Issues of Identity Politics and Its Impact in North-Eastern India

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Abstract

In common parlance, identity politics refers to people who share a common racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity. India is known for its tribal people. The term 'Adivasi' refers to the people who were the first and indigenous dwellers of the country, with their own lifestyle and land. A tribe is a fundamental social group whose members speak a particular dialect and perform together for a mutual goal including their wellbeing. 'Identity politics is a term used in primitive cultures to describe politics concentrated on demand for 'identity protection'. Due to excessive involvement with non-tribal communities, primitive tribes in India are afraid of preserving their identities. They have been making demands for more legal and administrative safeguards to protect their 'cultural' heritage. As observed from historical background, the dynamics of identity politics in the country & its impact on political and social interactions among tribal people as well as between tribal and non-tribal communities become much more significant. Before independence, tribal movements were generally directed against foreign rulers. We can notice that the majority of tribal movements originated from ideological and cultural disturbances. Nagaland and Bodoland movements are examples of identity movements demanding separate statehood. The main objective of this article is to discuss the issues of identity politics from the standpoint of North-Eastern India.

KEYWORDS: Autonomous, Identity, linguistic, Political, Tribal.

Introduction:

In the process of Indian democracy identity politics deserves much significance. In recent years it becomes a much discussed subject in Indian politics. The rise of various linguistic groups, low castes, religious groups and ethnic conflicts has contributed to demand identity politics much importance. According to many scholars, 'identity' is basically a modern phenomenon which emerged on the principle of ethnicity, religion, language, gender, sexual preferences or caste positions etc. It revolves round a pattern of belonging, a search for comfort, an approach to community.

In general identity politics means "the political debates that stress the aims and perceptions of particular groups by which people can identify". It thus involves all activities like racial group, caste, religious practices, gender, ethnic group, ideology, society, sexual identity, traditions, heritage, occupations, or interests, as well as how people's politics have been shaped. The assertion of identity and individuality on the grounds of race, language, belief, and tradition has a great concern in a pluralistic society. The majoritarian groups gain from the process of development as a result of

the majoritarian form of governance, and they make up the bulk of the socio-political structure.

In common parlance, identity politics refers to people who share a common racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity and try to form exclusive political alliances rather than participating in traditional large party politics or promoting their own interests without due consideration for the interests of a greater political organization. In the context of perceived inequality or injustice, identity is used to articulate political claims, promote political beliefs, and guide political activism to prove group distinctiveness, and seek power, and validation (Dam, 2011). Instead of uniting merely around belief systems or party memberships, identity politics refers to recovering greater self-determination as well as political freedom for disadvantaged communities by acknowledging their distinct characteristics and opposing arbitrarily defined characterizations.

Identity did not become significant in politics until the late 1950s, but it was revealed as a function of political and economic transitions in the 1960s. Because the Assam government approved the Assam state language bill in 1960, which secures the preservation of Assamese individuals depends on the Assamese language. Assamese language and identity had a negative impact on the hill people, who were fearful of being subjugated and losing their specific linguistic identity (N, 2021). As a result, while submitting a joint statement to the state reorganization commission in New Delhi, the united Mizu freedom organization strongly wants to complain that the influence of the Assamese language will divide the people of Assam into so many administrative groups. It was evident in separation of Nagaland from Assam by decreasing Assam's territorial size in 1963. Similarly, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh were splited apart to preserve their linguistic identities.

The northeast is a politically crucial and strategically sensitive region of India, consisting of eight states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura (seven sisters), and Sikkim (brother), with extremely separate identities in regards to food, dialect, and tradition. Tribal communities have now been severely threatened and are now in danger of socio-economic exclusion in the country due to contacts with non-tribal communities and excessive influx (Rao, 2013). Due to this exclusion, extremist groups have emerged in North-Eastern India throughout the years, which challenged the integrity and sovereignty of the Indian Constitution. In recent years, identity politics has been a popular issue in Indian politics. The growth of lower castes, many religious groups, linguistic communities, and ethnic conflicts are pointing toward the importance of identity politics in India.

A variety of ethnic movements have launched in North-Eastern India in order to retain one's identity, which poses a direct threat to the country, as stated by Debobrata Das in his book "Issues of Identity Politics and Ethnic Conflict in North East India". Srimayee Dam in her book "The Myth of Identity Politics in India: Identity Constructs over Political Realities?" has made a compelling case that India's weak governance system is the root cause of identity politics there. Shilpa N. in her article "Identity Politics in India - It's Various Dimensions" has said that in India, the struggle for identity, the categorization of identities, and the politicization of those identities is a significant phenomenon that is also a component of the governing process. PriyankaBorkotoky has stated that because of the identity movement, human rights in North-Eastern India are highly violated on all grounds. Therefore, governmental actions coordinated by the central government are required for a multi-

pronged solution to the region's current instability. Francis Fukuyama in his book "Identity: Contemporary identity politics and the Struggle for Recognition" has stated that Identity demands are elements of a dramatic change that has come to characterise present global events. And seeing identity politics as a revolutionary praxis weapon for revolting against prevailing inequalities and increasing disparities is to see its opportunities for enhancing democracy by radically striving for broader inclusiveness and political involvement that tries to go beyond the democratic institution's restrictions.

Objectives:

1. The main objective of this paper is to examine various issues responsible for movement based on identity politics in tribal communities in North-Eastern India.
2. Another objective of this article is to suggest some measures to overcome such issues.

Methodology:

This paper is based on descriptive and analytical methods and required information has been collected from secondary sources such as books, journals, Articles, Newspapers, periodicals, etc.

Identity politics in India:

With 1.30 billion of populations as well as a very highly populated territory, India is one of the most diversified nations in the world. Therefore India's socio-political factors are highly complicated. India's socio-political conflicts are very much diverse, depending on caste, community, language, ethnicity, and race also. Recently gender-related matters are gradually become a part of the socio-political conversation in India. After independence India had deals with various major identities in its process of nation building.

After Independence in North-Eastern India, the identity movement was started to form a new district on the basis of language. The movement for creating a Bodo Speaking District out of Kokrajhar district of Assam was emerged. As a result in 2003 the Bodo Territorial Council (BTC) was finally formed. Besides this caste, religion, ethnicity, and Gender have played an important role in the process of India's nation building.

Issues Responsible for Identity politics:

The identity movement in North-Eastern India is a significant concern that creates a serious threat to the inhabitants of the area. In North-Eastern India, numerous ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups have frequently demanded their identity, and have engaged in identity and separatist movements. The major issues responsible for the identity movements in North-Eastern India are discussed in the following manner.

Because of its diversified population in north-eastern India, both indigenous and non-indigenous minorities had a chance to influence the country's current political climate during independence. Basically, minorities are classified into two main categories: indigenous and non-indigenous. The non-indigenous minorities include the Muslim community and individuals from outside of north-eastern India and surrounding states(Barkotoky, 2017). On the other hand, the indigenous minority groups are referred to some small groups of indigenous people of north-eastern India, who have developed perceptions of being politically ignorant, financially prejudiced, and

socially disadvantaged over the period. As a means of eradicating inadequacies, a group of educated middle-class minorities began to organize their people on separate paths. As a result, various socio-cultural and political organizations were set up and started to revolt against Central and State Governments and demand separate statehood to protect their identity.

In 1960, When the Government of Assam has passed the Assam state language bill to ensure the safeguard and protection of the people who have Assamese identity based on the Assamese language, the indigenous people of North-Eastern India are forced to learn the Assamese language, and experience a feeling of cultural identity. And it had negative effects on both the hill and plain people. Both of them were fearful of Assamese language and identity dominating them and causing them to lose their distinct linguistic and cultural identities. As a result, various identity movements began and demand separate statehood. The resulting formation of Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, and Meghalaya, as a stateseparate states from Assam.

Financial stagnation, as well as an irregular rate of development, is the major causes of indigenous communities' revival in North-Eastern India. It is known to all of us that, the North-Eastern region of India contributes a significant portion of national revenues by exporting oil, tea, coal, handicrafts, natural resource, and a variety of other commodities, but obtains so much little return for its growth. This creates a feeling of uncertainty among the indigenous group of people in developing their socio-economic conditions. Because of this uncertainty, they started to demand an autonomous state for their own. As a result, various states were newly formed and autonomous district councils were set up in many states of the North-Eastern region in India.

One of the most important concerns in today's politics in North-Eastern India is the resettlement of tribal people. It is implicated for the emergence of movements based on identity politics in North-Eastern India. Because of industrialization in the North-Eastern region of the Indian Sub-continent, a group of indigenous and non-indigenous people was displaced and their land was requisitioned. Therefore the indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of North-Eastern India started to revolt against the central and state governments for the protection and safeguard of their social and cultural identity and their lands.

Advancement in the education sector and the use of new technology in the education sector are responsible for the uneven growth of indigenous identity consciousness which help the indigenous and non-indigenous people in the formation of identity movement in North-Eastern India. With the spread of education, people become more conscious of their social, political, administrative rights, and overall backwardness. Therefore they were able to feel that, they are deprived in many aspects of social, economic, political, and cultural, which leads to the growth of identity movement demanding for separate statehood in North-Eastern India.

Regarding development of people in North-Eastern India first of all we must have a clear concept about 'development'. The people of that area should enjoy the fruit of 'development' and participate in the process of administration in their own capacity. So, the development programmes initiated by the government should cover broadly in the arena of language, culture, ethnicity etc. Identity of the people of North-Eastern India should be understood in a broader canvas of human development and self-rule.

Conclusion:

Identity politics in north-eastern India always played a crucial role and poses a major threat to the indigenous and non-indigenous habitats of this region. Because of that various indigenous and non-indigenous communities have now been severely threatened and are now in danger of socio-economic exclusion in the country. Due to this exclusion, extremist groups have emerged in North-Eastern India throughout the years, which challenged the integrity and sovereignty of the India. Several separatist movements emerged and demands for the autonomous statehood to preserve their identity, land, cultural heritage, and traditional folk enhanced automatically. Therefore, it is clear that governmental actions directed by the central government are very much required for a multi-pronged solution to the region's current instability. In this regard, emphasis should be given on social organization and cultural values of the people of that area. Effort should be taken so that the inner strength of the people of that particular area may increase to have the expected development to protect India's unity and integrity.

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