

The Diversity of Assamese Culture

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ABSTRACT

Diversity is a pre-existing phenomenon in the India in general and Assam in particular. The term diversity simply means differences. For our purpose, it is more than mere differences. It means collective differences from one group of one people to the others. These differences can be divided into many ways- biological, linguistic, cultural, religious etc. On the basis of biological difference, we have religious diversity. When we talk about the religion, culture, tradition, custom, language etc. Then it represents diversity. Thus, diversity means the variety. Assam is the meeting ground of diverse cultures. The people of the enchanting state of Assam are an intermixture of various racial stocks such as Mongoloid, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Iranian and Aryan. The Assamese culture is a rich and exotic tapestry of all these races evolved through a long assimilative process. The natives of the state of Assam are known as “Asomiya” (Assamese), which is also the state language of Assam. The state has a large number of tribes, each unique in its tradition, culture, dresses and exotic way of life. Diverse tribes like Bodo, Kachari, Karbi, Miri, Mishimi, Rabha, etc. co-exist in Assam. Most of the tribes have their own languages though Assamese is the principal language of the state. This paper is an attempt to examine the diversity of the Assam state with the onset of urge for setting identities amongst the communities in the present world.

Keywords: Diversity, Identity, Unity

Introduction

Diversity is a pre-existing phenomenon in the India in general and Assam in particular. The term diversity simply means differences. For our purpose, it is more than mere Identity differences. It means collective differences among the people which make difference one group of people from the other. These differences can be divided into many ways- biological, Tinguistic, cultural, religious etc. On the basis of biological difference for example, we have racial diversity. Likewise on the basis of religious difference, we have religious diversity. When we talk about the religion, culture, tradition, custom, language etc. then it represents diversity, From that very meaning of diversity, we can assume that cultural diversity means the difference in cultures among people living in a particular area. It shows the difference in religion, language, dress, foot habits, folk culture etc. The first systematic case study regarding diversity was made by J. S. Milf, Humboldt, Herder and others and the new thinking with important modifications has been done by Berlin, Raz and Kymlicka. According to Bikhu Parekh, they have provided one or more arguments in support of it.

Firstly, he mentions that diversity increases the availability of options and expands freedom of choice. The argument makes an important point but it is very much restrictive. Since it values others cultures only as options or potential object of choice, it gives no good reason to value such culture as those of indigenous people, religious communities which are not realistic options for it.

It does not make out a convincing case for mainstream cultures either. The argument gives no good reason to cherish cultural diversity to those who are perfectly happy with their culture and have no wish to add to the options provided by it. Secondly, to him, some writers argue that since human beings are culturally embedded, they have a right to their culture, and to that to that cultural diversity inescapable and legitimate outcome of the exercise of that right. This argument shows the inescapability but not the desirability of cultural diversity. Thirdly, as mentioned by Parekh, some romantic liberals, such as Herder, Schiller advance an aesthetic case for cultural diversity. According to them, it creates a rich, varied and aesthetically pleasing and stimulating world. They make a valid point, but it is too weak and vague to carry the moral burden placed on it. Because, aesthetic considerations are a matter of taste and it is not easy to convince those who prefer a uniform moral and social world. Finally, there are some thinkers like Mill or Humboldt, who link cultural diversity to individuality and progress. They argued that it encourages a healthy competition between different systems of ideas and ways of life and both prevents the dominance of any one of them and facilitates the emergence of a new truth.

As we know that Assam as a land of diverse culture, religion, caste etc. Assam is situated in the north eastern part of India. At present, there are consists of 33 district in Assam. Multiplicity gives a unique outlook towards this region. From its total population, Assamese are contributing the major part. Besides them, there are Nepali, Santhali, Koch-Rajbongshi, mainstream Bodo, Bengali, Rabha, and religious minority groups etc. Assam is a region where we found full flowering diversity of cultures. Here, communities like-greater Assamese, Bodo, Rabha, Rajbongshi etc. are living with their own cultural identities but still they are showing the idea of oneness by assimilating with each other.

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Assam is the Bihu which is celebrated in three parts during a year with great pomp and grandeur by all Assamese, irrespective of caste, creed or religion. Bengali-speaking Hindus and Muslims represent the largest minorities, followed by Nepalis and populations from neighboring regions of India. The most important social and cultural celebrations are the three Bihu festivals observed with great enthusiasm irrespective of caste, creed and religious affinity' (Government of Assam).

The present research work is a descriptive study. Data requires for this research was collected from secondary sources only. The secondary sources of data collection are-Books, Journals, Seminar Paper, Internet and Official Records etc.

The study area of the researcher is Assam. Assam is one of the most diverse states in all over the India and it follows the principles of "Unity in Diversity".

1. Geographical Location: - Total geographical area of the Assam is 78,438 sq km.
2. Economy: - The economy of Assam is basically based on agriculture. Approximately 70% of total population is being engaged with agriculture in Assam.
3. Population Composition: - According to the Census report 2011, the total population of India is 3,12,05,576 and out of which male and female are 15,939,443 and 15266133 respectively.
4. Literacy Rates of Assam: - The literacy rate of India is 73.18% as per 2011 Census.

Diversity creates a climate in which different cultures can engage in a mutually beneficial dialogue. It is very true to the Assam also, many communities are creating colorful diverse images. If we try to analyze all the diversities of the region in a systematic way, it can be divided into the following ways

- 1) Racial Diversity
- 2) Linguistic Diversity
- 3) Religious Diversity

Assam is a land of multiple religions. Although, predominantly a tribal area, we find here people having faith upon Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and very few upon believer of Jainism. Pre-Brahminical believers also exist, but they are comparatively less on the verge of mainstream religions. Hinduism is the dominant religion in the area. All these religions give a unique outlook of Assam in the context of religious diversity.

In Assam, many communities are living together. Among them Assamese is the major group. All these communities have their own culture, custom, tradition, language, religion and all of them try to preserve their own culture. But there are some communities which are regarded as minorities and they always have to face problems from the majority group of people in terms of language, religion, tradition, custom etc. So they are in an anxiety of losing their own culture. It is a recent crisis and it is creating the tension among the communities. As we know that the diversity is providing a different outlook to the Assam, but still it also brings a great challenge towards the society. Various challenges are there as we have seen in the region for last a few decades. It is one of the great issues and challenges that emerge from the diversity, which is being faced by the general people of Assam. Many parts of Assam like- Karbi Anglong, BTAD etc. are recognize the most diverse region on the

basis of culture, language, religion etc. This diversity has brings ethnic conflict to this region. in many times. It creates the fear of existence for preservation of own culture. We have seen many ethnic conflicts in BTAD, like between Bodo and Santhali (1993-94), between Bodo and Muslim in Udalguri (2008), and between Bodo and religious minority in Kokrajhar (2012). We also have seen a massacre done by NDFB in 2014. In that incident approximately hundred (100) Santhali people were died in different parts of BTAD region within Assam, It came out as a result of this diversity only.

It is one of the greatest issues and challenges that rise out from this cultural diversity of Assam. The Kosh Rajbongshis of Assam is demanding separate state as 'Kamatapur' within Assam. Likewise, the Bodos are the earliest inhabitant of the region and they have faced the problems for preserving their own culture, custom, tradition, language, religion etc. So, they are demanding 'Bodoland as separate state within the state Assam. Although they have right to demand such kind of separate state, but it is created panic among other communities of the area. Other communities think that, if separate state is given by the government of India, what will happen to other community's culture and tradition. How they can preserve their own identity?

It is another striving challenge that comes out from this diversity. As we know that it is the great challenge all over the India. At present, more than two hundred groups are demanding SC and ST status.

Sometimes these groups of communities take the path of violence, demonstration, fasting, strike, road blockage etc. to fulfil their demand. It affects the day-to-day activity of general public. In assam, six communities are demanding ST status now. We can say that the main reasons behind it can preserve their community in these days of Globalization.

Although Assam has many diverse communities, but we introduce ourselves as Assamese. But the diversity of Assam is creating many problems like ethnic conflict, demand for separate state, demand for ST status etc. These kinds of conflicts and demands bring tension among the communities and create problem in other parts of the nation too. For example, in the BTAD region of Assam, an Ethnic Riot took place between the Bodo and the religious minorities and it move further to other parts of India. For such kinds of incidents becomes threat towards the national integration of India.

In Assam, we have seen more than fifty languages that are prevailing at present Among them the Assamese, Bodo, Bengali, Nepali etc. are the major languages. Currently, Assamese and Bodo are working as the official languages in the region According to the "Right to Education Act, 2009"; a child should be taught only in his/her mother tongue in the primary level. But that can't be fulfilled because of this vast linguistic diversity. Even the official the languages Bodo is the medium of instruction only till the secondary level. The condition of other languages is even worse, as most of them are being taught only till primary level and some languages are using for speaking purpose only.

Education is a vehicle of transforming the knowledge of a society. We find that most of the challenges come into existence for illiteracy of the people. According to the census report of 2011, the overall literacy rate of Assam region is 73.18% which is less than the average literacy rate of India (74.04%). Education is considered to be a perfect indicator which assists people in tracing out their weaknesses and enables them to step forward with remedial measures, confidently in the oath of

all round development. Alfred Marshall has emphasized the importance of education as national investment. Both formal and informal education is the source of acquiring knowledge, " understanding, skill and potentialities of people in a society. Hence, diversity should be provided as a part of formal education as well as various awareness programs should be arranged among the people of the area.

Provision of common language is another means to promoting diversity in Assam. In Assam, more than fifty languages are being used as mother tongue. So, this kind of linguistic diversity creates problem to the region. Hence, there should be a provision of common language through which the people of this region easily share their views with people from different communities of the region. The first step should be the introduction of using the languages as a medium of instructions in the Primary level. So we can say that it is one of the useful steps towards promoting diversity in Assam region.

Mutual Co-Operation Mutual co-operation is one of the important steps towards promoting the diversity in Assam region. All these communities have their own culture, tradition, custom, language etc. as well as all communities try to develop their own tradition, custom, language, religion. In such situation one community should not interfere with other cultures and respect all the culture. If all communities co-operate with each other then diversity can be promoted.

A strong legal procedure is needed for the promotion of diversity in Assam. Every people has right to preserve their own culture, but if any person from another community forbids the preservation of other culture then there will be tension. In such cases a person can't enjoy his constitutional rights. So to prevent such cases, a strict legal provision should be there. It is helpful for the people of every community and they can easily enjoy their rights. If a strict legal provision will prevail in this region, then it can help in promoting the diversity.

Cultural exchange is another way to promote diversity in this region. We know that, there are many communities living in this region and all of them have their own culture. So, there should be provisions like arranging festivals so that all the communities of this region can participate in this festival. It can bring cooperation and brotherhood among the people of different communities in this region. It is one kind of important instrument through which people can develop the moral values and respect the other culture. From the above discussion, it is found that there are various means for promoting diversity in Assam. If it properly used or implemented then definitely merge with the challenges arise out of diversity in Assam.

Conclusion

A critical analysis of the region shows us that it is an area where we find a full flowering diversity of cultures, languages, religion, custom, traditions etc. According to Homi K. Bhabha, when two or more cultures live together in a society, they share something of their own culture with each other. It is very much important, considering the fact that Assam has seen many cultural and ethnic conflicts amongst the communities in the last a few decades.

The diversity in Assam has created very diverse or vibrant society and which leads the society of Assam into a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual region. On the other hand, this diversity has created a greater burden upon the Assam. It basically deals with various issues and challenges

coming out of diversity in this region. Diversity of Assam has two aspects such as it has unified the societies of Assam, on the other hand, this diversity has also divided or stratified the society of Assam. Although many challenges are seen in the society of Assam for this diversity, but still, it is giving a new outlook towards the Assam and it is one of the diverse regions in all over the country. If preventing measures are implemented properly, then it will provide more lingual, ethnic and cultural beauty to this region, because in a garden only one flower can't express the beauty, but if there are various flowers of different kinds it will perfectly provide you the actual aesthetic pleasure.

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