ethnic group's desperate attempts to protect their identity, culture and language ,which thrown up several major issues that have resulted in the redrawing of the parameter of the Indian Nation State in several times and eventually redefine the idea of nationalism itself .

"All the people living in Assam should be Assamese and homogenized"– such type of mentality is still prevailed in the psyche of middle class, mainland Assamese people. On the basis of this type of mentality a process of homogenization was encouraged immediately after the independence, which include that all the people living here should know and speak Assamese, wearing Assamese attire etc. But to be truthful, the process of trying to bring all the ethnic

groups culturally and linguistically under the umbrella of Assamese language and culture was a historically wrong decision.

2. Methodology

In our study the method will be content analysis. Our research would adopt content analysis as the main for analyzing the ethnic movements in NE India. The content analysis is the method of social research that aims at the analysis of the content-qualitative or quantitative of documents, books, news paper, magazine and other form of written materials. According to Gardner, content analysis is a technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identified characteristics of messages. (Ahuja, 2001)

The content analysis signifies these major areas–

2.1   Objectivity and systematization

2.2   Generality and quantification

3. Analysis

3.1 The legacy of the colonial administration

If we look into the core of the problem of emerging ethnic movement in NE India, we found that the psyche which tended to seek different social, political and economic arrangement for the tribal people from that of the plain people, spread the seed of it, i.e. the concept of ethnicity. But if we look back to the history of NE, we found that the root of ethnicity and the feelings of difference were brought by the colonial rulers themselves. It should be mention here that the undivided Assam was first colonized by the British by the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. They started the process of separatism among the tribal people with that of the plain people both politically and mentally by introducing the concept of Plain tribes and the Hill tribes. In most of the times we say that they adopted the policy of 'divide and rule' by the means of various Acts and Laws enacted by them. In this context we can trace the name of various such Acts and laws, which are as follows–

3.1.1 Inner line regulation, 1873

This Act was passed in 1st November, 1873, in then Kamrup, Darrang, Nagaon, Sibsagor, Garu Hills, khasi and Jayantia Hills, Naga Hills, Kachar and Chitagarh Hills. (Nath , 2013)

Basically British officers and the people they permitted can get the license to cross the Inner Line. The plain people are restricted to enter into the hills without taking due permission of the District authorities.

The idea of *Inner Line* was to protect the tribal people from economic and political exploitation and cultural dilution.

3.1.2 The schedule district act, 1874

In 1874, the British Government enacted the Schedule District Act after the formation of Assam Province under the Chief Commissioner.

In the very beginning, it was declared that the Act would be applicable for the whole India. In November 1877, the undivided Assam province was created as a Schedule District, where Luchai Hills, Dimagiri, Chitagarh were incorporated from Assam province. (Nath, 2013)

3.1.3 Backward tract area

According to the 'Government of India Act, 1919' the Governor General-in-Council can declare any area of British India as the 'Backward Tract', where the laws passed by the Indian government would not be applicable. Actually, the areas which were declared as the 'Frontier Tract' by the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation, 1880, came to known as the Backward Tract. The Frontier Tracts which later on came to known as the Backward Tract are as follows_ Garu Hills, Khasi and Jayantia Hills(excluding Shillong), Mikir Hills, North Kachar Hills, Naga Hills, Luchai Hills, Sadia Frontier, Balipara Frontier, Lakhimpur Frontier.(Nath, 2013)

3.1.4 Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas Act, 1935

In 1930, the British government formed the 'Indian Statutory Commission1930' to review the execution of law in India. The commission held the view that the respective Governors also should be a part of the administration of the Backward Tracts along with the missionaries and the officials. On the basis of the recommendation of the commission

The Government of India Act, 1935 set the provision for the Backward Tract as the Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas. According to the Article 51(1)(e) of the Act, there are special responsibilities of the Governor in the administration of the Partially Excluded areas, where he can apply the power of individual judgment.

According to the Government of India Act, 1935 the people inhabited in the partially Excluded Areas were given the voting rights. Likewise, people in the Brahmaputra Valley introduced themselves as Plain Tribes and the Act eventually set the provision for the reservation of four seats for them in the Legislative Assembly. These principles isolated the hill people from that of the plains and remained educationally and

economically backward.

    The areas which are notified under 'the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Area) Order, 1936, are as follows–

Table No 1: excluded and partially excluded areas as declared by the colonial ruler

Excluded areas	Partially Excluded areas
Naga Hills Districts	Garu Hills Districts
Luchai Hills Districts	Mikir Hills in Nagaon and Sibsagor District
North Kachar Hill sub-division of Kachar Districts	The British portion of Khasi and Jayantia Hills District other than Shillong municipality and cantonment areas
North East Frontier (Sadia, Balipara, Lakhimpur District)	

Source: Dutta Akhil Ranjan, Politics in India issues, institutions, processes, (1st edtn, 2013)

4.   The responds of the independent State to the question of ethnicity

After independence, as a means to strengthen the Nation building process, the policies of homogenization and assimilation designed by the post colonial state to integrate different ethnic groups within the fold of Assamese nationalism opened the door for ethnic movement and cultural reconstruction in the region. Moreover, owing to the ill-planned economic policies, there is evident regional imbalance and backwardness in all sphere of life in NE region. Poverty, lack of employment opportunities and aimless political process has resulted in gross dissatisfaction among the population. Eventually as a results of all these above said, ethnicity has been growing rapidly in NE Region , and it has brought together the marginally differentiated ethnic groups as a strong united force, which continuously having frequent conflicts with the local as well as central government on various issues of ethnic identity and independence. Thus a process of alienation started on the part of the tribal people and the process took the shape of a continuous political agenda in the post-independence India, in fact the question of ethnic identity deepening day by day.

It can be mention here that, immediately after independence of India the Naga's declared their independence as they felt that mainland India did not understand their unique identity and culture. It was the Nagas who declared total boycott and a hostile war against the newly independent Indian nation. Though they did not successful in getting a sovereign state, Nagaland was declared as a new state within the fold of Indian Nation, which eventually paved the way for the demand of separate statehood on the basis of the ethnicity or community. Within a very few years, various other tribes demanded a separate homeland as their basic rights and the state of Mizoram, Meghalaya were the successful example of it. But, these types of demands are still going on, where we can cite the demand of the Bodoland by the Bodo community, Kamatapur by the Koch Rajbangsi etc. To deal with the feeling of discrimination and the issue of ethnicity, the Constitution of India is coming with a special provision in the form of **Sixth Schedule** (Article 244(2) and 275(1)) (Basu, 2005) for the administration of the tribal areas of NE India, which is also known as the **'constitution within the constitution'**. The philosophy behind the six schedule of the Constitution is to preserve the democratic tradition, cultural diversity of North-East and deals with the unique problems of tribes of NE India by constitutionally mandating a special kind of autonomous governance structure. These autonomous structures of governance are entrusted with the twin task of protecting tribal tradition, culture and customs and at the same time, undertaking development plans for them. At present there are a number of communities who are demanding ST status for them and demanding six schedule declarations. But this mechanism of Sixth Schedule proved itself insufficient to deal with the rising issue of ethnicity in the region and the process of getting divided on the line of ethnicity did not stop. The aspiration for a distinct identity among the distinct groups resulted in a number of movements demanding

autonomy. As a result, at present there are **10 autonomous councils** in the state of **Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura** of NE India (Dutta, 2013). If we look back to a few decades back we see that most of these ethnic groups had come together during the Assam movement (1979-85) But it's very unfortunate that the Assam Accord (1985) mentions only the mainland Assamese, which resulted in the alienation of the various other groups, inhabited here. Gradually they developed a desire to be separated and hence have come with a struggle for a separate identity.

5. Increasing ethnic assertions and the question of human security in NE India

When we say about the concept of Human security, it's basically a new concept. Its talks about an emerging paradigm for understanding global vulnerabilities whose proponents challenge the traditional notion of national security by arguing that the proper referent for security should be the individual rather than the state. Thus the concept of Human security holds a people-centric, multi-disciplinary understanding of security involving a number of research fields. It incorporated 7 types of securities, (Baylis john Smith Steve Owens Patrica, 2011) as mentioned by the United Nation, which are as follows-

  ➢ Economic security
  ➢ Educational security
  ➢ Personal security
  ➢ Environmental security
  ➢ Community security
  ➢ Food security
  ➢ Political security

But if we look into the matter of Human Security in NE India we see a very pathetic condition as in most of the times the people of this region have to live under fear and below standard of life. The fear is undoubtedly because of the act of insurgency prevailed in the region as well as the military operations. Though the military personals are meant for security of the people, it's very unfortunate in this region that the military persons create a fear psychosis in the psyche of the people. At the same, the weapons like continuous protest, riots, bombing, kidnapping etc are becoming the way of life in the region. These affect not only the political life of the people but the economic, social, educational, environmental, personal and community life as well. To be truthful, none of the above mentioned criteria of Human security as said by the United Nation is fulfilled in the NE region. In most of the cases, we felt the value of life is decreasing day by day. Though the concept of Human Security talks about the people centric security as well as development, but in this region the people are not even the least component of security and development agenda set and fulfilled by the central as well as state government. After 67 years of India's independence no such remarkable development is happening in the entire North-East. Economy is not growing as per the aspiration. Till today, no such remarkable local based industry is developed in the region and at the same time the foreign as well as the national level investors are not interested and encouraged to invest here. One of the major reason of these is that the act of insurgency operating here both by the state and non state actors. The poor economy eventually affected the education as well as social life of the people. That's why despite having the rich natural and human resources the entire North-East have to live under the line of poverty and backwardness and far lagging behind in the developmental programmes. In this regard the strong and proactive role of the Central as well as State government is mostly required. But the civil society organizations and the nationalist organizations strongly protest that the Central government doesn't even pay a necessary attention to the NE, but their main agenda is the drainage of wealth from here as the entire NE region is known for its rich natural recourses.

In other words ,we can say here that the increasing dimensions of ethnic movement and insurgency is a root cause of two steps of backwardness and underdevelopment, which eventually leads to the violation of Human security in NE region.

6. Conclusion

In the entire North-East, we have ethnic emotions, tensions and problems. North –East has become an ethnic conflict or ethnic movement porn area since the last few decades due to the out breakings of all these above said. But we can't claim that the declaration of the ST status or incorporation in the Six Schedule could be the sole solution of the problem. In fact we can say in other words that the introduction of the Sixth Schedule directly or indirectly deepening the issue of ethnic identity in the entire North -East.

On the contrary, most of the problems of North-East are not different to plain people and tribal people, but common to all. Here we can say about the rising problem like unemployment, insurgency, poverty, flood, landlessness, homelessness, witch-hunting, lack

of communication, not enough supply of power etc which are common to all. All these above mentioned act as a back force to the development and upliftment of this region and as a result the enjoyment of Human Security in NE is in a mere dream. People are still far legging behind from the basic of Human Security. So we, all the people living in the NE should come forward in the only aim to make a developed, prosperous homeland for us, as we all know that unity is the ultimate power.

References

Ahuja Ram, Social Problem in India 2014, 3rd edtn : Rawat publication, New Delhi

Ahuja Ram, Research Methods 2001 : Rawat Publication, Jaipur

Basu D D, 2005 : Introduction to The Constitution of India, 19th edtn reprint, Wadha and Company Law Publisher, New Delhi

Baylis john Smith Steve Owens Patrica, The Globalization of World Politics, 5th edtn, 2011, Oxford University Press

Bhadra R K & Bhadra Mitra, Ethnicity, Movement and Social Structure (contested cultural identities) 2007, Rawat publication, New Delhi

Bhattacharya Gauri Sankar, Pakistan Aru Atmoniyantron, May 1995, IMPRINT, Guwahati, Assam

Choudhury Arupjyuti & Gogoi Dilip, Marginal Frontier select essays on North-East India, 2012, Bhabani offset pvt ltd, Guwahati

Constituent Assembly Debates, Vol 1X p. 1011

Dutta Akhil Ranjan, Politics in India issues, institutions, processes, 1st edtn, 2013, Arun Prakashan, Guwahati, Assam

Gait Sir Edward Albert, A History of Assam, Bhabani Books Edition, 2013, Guwahati, Assam

Guha Amalendu, Medieval and Early Colonial Assam Society, polity, economy, Anwesha Edition, 2015, Guwahati, Assam

Hussain Manirul, The Assam Movement 1993, Manak publication, New Delhi

Johari, J. C., Indian Political System 2000, Anmol Publication pvt ltd, New Delhi

Misra Udayan, India's North-East: Identity Movement, State and Civil Society, oxford University Press

Nath Manuj kumar, Asomor Jonojati Rajniti 2013, aalibat publication, Guwahati

Sarmah, Chandan Kr., 2012, 'The State and the Ethnicisation of Space in Northeast India' in Nani Gopal Mahanta & Dilip Gogoi, eds., Shifting Terrain: Conflict Dynamics in North East India DVS publishers, Guwahati

Talukdar Nanda, Assam & the 19th century, 1st edtn, 2012, Nanda Talukdar Foundation, Guwahati, Assam

❑ ❑ ❑