



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Political Science

HISTORICAL AND FOLKLORE DIMENSIONS OF INTER- COMMUNITY RELATIONS FOR PEACE AND UNITY AMONGS THE PLAINS AND HILL TRIBES BETWEEN ASSAM AND OTHER STATES OF NORTH-EAST INDIA.

KEY WORDS: Ethnic, North-East, Tribes, Tradition.

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic archives, North-East India is the home of more than two hundred ethnic groups. Each community is characterized by divergent identities. At the same time they have much in common with the culture and traditions of the neighbors. Present splintered relations and misunderstanding amongst the different plains and hill tribes of North-East India, there is some hope of rebuilding the bridge of inter-community understanding if we dip into the resources of history and folklore of the region. History, cited with folklore enters into determining content and quality relations between hundreds of communities inhabiting the hill and plains of North-East India.

INTRODUCTION:

North-east is the most ethnically diverse region in India. It is home to around four hundred million people including two hundred and thirteen of the six hundred thirty five tribal groups listed by the anthropological survey in India. It is considered as the archives of ethnic study. They live in this Sub-Himalayan tract in different ecological setting which is also called as mini India.. Though each community is characterized by distinct identity, they have much in common with the culture and traditions of the neighbors. There is some hope in present fractured relation of rebuilding the bridge of inter-community understanding if we revive the historical ties among these communities. Present paper is a simple attempt to focus our attention in this regards.

METHODOLOGY:

The entire research has been formulated within empirical study based on personal observation and collection of secondary data from various books, journal and magazine. In using this methodology care has been taken to avoid both the extremes, that is one-sided emphasis on objective conditions and subjective interpretation divorced from abstract historical reality.

Issues of the parameters of study: The aim of the study is to identify the historical areas of rebuilding the bridge of inter-communities understanding among the people of hill and plain tribes. The study highlights some of the historical practice of inter-communities ties.

Jonbeel Mela:

Jonbeel mela is a three day community fair held during the winter months of Magh bihu with the post harvest season at a historical place known as dayang Belguri at jonbeel. It is five km from the Jagiroad in Morigaon district of Assam. The Jonbeel is so called because a large natural water body is shaped like a crescent moon. The history of this mela is entrenched in folk history alluding to common origin of the chiefs or rulers (roja or king) of the hills and plains communities. Legend current among the Tiwa tribesmen of Morigaon and Kamrup has it that four brothers from a place called Thinmowphlong located in Assam-Meghalaya border, moved down and established four separate kingdoms in the Assam plains as well as Meghalaya. The oldest brother founded his kingdom in Dimoria in the plains. The second oldest founded the Gobha kingdom on the eastern boundary of Dimoria. The third brother founded the kingdom of khoiram and the fourth founded the Milim chiefdom. The people claim that the last two lie in Khasi hills of Meghalaya.

Before the mela takes place an Agni puja is performed for the wellbeing of the mankind. The mela starts with community fishing in Jonbeel wetland. The Gova king along with his countries visits the mela and collects taxes from his subjects. People perform their traditional dance and music, making the whole atmosphere full of joy.

During the accession a huge bazaar is held. A few days before the mela starts, communities and tribes like Karbi, Khasi, Tiwa and Jayantia of the north-east come down from the hills with products and interchange their merchandise with local people in a barter system. It is said to be a hi-tech age barter system and perhaps the only fair in India where barter system is still alive.

Here, people from hills bring spices, herbs, ginger; fruits to exchange them with rice, fish, pithas and other stuff which not available in hill. Some 10,000 tribal villagers from the nook and corners of Assam come here and meet at the beautiful place. They spent their three days in makeshift bamboo huts as a greater family and share their movement each other. They dine together as a group.

The mela is of ethnic and socio-cultural importance as this becomes a common meeting ground from different hill tribes of Assam and Meghalaya, including the people of the plains. It stands for harmony and brotherhood, exchange of culture, expression of love for plains by innocent hill people. During the fair (mela) these communities perform their traditional dances and organized cock fights, fish melas and wooden furniture bazaar to attract customers from the plains.

Ties between Sherdukpen and plains communities of Assam:

The Sherdukpen , a small tribe of Mahayana sect in West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh, has an interesting myth which has it that they are the descendants of a Tibetan prince who married an Ahom princes. Tibet lies in the far north of Sherdukpen habitat while Assam plains (Darrang and Sonitpur District in the northern bank of Brhamaputra) lie to the south. Influences emanating from both these regions characterize their life and culture.

The Sherdukpens and their northern neighbours, the Monpas, has the tradition of winter visit to the plains villages of Darrang and Sonitpur districts close to the foot-hills region. They used to move down to a place called Doimara in the foot-hills and camp there for about three months for visit to the plains villages. From Doimara they would make several trips to the plains villages with their pack-horses loaded with their produce and return with loads of paddy collected from the villagers.

Though legends abound, it is not clear how and when they began their annual winter trips. It is probably that their formalized economic relations with the Koch and Kachari peasants began as a political arrangement between them and the rulers of Assam who wanted to maintain peace in the border regions. The Sherdukpens believed that once territory extended over the plains, and they thus acquired right to tributes from plains villages. In fact, the plainsmen still refer to the Sherdukpen visitors as rajas (kings) while the Sherdukpens refer to the plains villagers as bohokia Assamese

term meaning subject or subordinate people.

The bohotias received certain token gifts (dry chilly, dry raddish, jabarang, parched maize, shoulder bags etc) from the Sherdukpens for return gifts of substantial quantities of paddy.

The transaction between Sherdukpens and plains villagers took place among defined partners continuing through successive generations. This led to close intimacy and inter-community understanding. The bonds were as strong as between relatives. The Sherdukpens have a remarkable regard for Assamese items such as gamosa, erdi-chadar, brass and bell-metal ware, and so on. These items are greatly cherished and valued by them, so much so that brass and bell-metal ware, collectively called pitli by them, are preserved as family treasures and heirlooms.

Ties between Nyishi and plains communities of Assam :

The Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh too has similar tradition of close cultural ties with the Assamese villagers of the plains. In many case, the Ahom rulers even granted them temporary fishing rights in the ponds and marshes in the plains during the winter months. Like the Sherdukpen, the Nyishis too have great regard for items such as *endi-chadar* from the plains. The ceremonial attire of the Nyishi is incomplete without *endi* woven by the Assamese villagers.

Ties between Nocte and plains communities of Assam:

In the days of yore, a section of the Nocte tribe of Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh adopted a nominal form of Vaishnavism by accepting saran bhajan (religious instruction and mode of worship) as discipline of the Bareghar Satra of Nazira. Traces of this conversion remains to this day.

Ties between Wancho and plains communities of Assam :

At the end, a poignant tale from a Wancho village of Tirap District of Arunachal Pradesh. The village is Rusa which has earned notoriety in the Assamese mind last two decades in the border conflict between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The Wancho is a head-hunting tribe of yester years. They are among the gentlest of peoples of our hills. Their used to be tremendous understanding and affection as well as inter-culture given and taken between the Wanchos and their Assamese neighbors. Much of these has fairly snapped today.

A legend current in Rusa, the Wancho village, has it that when the Ahom prince Godapani escaped to 'Naga hill' to avoid persecution by the then Ahom king, he found refuge in this village and became a welcome and honoured guest. At Rusa, he fell in love with maiden, Dalimi. Eventually, when peace returned to Assam Godapani left Rusa and returned to Assam. The wonder of wonder is that even today the Rusa maidens meet every tear on a particular evening and sing soulful songs' recounting the sorrow and anguish of Dalimi who was abandoned and left behind by her lover prince from the plains. As they sing, tears stream down their cheeks. They weep today remembering a love story of centuries ago.

We have very rich resource in the domain of folklore and traditions of the communities for rebuilding and reviving inter-community relationship which political decisions can seldom deliver

CONCLUSION

Present fractured relations, tensions, conflicts and misunderstanding amongst the different plains and hill tribes of North-East India, there is some hope of rebuilding the bridge of inter-community understanding if we dip into the resources of history and folklore of the region. The oral history partly real and partly fictional created the environment of inter-community relations between diverse communities living in the hills and plains area. History, cited with folklore

enters into determining content and quality relations between hundreds of communities inhabiting the hill and plains of Assam and rest of the North-East India.

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