

Youth Culture in the Contemporary Society: A Study on 1979-90, Crisis of Assamese Culture and Identity

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ABSTRACT: Youth culture grows in the society depending on some social situations. These situations arise out of crisis. Discussing the crisis would be an extremely difficult task. Youth culture crisis may be anything in any walk of life. The term social crisis, has to be understood in a definite way in relation to a particular aspect of life. Some may think social crisis as financial crisis, some may mean identity crisis, illegal migration and so on. The scope of the subject therefore requires to be narrowed down so that crisis may be discussed in relation to youth culture with a perspective. The Youth crisis in which we find ourselves is economic, political, cultural, and psychological. In 1979, ULFA, an insurgent outfit formed with the aim to make a sovereign state of Assam and protect the Assamese culture and identity through armed rebellion. ABSU started Bodoland movement to protect culture and identity of Bodos. BLT and NDFB turned it violent.

KEY WORDS: Culture, Crisis, Identity, ULFA, Bodo Movement, Perspective, ABSU, NDFB

Date of Submission: 26-02-2019

Date of acceptance: 20-03-2019

I. INTRODUCTION:

The cultural chasm between the people of North-eastern India and those of the 'main land' is so deep and the leap through time that they have to take to catch-up with the national cultural mainstream so great, that this region is unlikely to be psychologically integrated with India for some time to come. (Hazarika S 1997).

Culture is defined as customs and civilizations of a particular time or people. It is a way of life of a group of people- the behaviours beliefs, values and symbols. Culture is transmitted from one group of people to another through language, material objects, rituals, institutions and art. It is also carried from one generation to the next generation. Youth Culture is the way adolescents live and the norms, values and practices they share. Elements of youth culture include beliefs, behaviours, styles and interests.

Assam is a state full of diversities. Like India Assam is a multi-racial and multi-lingual state. Even the Assamese as a community is a conglomeration of different tribes, castes, religious groups and people speaking different languages and dialects. It is the home of the great warrior community, the Ahoms, who ruled the state for six hundred years and defeated Mughals seventeen times when the latter attacked Assam to expand their kingdom. The warrior Koch Rajbongshis, whose kingdom extended from North Bengal to Lakhimpur District of North Assam, the Bodos, the Dimasas, Karbis, Chutias, Morans, Motoks, Lalungs, Mising Tribes, Sonowal Kacharis, Thengals, Tea tribes viz Oraons, Santhals, Mundas, etc. Deuries, Tai Fake, Kukis, Hmars, Rabhas, Garos, Nagas etc. form the Assamese community. All these tribes, non-tribes including the upper-caste people are the integral part of the greater Assamese community. All these tribes and non-tribal communities have their own historical background and own ethnic identity.

Assamese as a whole is a peace loving community. Till 1979, the beginning of the Assam agitation against illegal immigrants from Bangladesh, Assam was a peaceful state. The situation changed only after unabated migration from Bangladesh to Assam came to light during the election to the Mangaoldoi Lok Sabha Constituency in April 1979 necessitated by the sudden demise of the sitting MP Hiralal Patwary. During the preparation of the electoral rolls it was noticed that there was a sudden massive increase of electorate in the constituency. This exposed the magnitude of the problem. The media grabbed the opportunity and published news and statistical data over the massive influx of illegal settlers. When the rolls were revised it was reportedly discovered that 45,000 voters which was one sixth of the total electorate were not Indian citizens. The apprehension of inclusion of such illegal migrants in other parliamentary and legislative assembly constituencies led out the public outcry. The youth leadership of All Assam Students Union and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad a conglomeration of several nationalist organisations spearheaded the anti foreigners movement demanding deletion of names of the foreigners from the electoral rolls as well as their deportation from India.

Assam remained a land frontier attracting large-scale immigration through much of the twentieth century. "Assam has been the fastest growing area in the subcontinent for the past seventy years", wrote Myron

Weiner in 1978. Indeed, Weiner, who was looking at Assam as a possible case study of migrant local conflicts in India, soon discovered that it was a rather extreme and atypical case. He concluded that one cannot make many generalizations from such an extreme case; for Assam “ has had and even now, continues to have the highest in-migration rate of any state of India” (Barua S; 1999: India against itself).

There was unabated influx from Bangladesh to Assam. The people had the impression that neither the Central Government nor the State Government of Assam was doing enough to stop the infiltration of immigrants from Bangladesh. It was also an impression among the local people that the Political parties were using the illegal Bangladeshi migrants as vote banks. The indigenous people had the apprehension of being outnumbered and being minority in their own state. There was also an anticipation that the illegal migrants would take over political power from the indigenous people of the state with the help of their fast growing population. In that case there was the possibility of overpowering the culture and tradition of the indigenous people by that of the Bangladeshi immigrants. This was considered as a direct attack on the culture and identity of Assam and the Assamese. The All Assam Students Union leadership and other agitating groups realized that the respective governments at the centre and the state as well as some political parties were not concerned with the issue of infiltration from Bangladesh which in the long run was going to destroy the culture, language and future of the indigenous people of Assam. Moreover, it was felt that the governments at the Centre as well as at the state did not give proper response to the non-violent agitations. According to the intellectuals also, the Assamese identity was in crisis. Then how to handle this? The impression among a section of the population of the state, especially the young generation, was that, that the Government was not taking adequate measure to handle this crisis. People felt that they were pushed to the wall. In this situation people tend to attack the source of crisis. By any means people want to protect their culture

Youth culture grows in the society according to certain social situations. These situations arise out of crisis. In the above situation the Assamese culture was facing crisis and the existence of the community was under threat. A section of the youths tended to react to this situation violently and the result was for everybody to see.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

1. To study the concept of ULFA Insurgency.
2. To study the historical perspective of Bodo Insurgency.
3. To study the history of beginning of unrest in Assam.

III. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

In this study the investigator used different materials collected from books related to the topic of the study and articles published in journals.

IV. ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY:

4.1 Analysis of objective one: Concept of ULFA Insurgency:

Insurgency is a state of the society or a part there of rising up against the established authority or government in power with a motive-may be political-properly organised armed with even deadly sophisticated weapon open in nature (Sarma, K.1997).

Disillusioned with the so called central government’s apathy and neglect towards Assam and North East, a group of youths formed a militant outfit under name and style “ United Liberation front of Asom” or ULFA at the site of the Ahom era Pavilion” Rangghar’ in Sivasagar District on 7th April 1979. The formation of ULFA coincided with the beginning of the anti foreigner’s movement in Assam. Therefore it can be easily understood that ULFA was an offshoot of the foreigner’s movement in Assam. After ULFA came into being, the situation of Assam changed abruptly.

“There is no denying the fact that insurgency erupted in Assam and that the people were carried away by the secessionist propaganda. On analysis, I find this happened largely because of a feeling of popular neglect and discrimination and not because of ethnic, culture or historical differences. This is the critical difference between the insurgency in Assam and the other insurgencies in (the Hill) tribal areas.” (Sinha ,S.K. 2005) .

The faith in economic development contracts sharply with the vision of insurgent groups in the North East. While those who try to solve the insurgency problem mainly talk about economic development and modernization, the insurgents hark back to history. Thus ULFA speaks of Assam’s lost independence when the Yandaboo Treaty was signed between the British and the Burmese Kings in 1826, Manipuri rebels raise questions about the constitutionality of merger agreement of 1949, and Naga rebels query how these long stretches of frontiers which were neither Burmese nor Indian territories could simply disappear into India and Burma after 1947 (Baruah, S. 2005).

This is also true that the militant groups, Civil Society, Political leaders in North East States complain about economic under-development and lack of industrialization, but their primary grievance is rooted to history of how the Indian post British era constitutional order came into existence.

4.2 Analysis of objective two: Historical Prospective of Bodo Insurgency:

The Bodos are an ethnic group of people belonging to the great mongoloid stock. They are often known as kacharis – particularly among the non-Bodos. The Bodo is a word genus of large number of species-like the Boros, the Boro Kacharis, the Dewris, the Rabhas, the Tiwas, the Misings, the Mechas, the Dimasas, the Hojais, the Karbies and the Barmans of Cachar. But now Bodos generally include the Bodos, the Bodo Kacharis and the Mechas (Sarma, K. 1997).

The Bodos are the original inhabitants of Assam. They are the sons of the soil. They have a glorious history of their own. They are very proud of their culture and distinct nationality. They claim to be the origin of the Dimasas, Sonowal Kacharies, Tengal and Mech Kacharis. They have very strong ethnic feeling. The self realisation of their nationality originally started at the initiative of the Tribal Sangha which was formed during the early part of fifties. The sangha was able to unite the educated Bodo youths and old alike to one common platform. In the early part of sixties certain educated Bodo literati from the community established Bodo Sahitya Sabha. This sabha played a very important role in uniting all the Bodo people of Assam and upgrading their Bodo Language to a proper language. It also spreaded a tempo of literacy, linguistic and cultural resurgence among the community.

In 1948 Gopinath Bordoloi who was the first chief minister of Assam in Independent India chaired a special Constitutional Subcommittee that developed policies towards the tribes of the North-east. The Subcommittee was mandated by the constituent assembly. In that Subcommittee Gopinath Bordoloi and his colleagues described the plains tribes as a part of the greater Assamese society and that with time they would be assimilated with the dominant community. The Bodos were annoyed with such decisions and they found themselves without any special privileges or even protection of their culture and identity. The Bordoloi Committee opined that the Bodos did not need special protection because they were part of the larger Assamese identity. It was a mistake on the part of Gopinath Bordoloi. Own Culture and own ethnic identity is very much dearer to each community and very close to their hearts.

The infiltration of suspected Bangladesh national pre and post Indo Pak war in 1971 to lower Assam Districts like Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Kokrajhar and encroachments in the forest land and tribal belts and blocks posed serious threat to the ethnic culture and identity of the Bodos. The Government did not take any concrete steps to evict these suspected immigrants from the belts and blocks reserved for the tribal population.

Another problem of the Bodos was from the non- Bodo Assamese businessmen from Barpeta and Nalbari Districts who reportedly exploited the poor and innocent people and grabbed their agricultural land. The Bodo Organisations held these Assamese non-Bodo businessmen responsible for the pitiful plight of the Bodo villagers in areas like Udalguri of the then Darrang District , erstwhile Barpeta District etc.

The encroachments by the immigrant Muslims and by the non-Bodo businessmen were seen as direct encroachment upon their identity and culture. The Bodo Organisations like Bodo Sahitya Sabha, ABSU have been demanding their cultural rights and protection of language.

Among the cultural and language demands are the implementation of Bodo as associate official language in Bodo areas, introduction of Roman Script for Bodo, the teaching of Bodo in schools and Universities, government support for Cultural projects such as Bodo film making, the establishment of a museum and television stations focussed on Bodo programming, expansion of Bodo programmes on existing State-owned radio and television networks, and the abolition of the language requirements of Assamese for State governments employment.

Bodos felt frustrated when their concerns were not addressed. There is a popular feeling that the Governments tend to ignore peaceful agitations. Then the agitators or groups agitating react violently. The sound of gun or a bomb is much louder than the voice of a human being. Right from Irish Republican Army in Europe, Palestine Liberation Organisation ,in the Middle East, LTTE in Srilanka and ULFA, NDFB in Assam reacted to Government's apathy violently. The 1990s saw a sudden spurt in the rise of new insurgency outfits in the north-eastern region, and a consequent increase in terrorist violence. Other outfits started emerging on the basis of their putative assumption that they were sidelined or forgotten in different parts of Assam which were peaceful until a sense of alienation and deprivation changed their mind and propelled them to take recourse to violent means towards the realisation of their objectives. Most of these belong to marginalised and tribal communities, who had been peaceful all through and never showed any sign of discontent with the Indian State. Some outfits also emerged in areas where assertive democratic movements were active. For example, the failure of six-year long anti foreign national movement in Assam led to the crystallisation of the United Liberation Front of Asom(ULFA), though organised in 1979, its presence was beginning to be felt only in 1990s. The Indian Army sources reported that it was the NSCN (IM) which strengthened the ULFA by supplying arms and providing training to it. Similarly, the Bodos and the Karbis were in the thick of a peaceful democratic

movement demanding separate states for themselves. The rejection of their demands caused discontentment among the two tribes. But the movement became violent as underground wings emerged, which resorted to terrorist methods to attract the attention of the government (Nag, S. 2002).

4.3. Analysis of objective three: History of Beginning of Unrest in Assam:

During the anti-foreigner's movement in Assam, the Bodo students also participated in the movement, under the leadership of All Assam Students Union. But in the later stage of the movement an ideological rift cropped up between the AASU central leadership and some Bodo student leaders in the Gauhati University Campus. Most of the Bodo students came out of AASU and joined All Bodo Student Union (ABSU) under the leadership of Upendra Brahma. Prior to the Bodo Movement taking a violent turn, Upendra Brahma, the firebrand ABSU leader found himself ignored, cold shouldered by the then AGP leadership when he went to meet them at Guwahati for talks on the grievances of the Bodos. That added insult to injury as he went there to discuss on genuine problems pertaining to the Bodo issue. Then the extremist group of the ABSU formed "Bodo Volunteers force", (BVF) which later in the name of 'Bodo Liberation Tigers' (BLT) took up arms and started engaging in terrorist activities demanding a separate state for the Bodos. It turned itself into a strong anti government force with sufficient weaponry, trained manpower and wealth. It eliminated its political opponents in the political parties- The Plain Tribes Council of Assam and United Tribal National Liberation Force. Therefore, these two political fronts also covertly formed an extremist organisation in the name and style ' Bodo Security Force' in short 'BSF'. It followed ruthless killing of innocent civilians, attack on security force, vehicles, passengers carrying buses, trains, abducted people for ransom and also killing of opponents in the rival groups. On Feb, 10, 1993 Bodo Accord was signed by the representatives of central and state governments and of the ABSU. As a result, the Bodo Autonomous Council was formed. Though initially 2075 and then 112 forests and revenue villages were given to the BAC, the ABSU was not satisfied. They demanded inclusion of another 403 villages which the state government was not willing to concede as the population pattern of those villages was not favourable for inclusion. This accord failed to bring peace in the Bodo inhabited areas of the state. Finally, the Bodoland territorial council was constituted under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India in the year 2003 after signing of memorandum of settlement on 10th February 2003 between the Government of India, the Government of Assam and Bodo Liberation Tigers to fulfil economic, educational and linguistic aspiration and the preservation of land rights, socio- cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos; and to speed up the infrastructure in BTC area.

The BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area Districts) was created consisting of 4 (four) districts viz:Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang. These districts were carved out of seven existing districts of Assam -Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Nalbari, Barpeta, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur. Even after creation BTC, the BSF which was later on renamed as NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodoland) did not come over ground. Though later on in 2004 there was a pact with a fraction of NDFB led by Gobinda Basumatary, secretary of the organisation announced ceasefire of operations with the Government, another fraction is still underground and continuing its terrorist activities.

These two insurgent groups, ULFA and NDFB have established themselves as very ruthless outfits. Both the groups do not obey the Indian Constitution. The NDFB's armed struggle is for a separate Bodoland or a state for the Bodos curving the Bodo inhabited districts of Assam in the north bank. ULFA's armed struggle against the government of India is for a sovereign state. The armed struggle or guerrilla warfare of these two groups brought a lot of changes to the contemporary society in Assam. The state has not remained the same. This was a culture shock for the people of Assam.

Prior to the beginning of these two armed struggles, Assam was a very peaceful state. There was a great sense of unity among different tribes, caste, creed and followers of different religions.. This was because all tribes, non-tribes, tea tribes contributed immensely, in the process of formation of the Assamese community. Though each tribe and community has its own culture, food habits, traditions but finally it was the greater Assamese community that embraced all of them. There is diversity but there is unity also.

V. SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION:

According to Sir Ian Blair, London Metropolitan Police Commissioner, "It is not the Police and the intelligence services who will defeat terrorism; it is communities who defeat terrorism."

Community engagement is a very important tool to deal with terrorism. It is a valuable Concept. Without involvement of the community nowhere in the world the Government has succeeded in solving this problem of terrorism. For successful community engagement-
Law enforcement and officials:

- a. May offer easy way for the community to provide input.
- b. Respect and value all community members.
- c. Are fair and protect human rights

All Cultures should be allowed to grow in peace and tranquillity. No Culture should be suppressed. It is the duty of the civil society, formal structure of the government viz. legislature and executive to promote each and every culture so that people belonging to different culture feel happy and secured and do not feel suffocated and that their identity are under threat. Space should be created for the growth of each and every culture which will help in solving the insurgency problem in Assam.

The future of the nation lies in the hands of the young generation who are going to be the torch bearers of the society and the nation. The youths will have to be properly organized and oriented and every effort shall have to be made to help them change the youth culture with a positive outlook.

Rather than trying to contain insurgencies, India needs to raise its expectations of what is possible. Even the most protracted of armed civil conflicts in the world- Northern Ireland- is today closer to resolution than ever before. Establishing a blue-ribbon committee to examine the accomplishments and failures of the last five decades of India's strategy and tactics of counter-insurgency may be a good place to start from (Barua,S. 2005).

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Nitul Gogoi" Youth Culture in the Contemporary Society: A Study on 1979-90, Crisis of Assamese Culture and Identity" *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention (IJHSSI)*, vol. 08, no. 3, 2019, pp.01-05