

ETHNICITY

Identity and Identity Crisis in North East India

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ETHNICITY, CONFLICT AND ITS EFFECT ON SOCIETY: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KARBI ANGLONG

Suranjana Hasnu

Diphu Govt. College, Diphu, Karbi Anglong

Introduction :

The people of Assam saw the birth of a new district i.e. the United Mikir and N.C.Hills district on the 17th November, 1951. Again in 1970, a separate Mikir Hills was created and the district was rechristened as Karbi Anglong district w.e.f. the 14th October, 1976 vide Govt. Notification No. TAD/R/115/74/47 dated 14/10/1976. Thus the Karbi Anglong came to being as a full-fledged separate district in the map of Assam with the headquarter at Diphu. The district enjoyed autonomy under the provision of sixth schedule of the Indian constitution. It is the largest district of Assam situated in the central part of Assam. It is bounded by Golaghat district in the east, Meghalaya and Morigaon district in the west, Nagaon and Golaghat district in north and N.C.Hills district and Nagaland in the south. The district with dense tropical forest covered hills and flat plains.

The population of the district is predominantly tribal. The major tribal ethnic groups of this district are Karbis, Dimasas, Bodos, Kukis, Hmars, Rengma-Nagas, Man-Tai speaking and a large number of non-tribal live together in the district. The Karbis are majority in number and next to them are the Dimasas in the district. Karbis are patrilineal society practicing their traditional belief system which is animistic. The Karbis traditionally practice *Jhum* cultivation in the hills. They grow variety of crops which include food grains, vegetables and fruits. They are quite self-sufficient and have homestead garden which fulfill their nutritional as well as food needs. The Dimasas are another tribe of the district also self-sufficient with agriculture. They are the oldest inhabitant of Assam having a sizeable population in the district. They practice *Jhum* cultivation in the hills and other seasonal cultivation in plain area. As Dimasas are rich in their culture, they show rich expertise in the own woven cloths. In the present day also they prefer to wear their colourful traditional dresses. The Kukis without whom the population of Karbi Anglong may be incomplete. They migrated to the district in two sections. The first group came to the district during the Second World War as a labour from Manipur and Mizoram recruited by the British. They inhabits in Hamren area is indigenous to Karbi

Anglong. They have fully integrated with the local population in all respect. We can call them as old group. The new or another group migrated to the district during the 50's and 60's.

Statement of the Problem :

The district of Karbi Anglong can be called a mini Assam in respect of a land of meeting place of many ethnic people. Along with the other co-tribes of the district they also enjoyed their racial stock and culture. The district has become the epi-centre of numerous ethnic nationalities reflecting high degree of diversity as its community living there in has its distinct characteristics. But the conflict among the tribes resulted many far-reaching consequences in the society which affected the socio economic life of the district.

Objectives :

- The objectives of the present study are-
- i) to focus on the effects on society and
 - ii) to understand the peace process.

Methodology :

In this proposed study, the investigator shall adopt a method that would be empirical and analytical. It will be both literary evidence and field survey.

Recent Conflicts in Karbi Anglong :

The two hill districts of Assam N.C. Hills and Karbi Anglong are mostly inhabited by the indigenous tribes, as in case of Karbi Anglong we already came across. Assam though has gone through much violence but only this district plagued by unprecedented ethnic conflict in recent years. In general ethnic conflict normally involved a clash of interest or a struggle over rights: rights of land, to education, to the use of language, to political representation, to freedom of religion, to preservation of ethnic identity, to autonomy and self determination and so forth where different ethnic groups live side by side within a given society, the livelihood of conflict is always present when a more dominant ethnic group tries to impose its own norms and standard or its own model of society and other minority. In case of Karbi Anglong, violence that one has witnessed during the last one decade did not erupt all of a sudden. The reason behind the ethnic conflict in Karbi Anglong of Karbi-Kuki clash of 2003-04, Karbi-Dimasa clash of 2005 and Karbi Rengma-Naga clash of 2013-14 is varied. We can discuss these conflicts under following lines.

The migration and demand for political authority in the same demographic area can be the cause behind the clash of Karbi-Kuki in 2003-04. In our previous para, we already mentioned about the Kuki migration in the district. Here the old group nothing to do with the conflict, who have a population of around 4000-5000 and are confined to a small pocket in the Hamren sub-division. But the problem aroused due to the fresh migration of Kuki from the neighbouring states of Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland which we can call new group. They are around 20,000 and have settled mostly in Singhason,

brotherhood attitude of the tribes which we came across in the poems of Padmashree Rongbong Terang, a known litterateur, ex-principal of Diphu Govt. College and former president of Asom Sahitya Sabha, the then college song. The poem was a request of wish to spread light over the darkness and trying to establish a great Indian nation with Karbi, Dimasa, Rengma and all ethnic tribes. The feeling of Indian was present in those days. But the situation of the post conflict period, the national character vanished. In the last years, students and children have never seen the Independence day, Republic day as days were always declared as the Bandh by the tribal organizations. The total disregard for non-violence is visible in the conflict. In fact the 2003 Karbi-Kuki conflict began on 2nd October, birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, the father of non-violence.

The conflict was resulted displacement of hundreds of thousands of persons but not all of them can be counted. A good number of populations choose to migrate to the urban centers or to mingle with the general populace. For eg. As per the data available the Karbi Dimasa conflict of 2005 caused around 75,000 refugees in Karbi Anglong but many other lives with relatives or in makeshift shelters far from the zone of conflict. Most of them received First-Aid but due to over populated in relief camps, but there was a shortage of supply of drinking water, food and medicine. The inadequate water supply and sanitation resulting outbreak of many diseases like jaundice, typhoid, diarrhea, malaria etc. Besides these sufferings due to the conflict it resulted total death toll of 220 persons. The cultural heritage was too disrupted. People abstained from wearing their traditional dresses for fear of being identified and attacked. The beauty of their culture and tradition was checked. Many weaving centers in the village areas were stopped where once women of the village used to show their skill in traditional weaving culture. During my survey in the Dhansiri and Mohendijuwa village around ten weaving centers were affected due to conflict.



Views of Model Villages (Langmill area), Diphu established by the District Council Authority.

In the economic field too, the district faced a heavy economic crisis. The agriculture was disrupted. Important crops like sesame, ginger, rice etc. were either destroyed or abandoned because of their widespread violence work on agricultural land. As all the conflicts have been in a agriculture season in May when agriculture operations began or in October the harvesting season. For eg. The ginger of Karbi Anglong was in high demand in the market which was cultivated both by Karbis and Kukis was affected.

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Kharbaman Hill range of Diphu sub-division. In the meantime, late 1970's and 80's the state of Assam witnessed a new awakening among tribal communities which we can say 'Identity Crisis' movement. In Karbi Anglong district the demand for an autonomous state was raised under Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) under the Article 244(A) of the constitution of India. In the beginning of the movement the Kuki got involved in socio-political event of Karbi Anglong and so supported the movement. But may be for identity crisis or may be for political turn, Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA) was formed in 2000-2001 in Manipur with the help of Isac-Muiva factor of NSCN. The outfit declared objectives in the creation of Kuki National Council and Autonomous Administrative Council for the Kuki in Karbi Anglong, a separate homeland for Kukis. They also wanted to work for socio-political and economic advancement for the KUKIs. Tension grows for the collection of taxes, as both of the groups were operating in the same area and they did not confine extortion for tax collection to their own community. Another reason as we understood is the ban on ginger cultivation on the ground that it will damage the ecological balance as viewed by local organizations.

Another major ethnic clash in Karbi Anglong was of Karbi-Dimasa clash of 2005. People believed that the clash which rocked the district was fabricated by the element that wanted to create hatred between these two tribes. At the same time, people resorted to violence imbued with the ideology of protecting their ethno-religious-linguistic identities. The reason behind the conflict which destroyed the old bond between these two tribes might be political also. The area of tension between them is confusion over the territories which they will occupy if an autonomous state is granted. The territories that the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) and Dima Halam Dauga(DHD) demand overlap with each other. The second problem is extortion.

The Karbi-Rengma Naga clash of 2013-14 is also another spine chilling episode of the district. Extortion was the main reason behind the clash or conflict. As during this period the tribes of Karbi Anglong became very insecure for their cultural identity. Every tribe has their outfit with a motto to look after the socio-political and economic development of their own tribes and to active in their motto they need money.

Analysis and Findings :

The district that runs through a series of ethnic violence destroyed its very brotherhood nature. The tradition of brotherhood with co-ethnic tribes is in danger. An analysis was done to the conflict as the socio-economic and educational effect on society. The evaluation was based on village or household surveys, observation, discussion and information obtained through participatory rural appraisal.

The clashes were enormous and this psycho-social impact could not be quantified easily. Most victims of the clashes were left homeless, landless, destitute, injured, dead or abused. Among the immediate consequences was loss of security is the clash prone areas as civilians took the law into their own hands and targeted their perceived enemies. As a result of insecurity there was an indiscriminate loss of human lives. Many others sustained physical injuries and most were traumatized. The unity and

...a good revenue was lost. Karbi Anglong annual ginger production is about 20,000 tonnes. As many as 6000 and more household in the district are involved in ginger cultivation. Moreover, thousands of families lost their personal and household possessions. Many affected people till today cannot overcome with the loss and new construction of house is a dream for never. The poor people of the affected village cannot think to reconstruct their house which resulted govt. initiative to construct model village for them in many areas of the district. But living in a govt. granted house is not permanent habitation and also not the solution. The village once called a self sufficient economic village becomes a story in the pages of the tribal history.

A major consequence of the clashes is that the educational ambition of the youth of the tribe of this track is affected. The schools and college examinations are held during October and November and most classes have been during these months. Hundreds of school and college going children's were unable to attend schools or appear for the exams. Some children dropped out from schools or college due to financial and socio-economic constrains as a result of the conflict. The horrible experience of the conflict resulted feeling of fear, anxiety and distrust. The aggressive behavior to revenge became the mental behavior of the students as for months schools colleges turns relief camps resulted loss of academic session. Many though wanted to take admission cannot due to loss of certificates and official documents. Lack of proper education leads unemployment and aimless earner for family. The effect on education resulted poor performance in high school leaving examination as shown by the human development reports. In 2007 all Assam pass percentage is 54.93% and in the district it is only with 28% again in 2008 Assam made the best result comparing last ten years result with the pass percentage of 56% whereas Karbi Anglong with pass percentage of 30.98% only.

Conclusion :

From what has been indicating above, it is clear that the ethnic conflict in Karbi Anglong affected the old society. From the above analysis we can assume that the ethnic conflict in Karbi Anglong is mostly of a byproduct of land alienation owing to demographic changes as the people are fighting for natural resources in the same geographical sphere and in the same time because of political issues i.e. demand for autonomous right in same territory by the different tribes. It is only for the insecurity among the tribes and lack of the feeling of nationality. Therefore, it is obvious that peace can be restored in the district by land restoration, poverty alleviation, and educational development in rural areas and most importantly by a definite step to recreate an atmosphere of trust between the communities and introducing many short term courses for technical skill programme like cutting, tailoring, basket-making, computer education etc.

However, it is not that the peace initiatives are not taken. The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and many NGOs have done programmes for the peace process in the district. But the Govt. should take major steps to increase the economy of the district like establishment of GIN-FED for the production and promotion of ginger. The

initiative of then the Deputy Commissioner M. Angamutthu, Karbi Anglong produce and exported organic ginger to European. Education should be the main bridge for the people to have a better society by introducing subjects like Moral Studies and project for team work.

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