

## THE PRESENT STATUS, IDENTITY AND IDENTITY CRISIS FACING BY THE ETHNIC LANGUAGES

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### Abstract

According to the Oxford Dictionary language is the method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in an agreed way; and the word ethnic denotes origin by birth or descent rather than nationality, it very much relates to race or culture. India is a country comprising of several states. People belonging to different races, cultures, traditions and languages etc. form what is called India. In order to meet these differences and gaps our constitution has adopted only one language as the official language. But it solely depends upon every individual society to maintain and preserve its own identity and the constitution does not have any restriction regarding this. The present status of some of our ethnic languages is nearing extinction ----- the cause can never be some outer elements or factors. The Identity and Identity Crisis faced by some ethnic languages are due to politicization ----- where one results in ethnic conflicts and the other leads to the finding of a solution by advocates of law.

**Key Words: ethnicity, nationality, culture, language, identity.**

## Introduction

India is a land belonging to different ethnic groups with a variety of cultures, traditions, languages and dialects etc. an anti-India sentiment grew up among some communities because of the dominance of a particular group or individual class. Whenever a crisis is felt of a distinct identity among the ethnic groups it always resulted in a number of movements where autonomy was demanded. Variety of factors gives birth to an identity. There are many ethnic groups having their own distinct culture, language or dialect-----and they are facing crisis of losing their identity. The politics of our country is leading the ethnic languages to face this crisis more or less through their misinterpretation. Assam as such is a state of India which consists of people belonging to different races, cultures, traditions etc. If we try to establish Assam only as a state then, retaining all our traditional values and languages, altogether for the betterment of the state.

## Objectives and Methodology

The objective of the paper is to make an analysis of the present status, identity and identity crisis faced by the ethnic languages in India. A very brief study I made to show the sense of being an Indian and that ethnicity cannot overcome nationality.

The methodology used here is purely analytical and help of secondary sources of information such as newspapers, journals, articles, books etc. has been taken.

### Review of Related Literature

Ethnicity is “the sense of collective belonging to a named community of common myths or origin and shared memories, associated with an historic homeland”(Smith, 1999: 262). Ethnic identity is a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one’s identity or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group.(Phinney, Romero, Nava & Huang, 2001; Tse, 1997). Today in Assam, there are either movements for separate states or autonomy on the part of different ethnic groups. These groups had come together during the Assam Movement 1979-85 but the Assam Accord 1985 mentioned only the ethnic Assamese. That alienated the groups that had identified themselves with a common Assamese identity (Roy 1995: 41-43). For A.K.Baruah (2004; 19) “identity is directly related to the emergence of an educated elite in the concerned community.” The stronger groups being unable or unwilling or both often do not take cognizance of even the legitimate needs and aspirations of weaker ethnic groups (Datta: 1990: 39). Dov Ronen (1986:1) suggests “ethnicity is politicized into the ethnic factor when an ethnic group is in conflict with the political elite over such issues as the

use of limited resources or the allocation of benefits. Stanley Tambiah (1989:339) says that “central problems posed by our present phase of ethnic conflicts are startlingly different arising out of an intensified ‘ politicization of ethnicity’ and ensuing in conflicts between member groups of a state and polity, which itself is thought to be in crisis, (the crisis of the state). Shakuntala Boro (2006: 464) describes that the political ambitions and organizations of other interests became easy at the backdrop of cultural identity as cultural identity is an emotional and sentimental issue that evokes mass support.

### **Statement of the problem**

India is a country comprising of several states and people belonging to different races, cultures, traditions and languages etc. form what is called India. India does not mean only Gujrati, Marathi or Assamese and in order to meet these differences and bridge the gaps our constitution has adopted only one language as the official language. If we take into account the USA then we can see that it has a racially and ethnically diverse population. Officially there are six such categories. People speak Chinese, French, German etc. in the US but the primary language used for legislation, executive orders, rulings etc. is English. In our neighbouring state Bihar people speak Magahi, Bhojpuri, and Maithili etc. Bangladesh is a land where different ethnic groups like the Hajong,

Manipuri, Khasi, Chakma, Rajbanshi etc. prevail. It solely depends upon every particular society to maintain and preserve its own identity and the constitution does not have any restriction regarding this. The present status of some of our ethnic languages is nearing to extinction-- -----the cause can never be some outer elements. For example people living in India are Indians similarly people living in Assam are Assamese. Indians adopted Hindi as their common link of communication similarly Assamese has been adopted by the people of Assam. Here one is reminded of Dr. B.R.Ambedkars idea of Indian states where he wanted linguistic states in India.

The Koch Rajbongshis in Assam are facing such an identity crisis. They are in demand of a separate state, where statehood can be demanded only when one has a separate identity. Being politically motivated they are now of the view that they are not Assamese at all-----without a separate identity of language. Language is the primary tool of any ethnic group. We can here quote Alphonso Daudett "When people are enslaved as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to their prison."

The cause of the identity crisis being faced by such ethnic groups cannot be any outer element but that the group itself failed to preserve their separate identity-----of language, culture and tradition getting

mixed up with the greater Assamese identity. It may be that a desire for power, economic independence and many other facilities are felt now by these people.

## Conclusion

This paper has tried to deal with the ethnic identity issue. It has a brief look at the double identity issue of the ethnic groups specially the Assamese. While discussing the problem there aroused a question whether this identity crisis is created or it just evolved. Whenever there is suppression, exploitation and dominance of a superior group over the weaker sections of the society it results into the need of a separate and distinct identity. But whenever it is politicized it resulted in a conflict. India is a unity in diversity but assimilation will not do. It requires integration and the nation should try to recognize the specificities of each component. Political organizations should try therefore to give every ethnic group their due share in every sphere of life. Recognition should also be given to their culture, tradition and language. The issue is very sensitive and so measures has to be taken by the Govt. to ensure them of finding a solution with respect to their cultural, linguistic and traditional identity.

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