

The Question of Multiculturalism in Assam: Shaping and Re-shaping Identity

Satish Dixit¹ and Rajesh Kumar Singh²

¹Department of Sociology, Madhabdev University, INDIA.

²Department of Sociology, Madhabdev University, INDIA.

¹Corresponding Author: dixit_sat45@gmail.com



www.ijrah.com || Vol. 2 No. 1 (2022): January Issue

Date of Submission: 06-01-2021

Date of Acceptance: 21-01-2021

Date of Publication: 31-01-2022

ABSTRACT

The Indian people have taken satisfaction in being regarded as "unity in variety" even in the face of social unrest, political agitation, and a deteriorating economy. In order to guarantee that this is the case, many provisions of the Indian Constitution have been adopted. However, while India has not declared multiculturalism to be a national policy, its spirit has always been a part of the country's history and culture. Historically, the northeastern region of the country has been isolated from the rest of the country, creating concerns regarding its inclusion in the true sense of the term since the colonial era. Assam, one of the region's eight states, is home to a varied spectrum of ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups, making it a very interesting place to visit. As a consequence, identity politics has played a crucial part in the consolidation of the country's identity. Jihad and murder have played a significant role in Assam's identity politics throughout its history. On occasion, both the federal and state administrations have attempted to satisfy the demands of different political parties; yet, there have been persistent calls for autonomy and independence in various parts of the state. This dissertation is a modest effort to look at the Indian state's and ethnic groups' attempts to embrace the spirit of diversity in Assam from a historical perspective.

Keywords- diversity, social turmoil, Re-shaping Identity, ethnic, religious.

I. INTRODUCTION

Multiculturalism has risen in importance in the functioning of liberal democracies as a method of being more sensitive to minority cultures and assuring their preservation and promotion, as well as a means of being more attentive to the needs of minorities. The two most important objectives of multiculturalism are cultural variation and cultural equality. Assam is a melting pot of ethnic groups and immigrant communities that speak a diverse range of languages and adhere to a diverse range of religious beliefs. The study of Assamese society's heterogeneity may be done via the perspective of multiculturalism, which is both intriguing and difficult. Since the beginning of the post-independence era, Assam has been exposed to the wrath of identity politics and has suffered as a result. The Nagas and Mizos have fought a long and bloody battle over their respective

homelands, which has resulted in widespread violence and despair. In modern-day Assam, ethnic conflicts and murders continue to be a problem. The inability to accommodate the aspirations and desires of numerous groups for greater inclusion within the Indian state's jurisdiction, and at times for independence from it, lies at the heart of these problems. At this stage, a thorough examination of the different civilizations that have existed throughout history and the present is essential.

Multiculturalism encompasses more than simply the presence of people from other cultures. In the notion of cultural equality, or the state's treatment of all cultures on an equal footing, it has its roots. However, it emphasises the need of recognising and acknowledging their distinctions at the same time. It also involves the acceptance of minority cultures' ideas and behaviours by dominant civilizations.

II. SAFEGUARDS FOR MINORITY CULTURES IN THE CONSTITUTION

As a result of their recognition of the diverse nature of the Indian population, the constitution's framers put a significant emphasis on providing for both general and specialised requirements. The Preamble, which is regarded as the foundation of the constitution, promotes several principles and values that are comparable to those of multiculturalism and are thus included in the Constitution. The six fundamental rights, which recognise both individual and collective rights, are among the articles that promote a culture of tolerance and respect for differences. Our discussion of constitutional provisions in Assam will be primarily focused on those clauses that have an impact on the state's diverse cultural heritage

When attempting to categorise the diverse people of the state, language, religion, caste, tribes, and other variables may be considered. In light of this, Article 21 (1) of the Indian Constitution declares that any Indian citizen who has a distinct language, script, or culture has the right to protect and perpetuate it. Furthermore, under Article 29 (2), discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, or language is prohibited in areas relevant to admission to educational institutions, among other things. Articles 330 and 332 of the Constitution provide for the reservation of seats in the House of People and the Legislative Assemblies of the states for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, respectively. In accordance with Article 339 of the Constitution, the President has the right to establish a commission to report on the situation of the scheduled tribes in the states (1). Article 350 (A) of the United Nations Charter requires states and local governments to support the establishment of sufficient facilities at the basic level of education. The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution contains important provisions for the governance of tribal lands in the states of Assam. Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram are three Indian states located in the northeastern part of the country.

More than the interpretation and application of constitutional safeguards will be necessary to promote cultural equality in a state whose identity has been formed, modified, and challenged since colonial authority at the whims of the British would be required. Throughout Assam, ethnic tensions and terrorist activities have wracked the state, jeopardising the state's hopes of attaining a collective and inclusive way of life.

III. GHETTOISATION IN TRIBAL AREAS

Kham Khan is a city in the Pakistani province of Punjab. Suan Hausing used the phrase "tribe ghettoization" to characterise the manner taken by

colonial officials in controlling the country's northeastern region before to its independence. According to Hausing, "the inner line regulation (1873), the backward tract (1919), and the excluded and partially excluded areas (1935) established special and preferential regimes that sustained their autonomous societal cultures over time... this process entrenched disparate social and cultural boundaries over time." 2 For decades following independence, insurgent acts and separatist inclinations took place in the Naga Hills, Mizo Hills, and Assam, all of which were tied to a prolonged time in which the region was cut off from the rest of the country. Udayan Misra argues in his book "Burden of History: Assam and the Division-Unresolved Issues" that the partition left an indelible imprint on Assam's landscape as well as the consciousness of its people after the division. During the post-independence years, "...the whole politics of grouping, when the Central Congress leadership initially shown a substantial insensitivity towards Assam's attitude, coloured Assam's and the northeastern region's relationship with the Centre," he continues.

IV. IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES AND ASIAN IDENTITY

During the colonial period, the promise of commercial tea production and the discovery of oil seeps prompted immigration to Assam. Tea plantation labourers were largely recruited from modern-day Bihar and Odisha. The tea tribes have been one of the most adaptable ethnicities to the Assamese way of life since their arrival. Intermarriage and receiving an Assamese education have opened up more opportunities for cultural integration. "Historically, their tendency to speak Assamese and adopt Assamese practises has made them ideal immigrants in the eyes of the ethnic Assamese," SanjibBaruah writes in "India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality." However, they have a poor position within the ethnic Assamese upper classes, which has made it difficult for them to integrate into Assamese society." 4 The ethnic Assamese's attempts to create cultural equality have not been particularly remarkable in this regard. After the Muslim invasions of the 13th and 14th centuries, a large number of Muslims remained in Assam when colonial administration began in India. Those people eventually blended in with Assam's other groups and were known as "AsomiyaMussalmans." There was no significant cultural gap between Assamese Muslims and Assamese Hindus. The hospitable spirit of Assamese society, however, was hampered by a steady and mainly uninterrupted inflow from Bangladesh. It was one of the most pressing factors that led to the Assam Movement. Assam's post-independence history is littered with communal violence. The Nellie Massacre, which occurred in 1983, is a harrowing reminder of a community rage that rocked the whole nation. The

process of community trust-building has slowed as a result of these confrontations. There are various additional ethnic groups whose presence has impacted Assam's already complicated multi-ethnic society throughout the years. A significant number of people from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab have relocated to Assam for business reasons.

V. IDENTITY POLITICS IN ASSAM

Identities politics were cultivated in Assam from the very beginning of the colonial era forward. During the British rule of Assam, Bengali was designated to be the state language. In reaction to it, a significant portion of the population expressed their disapproval. With the support of Assamese nationalist Anandram Dhekiyal Phukan, the language of administration was restored in 1873. It has always been the case in Assam that sub-nationalism is closely associated with the language. Assamese sub-nationalists widely regard the founding of the Axomiya Bhaxa Unnati Xadhini Xobha (Association for the Development of the Assamese Language) in 1888 as a watershed moment in the development of Assamese sub-nationalism. The association was established to promote the development of the Assamese language. Because of the circumstances surrounding the language and its standardisation, the region's cultural equality has not always been protected. Assamese was declared the official language in 1960, and it was used as the medium of instruction at the college and university levels in 1972, alienating hill and plain tribes who talked in their own languages and dialects. As Udayan Misra says, "it was evident that the Assamese middle class leadership, busy as it was with the struggle to establish Assamese hegemony, had failed to respond to the rising sense of terror in the tribal mindset." 5 Since its inception in 1979, the Assam Movement has mobilised inhabitants of Assam from practically all tribes to demonstrate their opposition to the federal government's casual response to the problem of continued immigration as well as the state's economic neglect over a period of many decades. Nevertheless, by the time of signing of The Assam Accord in 1985, popularity had waned substantially. "They considered the pact as a measure aimed only at safeguarding the Assamese-speaking people's identity, while entirely ignoring and overlooking the immense threats that were being posed to tribal identity," Misra said. 6 In Assam, ethnic groups' links were being severed, and the state's viability as a social and political entity was being jeopardised. It became more difficult to reconcile differences across ethnic groups throughout the upheaval. Many tribes in Assam have shown an interest in establishing themselves outside of the Assamese subnational system, including the Bodos, Karbis, Tiwas, and Rabhas, throughout the course of the last few decades. It is the Bodos, who are the state's largest plains group, who have called for the state's independence.

VI. CONCLUSION

In India, the justification for multiculturalism is different from that of nations like Canada, where it is a government policy. The Indian Constitution has measures aimed at maintaining and encouraging minority rights, paving the basis for the realisation of multiculturalism's ideas. However, some systems must be reconsidered in order to offer an appropriate space for minority cultures to exercise their rights. The Indian Constitution established a strong central government. The federal structure of the nation has to be reconstructed in the current environment, where people have grown more conscious of their identity, which at times deviates from the pan-Indian formulation. Centralization of decision-making is incompatible with the integration of formerly disconnected areas such as northeast India.

Assamese society has never been a monolithic entity. Language politics of the 1960s and 1970s, the Assam Movement, and, as a result, the Assam Accord, have all contributed to the breakdown of the inclusion process. Clause 6 of the Assam Accord attempts to protect "the Assamese people's" cultural identity. It seems hazy and perplexing since the word "Assamese" lacks a clear description of the community it encompasses. Given the current condition of circumstances, intercultural discussion is essential, but not at the expense of any single group's monologic mindset. The constitutional autonomy granted to some tribes will not be adequate to maintain the spirit of cultural variety and equality. The establishment of a larger space for critical and reasoned conversation is required. At the same time, just allowing members of minority groups to retain their unique customs does not fulfil the multiculturalist requirements. In the public arena, civil society and the state system must equally foster the practise of such cultures.

REFERENCES

- [1] Baruah, S. (2019). Burden of History: Assam and the Partition—Unresolved Issues. *History: Reviews of New Books*, 47(1), 16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03612759.2019.1543494>
- [2] Buragohain, R., & Deka, N. (2018). Agripreneurship- A Way for Women Empowerment in Assam, India. *Asian Agri-History*, 22(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.18311/aah/2018/v22i1/18300>
- [3] De, L. (2018). Organic Production of Horticultural Crops in North East Region of India. *International Journal of Horticulture*. <https://doi.org/10.5376/ijh.2018.08.0016>
- [4] Hausing, K. K. S. (2016). Multiculturalism and Intercultural Dialogue in North-East Region (NER) of India. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 62(3), 399–418. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0019556120160305>

- [5] Immigration from Bangladesh into Assam and Its impact on Society and Politics. (2020). *Strad Research*, 7(9). <https://doi.org/10.37896/sr7.9/068>
- [6] India against itself: Assam and the politics of nationality. (1999). *Choice Reviews Online*, 37(04), 37–2399. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.37-2399>
- [7] Kaman, D. R. (2012). Religious Rituals of the Mising Tribe of Assam. *Global Journal For Research Analysis*, 3(6), 207–208. <https://doi.org/10.15373/22778160/june2014/72>
- [8] Laskar, D. F. I. (2019). The anti-Partition and Swadeshi Movement in Assam. *History Research Journal*, 5(5), 186–193. <https://doi.org/10.26643/hrj.v5i5.8087>
- [9] Misra, U. (2018). *Burden of History: Assam and the Partition--Unresolved Issues* (1st ed.). Oxford University Press.
- [10] Muir Watt, H. (2020). La portée territoriale du droit au déréférencement : un exercice de proportionnalité dans l'espace. *Revue Critique de Droit International Privé*, N° 2(2), 334–348. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rcdip.202.0334>
- [11] Stokke, C., & Lybæk, L. (2016). Combining intercultural dialogue and critical multiculturalism. *Ethnicities*, 18(1), 70–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796816674504>
- [12] Verdenius, W. (1979). J. McDOWELL, Plato, Theaetetus. Translated with Notes. London, Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press, 1973. 264 p. Pr. £ 2.75 (paperb.). J. C. B. GOSLING, Plato, Philebus. Translated with Notes and Commentary. Ibid., 1975. XXI, 238 p. Pr. £ 6.00 (2.95 paperb.). D. GALLOP, Plato, Phaedo. Translated with Notes. Ibid., 1975. 245 p. Pr. £ 6.00 (3.25 paperb.). C. C. W. TAYLOR, Plato, Protagoras. Translated with Notes. Ibid., 1976. 230 p. Pr. £ 7.50 (4.50 paperb.). *Mnemosyne*, 32(1–2), 183–185. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852579x00426>