CONFLICTUAL RELATION BETWEEN THE TRIBES: A STUDY ON POLITICS OF AUTONOMY IN NORTH-EAST INDIA, ASSAM.

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Abstract:

Assam, one of the state of North-East region has gone through wide autonomous movement. The tribes of both hills & plains of Assam were closely related with the issue. Later on, Assam was divided into different autonomous state namely Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland on the basis of their heterogeneous ethnicity, language, beliefs, identity, caste, tribes etc. It has been alleged that hill-plains or tribal-non-tribal equation in Assam has never been stable (Chaube, 1992:256). Therefore, this paper attempts to emphasize upon the reason behind the population’s demand and the consequences of the demarcation till date in Assam.

Keywords: autonomous movement, tribals and non-tribals, heterogeneous factors,

Introduction:

Initially the region of north east consisted mainly of three states namely, Manipur (princely state), Assam and Tripura(Princely State). Sikkim came under the recognition as a part of north east during 1975 along with other four states i.e., Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. The whole separation process was done after the independence of the nation, even though the region went through hilarious autonomous movement, no prior measures were taken before 1947. Autonomy is believed as a device to allow ethnic or other groups to claim a distinct identity and to exercise direct control over the affairs which are important for the group and which may become a common interest for them. It also means self government and decentralization of power (Ghai, Yash: 2000:8-9). Autonomy in north east can also be understood as a result to preserve ethnicity and indigenous identity. The whole idea of autonomy revolves around the question of identity and the right to possess their own land.

Generally, the demarcation of regions have deep impact on the people along with geographical and political structure. These movements comprises of people from hill tribes & plain tribes, where they themselves carried conflictual relationships within their own tribes which resulted into this movement. The hill tribes of north east were kept isolated from the other plains since, the time of British period through the system of Inner Line Permit which was adopted to maintain the status of the existing conditions and affairs of the states as well as to protect the tribals. The sixth schedule of the constitution of India is the outcome of the tribals agitation and demand for autonomy and the list of those areas are mentioned under the same. Besides, the plain tribes were not an exception to demand for autonomy due to the negligence they faced so as to save their ethnicity and identity.

At the present era it cannot be said that the conflictual relationship is totally solved by demarcation of the hilly areas from Assam, because the tribes of one state still have disputed connection with another state in the region. They are very much conscious to preserve their ethnic interest for which they don’t share any sort of mutual affairs with the neighbouring North Eastern states.
Literature Review:

There are number of volumes of literature available related with the autonomous movements of north-east but following are some of the remarkable articles that I reviewed and the same helped me to work upon.

1. **Dr. Gogoi C (2018):** in the research paper ‘The Voice of The Marginalised: Demand for Autonomy Among The Tribes of North East India, With Special Reference To Assam’ stressed on the background of the north-eastern states and the prevalent reason behind their bifurcation and further analyzed the demands for autonomous states among the hill and plain tribes.

2. **Singha K (2018):** in his article ‘Migration, Ethnicity-based Movements and State’s Response: A Study of Assam’ emphasised on ethnicity-based autonomy movement and provided various reasons as to why state’s involvement failed to suppress these movements.

3. **Dr. Doungel J (2012):** in his article titled ‘ Autonomy Movement And Development Constraints In The Sixth Schedule Area Of North East India’ highlighted about the sixth schedule of the constitution and critically analyzed the role of different councils related with those movements.

4. **Das N.K (2011):** ‘Social Exclusion, Misgovernance And Autonomy Movements In Northeast India’, in this paper he throws light on the issue of misgovernance and adversary policies of administration in northeast and how the human rights and civil society organizations have been active in the region.

5. **Hussain M (1987):** in his journal article ‘Tribal Movement for Autonomous State in Assam’ focused on the demands of the hill people for an autonomous state in Assam that later on led to the separation of various states along with the decline of then political parties.

6. **Mahanta K.C (2017):** in the article ‘Tribal Tradition and the Problem of Identity in Assam’ illustrates the changes in the politico-socio-cultural life of the hill and plain tribes and those people’s concern to preserve their tradition.

Research Methodology and Objectives:

Qualitative and analytical methods are used while doing this paper and the necessary references to the resources have been made from secondary sources.

The objectives of doing this paper are mentioned below:

1. To analyze the reason behind the tribal and non-tribal autonomous movement.
2. To know the impact of the separation in Assam in the present context.

Discussion:

The autonomous movement in Assam is not a result of single element rather it is a broad area of study which can be studied parallel to hill-plains or tribals and non-tribals politics. Some of the factors are social which is related with the indifferent attitude of the upper caste Assamese people towards the tribals, some of them are economic which include the overall backwardness of the tribals, and other factors such as emergence of middle class, emergence of different political organization etc are some of the political factor. All these amalgamated reasons led to the moment. Besides, the whole idea of autonomy revolves around the question of identity and the right to have requisition of land. Initially the movement for autonomy got welcomed among the hill tribes and later on slowly and gradually it got extended among the plain tribes as well. The tribals are regarded as the aborigin of Assam as they are the one who migrated to Assam long back ago almost during the British time period. The areas were inhabited by heterogeneous ethnic tribes which were soon given the recognition of separate administrative arrangement, under the landmark provision of the Schedule District Act, 1874 and the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation, 1880. “The Inner Line Regulation of 1873 and the province was considered as special case in all these regulation as because it was realized most of the province of Assam were covered by hill tribes” (Op. cit. Rao. 1976:46). The Act of 1880 provided the transfer of examining the area of its territory from the state government to the governor which means the provision of providing...
those zones the autonomy. The 1873 Regulation further brought the clear cut demarcation of the states which are originated within the Assam’s territory as an internal boundary. “The demand for separate hill state was first popularized by the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) who demanded for separate hill states for the hill tribes by referring to the earlier colonial arrangement” (Gogoi:2018:385). Later on the demand was seen among the plains in the Brahmaputra valley and subsequently the movement got so intensified that the Government of India and the hill tribes had to accept the exclusion criteria. After independence, it was Gopinath Bordoloi Committee (named after the first Prime Minister of Assam, Gopinath Bordoloi) which came to the fore-front and declared those states and districts as autonomous which were excluded and partially excluded by the British administration. The Autonomous District Councils (ADC) was made in the hill areas of Assam. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India was enacted in 1950 and was drafted especially to provide autonomy for the hill tribes but there were no any provisions for the plains and that is why the plains in the post-independent period demanded for autonomy under this schedule. The Bodos were the first to raise the demand followed by Tiwas, Rabhas, and Mishings etc. Apart from this the Assamese people, particularly the upper caste Hindus look down upon towards the tribals in their day-to-day social relations, so if the Assamese do not think the tribals as the part of Greater Assamese society than what is wrong with the tribals to demand for separate political arrangement or to launch a movement for autonomy.

As mentioned above, the tribals were the ones who demanded autonomy so as to safeguard their ethnicity and identity but this popular wave of moment gradually got spread among the plains of Northern and Eastern Brahmaputra River. The movement in plain areas were carried by various organizations led by Bodos, Deories and Sonowals etc communities with the objective to bring social change and welfare to the community. The ethnic people of Assam before independence had their common political manifesto. The emergence of Plain Tribals League, 1933 was the first effort in this regard and they were considered as the voice of the common plain people and started demanding autonomy for them but unfortunately even after the creation of this league sufficient initiative was not taken and as a result Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), 1967 was formed. “The council demanded for a separate plains’ tribal land named as- Udayachal, which they demanded to be recognised as a separate Union Territory” (Chandan, 2000:10-11). But the council was again seen as a failure in this area as it used to focus mainly to the issues of Bodo people as maximum number of leaders were from Bodo community itself thus creating tension among all other sections of the society. “Therefore the demands for autonomy in the latter phases for the plain tribes transcend cooperative feelings of identity and enter into a phase of separate and distinct process of assertion, important among these which find the way of success are – Tiwa, Mishing, Deori and Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council” (Gogoi, 2018:388).

Conclusion:

It can be said that the autonomous movement both by the tribals and the plains were the outcome of many reasons and factors but the main objective to led this movement was to preserve their own culture and identity. The fear of the hilly people of becoming minority and losing their ethnicity made them to take the step against the plains for the bifurcation and demanding for their own separate state. On the other side plains were conscious regarding their own Assamese language and traditions and had the same fear of becoming minority as that of the tribals. Further in my opinion though the difficulty of managing the diversity of tribes in the plain region led to the movement but at the same time it cannot be denied that the diversity of population can also lead to huge developments if partition have not been done in north-east region.

References: