# Durable Peace And Quest For Human Security: Revisiting The Tales Of Restlessness In Bodoland

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*Abstract: Ethno-nationalistic sentiments of each and every caste and community and Xenophobic identity issues provide fuel in increased number of structural and physical violence to create new world disorder. After the end of cold war the ethnic violence becomes more brutal and destructive in character which jeopardizes the political order of a society. Post-cold war phenomena further weakened different regions economically which increased their miseries and accordingly social unrest and ethnic strife threatened the social order of different societies. Violence is considered to be an ambiguous and elastic concept due to because of its direct use of force with the help of different notions of symbolic violence. The paradigms of human security norms can only be realized in a peaceful situation for which more emphasis needs to be given for the establishment of durable peace. The tales of restlessness has been increases on the part of the people residing in Bodoland of Assam for the last couple of decades. The quest for identity and space and stir for political milieu among different communities increases lots of security dilemmas in Bodoland for which the common civilian think in terms of durable peace.*

*Keywords: Durable Peace, Human Security dilemma, Political Space, Xenophobic identity.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The nature of violence has undergone a transformation in the last few decades. Contemporary violent conflicts, especially of armed nature are fast adopting alternative methods of warfare, penetrating into towns, villages and even the homes of civilian (Goswami, T. 2006, p-09). Quest for space and politics of identity accelerated the process of different resistance movement in North East India in general and Assam in particular. In the micro level perspective within the territory of Assam, ferocious and aggressive movement of Bodos along with other tribes, insurgent activities by the rebel forces, violations of human rights, armed violence sponsored by both state and non-state actors etc have resulted in perpetuating fear and insecurity and thereby dismantling the emotional fabric of greater Assamese society. Violent ethnic conflict coupled with regional imbalance and identity discontent has culminated socio-political turmoil in Assam especially in Bodoland. Like other parts of the world, North East India also experienced with secessionist movement by demanding sovereignty from the established state system. Bodo's stir for political milieu and knocking of smaller identity groups in a deeply heterogeneous society create lots of security dilemma in the region. In order to establish durable peace in the region, the tools of violence need to be tame by creating peace and conflict resolution mechanism.

## II. GENESIS OF CONFLICT IN BODOLAND

In India, different religious, caste and regional identities have been experiencing badly with lot of political conflicts and violence. There are lot of violence occurs among different identity groups as compared to the pre-independence period. India has experienced lots of violent conflicts in recent years which basically against the state. Sub-nationalist sentiments develop among the minds of smaller linguistic and ethnic minority group and in the long run they developed secessionist and autonomy movement. These different kinds of movement also create adverse effect on the issues of Human Security of

the civilian. In case of violent conflict situation, powerful groups dominate the minority groups along religious, caste or ethnic lines with extreme brutality. Due to the frustration and aggression, they in the long run inculcate in violence by engaging themselves in group clashes. Bodo, as a largest plain tribes in Assam since 1960s have been trying to revive their language, culture and identity by following certain ethnic specificity.

The whole concept of ethnicity has been contested in North East India due to the issue of 'self' and 'other'. As a result ethnic conflicts become an inevitable in different parts of the world, so also has happen in BTAD of Assam as well. Anthony giddens, a noted sociologist have identified ethnicity with cultural practices. He cited,

*"Ethnicity is an idea that is purely social in meaning. Ethnicity refers to the cultural practices and outlooks of a given community of people that set them apart from others."*

The accommodative capacity and democratic viability of an ethnically exhausted society like Bodoland need to be re-examined. The desire for ethnic monolithic sovereignty of Bodos coupled with the process of ethnic cleansing has been the main motivating force behind violence and human insecurity in Bodoland.

The genesis of the Bodo movement has its roots in the socio-cultural and economic aspiration of the Bodo people. The Bodo-educated elites and intelligentsia have been articulating their divergence from the Assamese caste Hindu society and highlighting issues like land alienation and social and economic backwardness (Pathak, S. 2012, p-20). Before discussing about the Bodo movement, it must be mentioned that Bodo people had already merged into Assamese identity; they had already accepted Assamese language. But in 1960 Assamese was made official language in Assam. Efforts were made to impose Assamese language on all communities living in Assam. This created feeling of insecurity among the tribes of Assam, including Bodos, about the future of their identity and culture. This official imposition of Assamese language made the Bodo people suspicious about the motive of the Assamese leaders. They became conscious about the hegemonic nature of the Assamese leaders who were trying to make Assamese language and culture to be dominant over other communities. The sense of insecurity among the Bodo people, which was the fallout of the attempt of Assamisation of Assamese leaders, gave birth to the feeling of unity among them against the Assamese people and the Government. Many Bodos, especially of the younger generation, began to speak only Bodo and prefer not to speak Assamese (Baruah, S. 1999, p-185). Infact the urge to preserve the Bodo identity has been a major cause behind the Bodo Movement and it runs counter to the effort of the Assamese to Assamize Assam (George, S.J. 1994, p-884). In late 1960s the Bodos began their agitation for the introduction of Bodo language as the medium of instruction. The Bodo people, including its premier organisation the Bodo Sahitya Sabha demanded the Government of India to include Bodo language in the 8th Schedule of the Constitution to protect Bodo interest. In 1973 when Sarat Chandra Sinha was the chief minister and Hiteswar Saikia the home minister in Assam the Bodos Launched a movement for use of the Roman script in place of the Assamese script for their language (Gohain, H, 1989). But

the state apparatus dominate the movement with savage brutality.

Another major cause of Bodo movement is economic cause. Bodo economy was mainly agrarian which depended mainly on land. But due to migration of non-tribals into Bodo areas the size of land available for Bodos reduced which adversely affected their economy. Landlessness and poverty became their main problems. Meanwhile the spread of education raised political consciousness among the Bodos. The handful of Bodo youths who received higher education at great sacrifice and with grim determination had great difficulty in getting good jobs where the competition with the politically powerful caste-Hindu Assamese left them feeling frustrated and discriminated against (Gohain, H. 1989). The lower levels of both the caste Hindu and Bodo societies have been wretchedly poor; but the elite among the caste Hindus had been larger, better equipped and better trained as an active partner of a feudal system of exploitation for centuries than the hitherto almost non-existent Bodo elite (Prabhakar, M.S. 1974). Gradually the Bodo elite increase their numerical strength and manifested lots of demand, e.g choice of script for Bodo language.

The policies pursued by the Indian Government during 1960s and 70s leading to the creation of separate tribal state for population smaller than the Bodos made the aspiration of the plain tribal Bodos for autonomy seem legitimate (George, S.J. 1994). So to improve their economy and overall condition the Bodo people started movement for greater autonomy. The Bodo leadership in 1967 formed a political party called the Plains tribals Council of Assam (PTCA), which demanded a union territory called Udayachal for Bodos and other plains tribes of Assam.

All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) was also formed in 1967 representing the Bodo interest and it gave its support to PTCA in its demand. But due to the failure of PTCA in fulfilling the deepest aspiration of the Bodos for a separate state during the time of reorganisation, the ABSU withdrew its support from PTCA in 1979. During the period of Assam Movement (1979 to 1985) there was a close attachment between AASU and ABSU. But after the formation of AGP Government as a successful package of Assam Movement, the Bodo people began to realise that the new Government's attitude towards them is not much different from that of earlier one. Here it can be mentioned that in 1950, the Government of Assam (Congress I) established several tribal blocks and belts. But the implementation of various settlement policies by the successive Assam Governments increased the number of non-tribal in these areas. Due to the paradigmatic shift towards the process of modernization in the state the poor tribals were pushed back into the forest. Here the contrast arose between the ABSU and AGP Government because the later had promulgated a new law to evict unauthorized occupants of forest reserves and lands for which ironically the tribals were affected mostly.

The Bodo agitation launched by the dominant faction of ABSU led by Upendra Nath Brahma on March 2, 1987 had initially put forward a 92-point charter of demands covering the political, social and economic aspirations of the Bodo people. But of late they concentrated particularly on three demands.

To protect the Bodo interest, ABSU on March 2, 1987 launched a movement for the creation of a full-fledged state of Bodoland outside Assam. ABSU demanded mainly the following 3 points:

✓ Formation of a separate state namely Bodoland on the north bank of the Brahmaputra.
✓ Establishment of autonomous district councils in the tribal dominated areas on the south bank of the Brahmaputra.
✓ Incorporation of the Bodo-Kacharis of Karbi-Anglong in the 6th Schedule of the Constitution.

ABSU and Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) led the Bodo Movement persisted for 6 years. The Bodo Movement, though was peaceful in its initial stage, became violent in later phase. There is a sharp difference between the AASU-led movement and the ABSU(UB)-led one that while the AASU leaders succeeded in keeping their six-year old movement by and large peaceful, notwithstanding the occasional outbursts of violence and the undercurrents of communal tension, the ABSU(UB) opted for violent tactics at a relatively early phase of the struggle (Mishra, U. 1989). The tribal organizations like the Plains Tribal Council of Assam, the All Assam Tribal Sangha, the All Assam Tribal Student Union, the All Assam Tiwa (Lalung) Sanmelan, the Lalung Durbar, the Lalung Youth Front etc also opposed all those tactics adopted by the ABSU(UB). The ABSU(UB) fraction took the path of violence only to attract central attention. This group showed their eagerness to established Bodo as the most powerful plains tribal organization in the state. Due to the presence of different tribal homeland discourses other than Bodo, the state of Assam experienced with burns of ethnic conflict in different circumstances ranging from Rabha, Mishings etc to Bodo-kacharis. Infact the Bodo Movement paved the way for the formation of Bodo Security Force (Bd.SF), a militant outfit aiming to achieve the goal of Bodoland through violent activities.

While analysing the conflict of Bodoland area it can be said that the failure of the political stakeholders in articulating an inclusive agenda, which stems from their utter insensitivity to the multi-cultural differences among various communities living in Bodoland is the cause behind the recurring incidents of violence in the BTC area. The atmosphere of conflict and violence that have grapsed the Bodoland area cannot be get ridden of unless the other communities i.e. the non-Bodos residing in Bodoland are acknowledged.

## III. PEACE, HUMAN SECURITY AND FREEDOM FROM FEAR IN BODOLAND

Peace is a contested term with its undesirable connotation. It signifies two kinds of possibilities of absence of violence at personal level and structural level. Basically peace reflects absence of actual warfare. But mere absence of war only construct negative dimension of peace. Raymond Aron, a 20th century French intellectual and supporter of Negative Peace defined peace as a condition of "more or less lasting suspension of rivalry between political units." (Aron, R. 1966). According to Negative dimension of peace, if there is total absence of war and state sponsored violence, peace will automatically attainable in the society. For Galtung, negative peace is states of action which basically want to overcome the problems of overt conflict. But on the contrary, positive peace is "a pattern of cooperation and integration between major human groups...It is about people interacting in cooperative ways; it is about social organizations of diverse peoples who willingly choose to cooperate for the benefit of all humankind; it calls for a system in which there are no winners and losers-all are winners; it is a state so highly valued that institutions are built around it to protect and promote it." (Sandy, Leo R., & Perkins, Ray. 2002).

Positive peace is more conducive for eliminating overt violence as well as structural violence. Structural violence in the long run has the effect of denying people from their basic amenities thereby causes great sense of human insecurity. For Johan Galtung, many people who behave as good citizens and peace-lover often participate in settings within which individuals may do enormous amounts of harm to other human beings without ever intending to do so, just performing their regular duties as a job defined in the structure. (Galtung, J 1985, p-414). The positive dimension of peace always involves in searching for resolution and keep vigil on causes of conflict that produce violence. Violent conflicts basically ethnic and religious in nature have become one of the most significant threats to human security in the 21st century. Peace, which is a multifaceted concept need to be realised at the societal context for understanding the paradigms of human security. In this context, we can cite Trostle's comprehensive definition of peace,

*"Peace is a state of well-being that is characterised by trust, compassion and justice. In this state we can be encouraged to explore as well as celebrate our diversity, and search for the good in each other without the concern for personal pain and sacrifice...It provides us a chance to look at ourselves and others as part of the human family, part of one world."*

The whole issue of human security in the context of armed violence can be looked into through the approach of freedom from fear which stresses on protection of common people caught in war zones. It also advocates ending the use of weapons that contributes in making war more deadly and brutal. It emphasises on safety of people from both violent and non-violent threats. In the underdeveloped society like India, freedom from fear approach gain lots of significance. It stressed more specifically on creating condition favourable for human being to be free from fear of any kind. In the post 1990's world phenomena, the increase numbers of armed violence in diverse socio-political context creates a legitimacy vacuum in the functioning of the state. Of late, the non-state actors and other centrifugal forces diluted the society and develop the sense of insecurity in the minds of the people.

Violent ethnic conflict coupled with regional imbalance and identity discontent has culminated socio-political turmoil in Assam especially in Bodoland. Like other parts of the world, North East India also experienced with secessionist movement by demanding sovereignty from the established state system. Bodo's stir for political milieu and knocking of smaller identity groups in a deeply heterogeneous society create lots of security dilemma in the region. In order to establish durable peace in the region, the tools of violence need to be tame by creating peace and conflict resolution

mechanism. In the micro level Bodoland's security scenario, the identity consciousness on the part of both Bodos and non-Bodos need to be addressed within a democratic federal polity. But ironically political violence is an intrinsic part of democracy. So the democratic government much increased their viability in order to study each and every micro identity in its own right. Proper representation of each and every identity groups in the democratic settings ardently required which is indeed a solution to political violence thereby fulfilling the vital desires of the discontent.

## IV. THE NARRATIVES OF IDENTITY DISCONTENT AND NUANCES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN BODOLAND

The tools of conflict management are fundamental in solving the sense of identity discontent. Identity related conflict often feel deprived in comparing with relatively advantageous group and a sense of group solidarity develop within the community which in turn demands certain preferred outcomes. During the time of violent conflict, the issue of identity which is considered to be dynamic in character makes people fanatic and romantic by rigorously redefining the meaning of identity. Subsequently the identity issue creates a grave challenge in the process of conflict management. By creating spaces and providing opportunities to different identity groups, we can manage and resolve conflict or minimize their destructive propensity. Conflict management entrails the establishment of a peace process.

For the transformation of peace culture, conflict needs to be minimized by addressing and managing the grievances of each and every identity groups. Conflict management understands social conflict as evolving from identity discontent and seeks to promote constructive processes as a dynamic problem solving mechanism. It minimize destructive propensity of violent social conflict and increases the potential development of individual growth thereby co-relating the process of communication.

The violent conflict behaviour can be refined by following the tools of conflict management. Identity assertion which is considered to be a common character in this part of the world can be minimizing by proper implementation of conflict management style. It procreates changes in structural dimension of human experiences by understanding and addressing the root causes of violence. Accordingly it provides certain non-violent mechanisms and foster basic requirement of each human being. Conflict management basically put emphasis upon integration. To maintain equilibrium among the identity groups, they always be treated equally and for that democratic government must be capable enough. In this context we can cite Mary Parker Follett analysis,

*"There are three ways of dealing with difference: domination, compromise and integration. By domination only one side gets what it wants; by compromise neither side gets what it wants; by integration we find a way by which both sides may get what they wish".*

Violence is always intermingled with social complexities of which in the long results in violent conflicts. In some occasions, ethnic bias may lead to the enormous ethnic strife

and violence in different parts of the world. Political violence has become a native character of democratic polity. Violence against religious minority in Bodoland can be seen as a product of democratic deficit in the region. To overcome the problems of violence in Bodoland, there must be a democratic federal state structure with secular mental outlook need to reflect. The equal representation of each and every social group in the power sharing mechanism can only provide a plausible solution of the on-going problems in Bodoland.

There must be political space and environment for minimizing hostility and violence among the identity groups. The religious minority i.e. muslims which are considered to be marginalized in Bodoland needs to be protected under democratic principle. The violent conflict between Bodos and muslims are in most cases economic in nature. Of late it takes the shape of identity discontent and political disorder. The genesis of most of the conflicts that has engulfed the Northeastern states of India is either to preserve the unique indigenous identity or due to the lack of economic development and opportunities for the large majority of the people or both (Madhab, J, 1999, p-08). Armed violence across and between communities result in massive levels of destruction to the people- physically, psychologically, culturally and economically (Deka, K. 1999, p- 141). In the context of Bodoland, the religious minority i.e. muslims are the vulnerable side for the last two decades.

## V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The ethnic assertion and identity discontent of various ethnic groups increases the degree of political violence in North East India and particularly in Assam. Ethnic chauvinism, illegal infiltration, landlessness, fratricidal killings, ethnic cleansing, communal violence etc are some of the visible sources of violence in Bodoland. In the hope of recognition, each group are increasingly taking up arms and thereby dismantling the order of democracy. The diverse groups inhabiting this state, have been pressing either for the creation of separate or autonomous state on the basis of their lingua-cultural identities or for special constitutional safeguards of their respective identities (Phukan, G. 1996, p-131).

Right from the time of independence the North East region of India has been confronting serious problems and most of these problems are centred on growing assertion by various ethnic groups. This ethnic assertion by these various ethnic groups has a very complicated impact on the politics of the region. Infect we can say that the issue of ethnic identity has been a very crucial issue in the socio-politico and economic aspects of the all north eastern states which has led to the emergence of many tribal movements in the region. In most cases the unresolved economic apprehension gave the political direction in each and every movement. The quest for identity and space has become a living phenomenon in Assam. Identity discontent followed by ethnic assertion creates an environment of fear, mistrust, disorder and violence in Bodoland. Increase numbers of fear psychosis and violent conflict lead Bodoland to establish a terror industry. In such a violent situation, the common civilian in Bodoland has to live

a life with constant anticipation of fear and anxiety which increases their vulnerability. In order to establish durable peace in the region thereby establishing human security norms, there is an increasing urge to rigorously re-examine the territorial council which is ethnically exhausted. Without addressing the core issues, all process of negotiated settlements and dialogue proof to be futile. Before taking any decision for Bodoland, the political regime must understand about people's psychology and what people want. While making theoretical assumption in terms of root causes of marginalization and alienation of the ethnic communities, the role of the state as an institution to deliver welfare services to the needy section is to be scrutinized.

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