STATE POLICIES, DISCONTENT AND SUB-NATIONAL MOVEMENT IN INDIA: ASSUMPTIONS REGARDING THE KAMTAPUR MOVEMENT

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Abstract

This is a review paper which studies the reason behind the social movements happening in India. Based on this an assumption regarding probable reason that could lead toKamtapur Movement was made. When state policies are made without taking into account various linguistic, cultural and religious diversities then it leads to various social movements. Also, when proper implementation of different state policies are not done and different ethnic groups are being marginalized for a longer duration there comes a situation when these groups starts revolting. The review of different studies also highlights the fact that state tries to sideline these issues by creating rift between different ethnic groups.

Keywords: Social Movement, Ethnic Groups, State Policies, Development.

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Introduction

This paper reviewsscholarly works across cognate social sciences in order to make an assumption regarding the reason behindKamtapur movement in India.

At present the world is undergoing many social movements which occur due to inequalities in social structure. These are spearheaded by group of members having similar goals and ideology. The participation by the members is usually voluntary and they form organization. Social movements are the mechanisms adopted by these groups for mitigating their deprivation through demonstration of power (Oommen, 2010). When social movements against the state occur, the state generally provides a negative response towards it and describes it as a challenge faced by the governance. Different tactics are adopted by the state to curb out these movements ranging from dialogues as well as negotiation to brutal repression. Whenever these strategies lead to contradictory results state tries to divert the attention of the members who are spearheading these movements (Shah, 2002).

Sub-nationalism is a type of new social movement (Singh, 2001) which at present is a significant challenge for India. No doubt it is true that the attainment of Indian independence after a long regime of colonial rule marked the beginning of a new vision related to nation building, establishing democracy and entire societal development as well as wellbeing of the citizens. But achieving all these was not at all easy due to – among other things -- the existing diversities in India in terms of ethnicity based on different cultures, religions and languages. The violent memories of partition forced many to believe that a diverse country like India would not be able to remain united together for a long time. This belief started turning into reality with the resurgence of the feeling of sub-nationalism among different ethnic groups. Although our constitution has granted certain fundamental rights to all its citizens, emphasizes a representative democracy and ensures development and wellbeing of all ; but still after having celebrated more than fifty years of independence, these are seldom practiced in reality in its true sense. Because of these, different ethnic communities of India have been protesting against their prolonged oppression and exploitation.

Review of Relevant Scholastic Works

The world in reality consists of heterogeneous societies practicing plurality of culture. According to AmartyaSen, 'culture' influences our lives in many ways, which can be seen in terms of economic, social and political behavior. Then, culture should not be seen as a homogeneous attributes as we may find certain variations within the same cultural set up due to its dynamic aspect. In addition, different cultures are highly interrelated. All these characteristics of culture help in understanding both human behavior and social as well as economic development. However, if any asymmetry of power occurs there then it does leads to strong reactions from different cultural groups (Sen, 2004). Presently, the world is undergoing many social movements, which are actually the result of inequalities in social structure. These movements depict the attribute of 'collectivity' which are organized as well as continuous in nature, accommodating either extra institutional collective action or a mixture of both extra institutional (protesting in the streets) and institutional (political lobbying activity) activity, in order to either promote or resist changes in the group, society or world order of which it belongs. These movements are goal-directed activity, pursued jointly by two or more individuals. The social movements can be regarded as both a form and sponsor of collective action (Adam and Snow, 1997).

Anthony D. Smith viewed that collective actions are more important for organizing social movements compared to individual actions. When many individual identities are combined together, it leads to the formation of collective identities where more attention is paid towards collectivity compared to individual, for instance, ethnic communities, linguistic groups, cultural groups etc. The nature and durability of collectivities helps in understanding the intensity of social movements. In his writing, he focused on how collectivities are formed. For this he gave the example of transformation of ethnic category into ethnic community and stated the different conditions responsible for this such as common ancestry, shared memories and culture, homeland aspiration, solidarity as well as the activities of modern state, the secular intelligentsia and of external agencies.

He further went on stating that the ethnic communities these days are being transformed into ethnic nations through three different processes. First, being 'vernacular mobilization', that

involves a rediscovery of certain attributes of the culture of the referred ethnic community for instance indigenous traditions, customs, memories, symbols and mainly languages. This task is mainly performed by the ethnic intelligentsia and is disseminated to the whole population of the designated group. As a result, ethnic languages as well as cultures are being modernized. The second process, which succeeds the previous one, is the 'cultural politicization' of the vernacular heritage. The indigenous traditions are politicized for waging war both against outsiders and against those who are the guardians of the traditions. The last process is 'ethnic purification' that is the result of earlier processes and deals with the sanctity of the culture in context. However, this should not be seen either as an ethnic inferiority complex or as an ethnic defensiveness. Thus, the factors behind the transformation of ethnic category into ethnic community and the impact of nationalist ideology on the later help in understanding the strength of nationalism which in turn alters the already existing interstate systems.

He also stated that if we perform a detail study of the different ethnic conflicts, which occurred throughout the past and is being continued at present in many parts of the world it will highlight the fact that conditions required for the development of ethnic relation into long-term ethnic antagonisms, cannot be met always in a similar fashion. Rather, there are varieties of ways that can initiate this feeling such as war, revolution, migration and state action, which may or may not encompass other ethnic communities. Therefore, we need to look into each ethnic conflict separately for initiating solutions and policy formulations (Smith, 1993).

After, the disintegration of the Mughal Empire, the Britisher's entered India as a trading company with a motive of colonizing our country. Later, they succeeded in achieving the same by conquering different areas of the subcontinent one by one. Although, they built a huge colonial empire across the Indian subcontinent, but then also, it cannot be referred as an integrated entity because of the existence of two distinct categories within the British India, namely, British India (directly administered by the British) itself and Princely India (had treaty relations with the British) (Laxmikanth, 2010).While looking into the ethnic conflict in the Indian scenario during the colonial era, SuryasikhaPathak stated various factors such as the changes in land relations, patterns of landownership and demographic structure that led to the marginalization of a large number of ethnic communities (Pathak, 2012). DipeshChakrabarty

viewed that Britishers during the colonial regime introduced pattern of modern state to Indian society and not a nation state. The attributes of modernity could be seen in the use of different statistical measures based on which the techniques of government were arranged. This according to the Britishers helped in providing fairness and justice in terms of resource distribution to different competing communities. However, while doing these, ethnic identities were taken for granted and not seen as porous. He stated one example that whenever enumeration of population Census took place, discrete kind of identities like scheduled castes and tribes were used for referring different ethnic identities, even if they underwent certain changes overtime. Since, 1890 onwards, ethnic revolts in India had been quite violent in nature and recent problems are much more glaring which highlights the fact that there is a necessity of taking into account the vague boundaries within which the identities are built (Chakrabarty, 1995).

When the Britishers were leaving India, the territory which was under British India was partitioned. But this was not done in case of the princely states. Also they were not given any independence. They had only one option i.e. either joining with Pakistan or India. (Schendel, 2002). Many of the larger princely states aimed for independence. As a result, some of the Princely States didn't wish to join any of the two countries and this action actually created barrier in the way of nation building in India. In order to integrate all these areas, Indian leaders took the help of different tactics such as negotiations, allurement, arousing pan-India sentiment and armed forces. But, the integration was not liked by most of the residents of these areas and the anger still persists in them e.g. Manipur, Nagaland (Chandra et.al, 2008).

SajalBasu highlighted the factors, which were mainly responsible for the disturbance of inter-ethnic balance in the Indian context. First being the increasing pressure on land due to rapid influx of migrants. Second factoris related to the deprivation of the indigenous people mainly caused due to their displacement and dispossession. Third is the economic domination of the migrant groups (Basu, 2005). For instance, the North East region underwent the problem of influx of migrants from its neighboring states and countries, the rate of which is still high in the present scenario. This resulted in the change in demography of the region and these migrant groups seek to dominate over the indigenous ethnic communities(Chandra et.al, 2008).

The fourth factor highlighted by him is the fear among the indigenous ethnic groups of being submerged in terms of both culture and language (Basu, 2005).For example, during the national movement, our leaders promised that after attaining independence, the states will be reorganized on the basis of different linguistic and cultural groups, so that the cultures in our country can be maintained without compromising the national unity. But then, after the attainment of independence, they tried to deviate from the promise because they felt that reorganization of states on the above mentioned basis might lead towards disruption and disintegration of the whole nation. Thus, they thought of focusing towards the social and economic development of the country. These basically angered certain section of population who became successful in gathering a wide support. Ultimately, the Central Government was forced to appoint a State Reorganization Commission in 1953 for addressing the question related to redrawing the boundaries of states.At independence, except Manipur and Tripura, the entire Northeast comprised Assam.[1] The Assam Government tried to impose the Assamese language on different tribal communities living there. These resulted in sub-national movement e.g. Meghalaya, Mizoram (Chandra et.al, 2008).

The tribal people are mainly concentrated in Maharashtra, Gujarat Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal where they are in a minority. Also, the tribal people are concentrated in north-eastern India where they are in a majority. After independence, the Union Government has been trying to integrate these tribal people with the rest of Indian society without destroying their identity and culture. Therefore, several constitutional measures has been adopted for the tribal people such as promotion of their education as well as economic interests, their protection from social injustice as well as exploitation, protection of their right to land, extension of full political rights to them, reservation of their seats in legislatures as well as administrative services, their welfare and monitoring of all the above mentioned measures. But, due to the weak execution of all these measures, the progress among the tribal people is happening very slowly. Except Northeast, the situation among the tribal's inhabiting in other parts of India got worsened. Added to this the change in demography of the region due to the settling of non-tribal people who exploited the tribal people led to sub-national movement e.g. the Jharkhand movement.(Chandra et.al, 2008).

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[1] North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was created in 1948 consisting of the border areas of Assam.

India being a geographically vast country was therefore divided into six Zonal Councils (the Northern-Zonal Council, the North-Eastern council, The North-Central Zonal Council, the Eastern-Zonal Council, the Western-Zonal Council and the Southern-Zonal Council), according to the Part- III of the State Reorganization Act, 1956, so that cooperation among all the states can be developed (Laxmikanth, 2010). But, the North East region is connected to the Indian mainland by a narrow strip of land known as the Siliguri Corridor which after the Partition of India in 1947 got reduced to a mere landlocked region ultimately affecting its economy to a great extent. This region suffered negligence in terms of development. Added to this Further, the region remained cut off from the other parts of India which helped the neighboring countries to take advantage of the situation. The north-eastern India underwent mainly three types of movement i.e. sub-national movement, secessionist movement and opposition to outsiders. Added to this lop-sided regional development in different part of India and within state for a long time led to sub-national movement e.g. Telengana, Vidarbha, Saurashtra, Bundelkhand, Gorkhaland, Bodoand(Chandra et.al, 2008).

Looking into the Central Government policies for settling ethnic disputes in the post-independence era, we will find that there exist major flaws. NaniGopalMahanta highlighted the three approaches that are undertaken by the Indian Government for dealing the various ethnic disputes. First, the Indian Government adopted a divide and rule policy and there are many occasions when they tried to divide the ethnic insurgent groups. In order to do that they patronized new rebel groups. Secondly, they imposed certain accords but then the provisions were not implemented. Third, they took the help of tribal-to-tribal approach, where they kept different ethnic groups at conflict with each other so that this helps them in negotiating power. All these above-mentioned approaches provided the state with a provisional respite as well as benefit the leaders of those ethnic organizations who get power in their hand and come in favor of the state. As a result, real issues get sidelined and after sometime a new rebel group starts protesting against those (Mahanta, 2005).

During the time of the framing of the Indian Constitution, the framers adopted the federal system of government. This was done for facilitating efficient governance of the vast country and for maintaining national unity while taking into account various socio-cultural diversity. Under this system, the Indian constitution seeks to establish a dual polity that consist Union at the centre

and the States at the periphery. This can be seen in terms of linguistic reorganization of the states. Both the forms of government are assigned with sovereign powers, which they can exercise in different fields allotted to them by the Constitution. BalrajPuri focused on different problems of federal government. First, the power division was done in such a manner so that it favored the Centre compared to the states. Secondly, he referred to the problem of protection of minority rights both at the local and national level and viewed that federalism should not be looked only in terms of administrative function but also in terms of political power that can be applied both vertically and horizontally. Third, our Constitution has provided special status and provisions to certain regions where these socio cultural groups have a single territorial base. But the principle of federalism is not being extended in case of those ethnic identities which don't have any territorial bases and cut across regional boundaries. This sort of differential treatment was initiated in order to restrict the aspiration of statehood from these communities (Puri, 1998).

RomeshThapar in his article stated that Indian constitution had implemented few protective discrimination policies. For instance the fifth and the sixth schedule and certain special provisions to some states like Article 370 and 371 so that these areas are protected from the highly developed and affluent migrated groups who try to occupy the resource base of these areas (Thapar, 1986). Sanjay Barbora said that most of the present day constitutional policies for the protective discrimination of the impoverished ethnic groups may sound good but then these get limited when the state use these as a tool for managing ethnic conflicts. All these policies roots back to the time of colonial administrative system. Now in order to manage the ethnic conflicts, the state uses its armed forces, which suggest that it is more focused towards condemning insurgency rather than focusing on the overall development of the region (Barbora, 2002). In addition, SanjibBaruah viewed how protective discrimination policy of our Central Government in terms of sixth-schedule of the Constitution led to statehood aspiration by other ethnic communities in the North East region. The sixth schedule deals with allotment of autonomous districts and autonomous regions within districts as applicable only specified scheduled tribes. Whenever these autonomous districts get transformed into full-fledged states the policy of protective discrimination are provided at the state level. Most of the policy makers of our country did not took into account the historical background of the concerned region and went on extending the policy of sixth schedule to those areas where there exists far more mixed demographic picture (Baruah, 2003).

Rajesh Dev looked at the above-mentioned lacunae of the policies of the Central Government. He highlighted the fact that all these had forced the ethnic groups to self-consciously fashion a culture by invoking different symbols and myths that not only helps in emphasizing their autonomy and differences, but also legitimate their views of subordination and exploitation by either state or other dominant groups (Dev, 2004).

SajalBasu further stated that after independence, Indian Government emphasized much to build a modern nation state through economic and social forms of modernization and the ethno-nationalism was accommodated within this framework, which was thought of benefiting from them. However, it was seen that mere focus on economic modernization blurred out the cultural and ethnic boundaries. He further said that consolidations of communities are possible through different attributes of ethnicity. However, if this is mixed up with the issues of religion and caste then it can lead to the division of the communities vertically (Basu, 2005).

Assumptions Regarding the Kamtapur Movement:

The Kamtapur movement got prominent in the last two decades in the northern part of West Bengal (Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjiling, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Maldah) and the adjoining districts of Assam (Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darang, Morigaon, Sonitpur and Lakhimpur) (Map1.1). This movement is spearheaded

Map1.1 Map of KamtapurProposed by Kamtapur Association
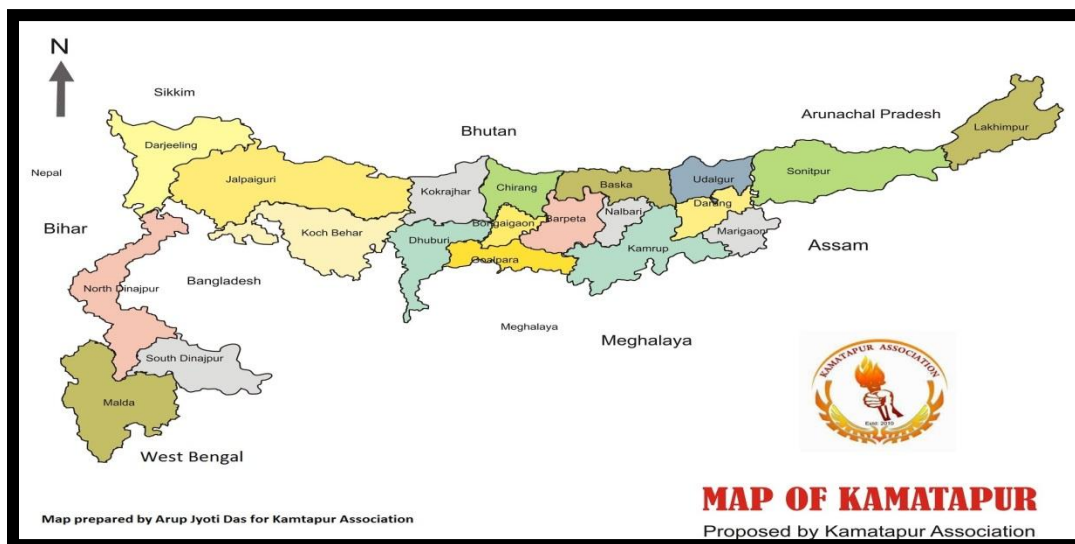
Source: Kamatapur Association

by the Rajbanshi community who are being marginalized for a long time by the culturally and economically powerful groups. The reason behind the naming of this particular movement as Kamtapur is due to the persistence of a rich heritage of the Kamta kingdom in the minds of the Rajbanshi community.[2] Although, this is mainly regarded as a movement for identity recognition but it combines with certain materialistic demands also.

During the colonial period, the Rajbanshi community (mainly an agrarian community) inhabited in the north Bengal region and was marginalized for a long time by the 'upper caste Hindu Bengalis'. (Basu, 2003; Ray, 2013; Das, 2009; ParthaSen and AbhijitDutta, 2012; JyotirmoyProdhani, 2012). Prior to the Indian independence, this movement differed in its forms and tactics. It basically revolved around the upliftment of the Rajbanshi community in terms of identity, their representation in the governing bodies and social as well as economic development (Basu, 2003).

After the attainment of Indian independence, the Rajbanshi community got settled in different parts of India and underwent a fragmented identity both in terms of nomenclature and category. This particular community came to be known as 'Koch-Rajbanshi' in Assam, 'Koch' in Meghalaya and 'Rajbanshi' in West Bengal and Bihar. They got scheduled caste status in West Bengal, scheduled tribe status in Meghalaya and other backward class (OBC) status in all the districts of Assam except the undivided Goalpara district where they came to be recognized as most other backward class (MOBC) (Choudhury, 2013).

In West Bengal, the Rajbanshis are mainly concentrated in Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri. Scholastic works suggest that, this community was marginalized by the dominant Bengali groupin West Bengal and their condition got worsened further due to the following state policies:-

(1)   After Indian independence, the Cooch Behar (which was a princely state during the colonial regime) got integrated with India on 28th august, 1949. But, soon it was incorporated as

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[2] Derived from a pamphlet of All Kamtapur Students' Union dated 6th January 1999 and a pamphlet of Kamatapur People's Party dated 5th September 2011.

a district of West Bengal against the will of the Rajbanshis of Cooch Behar who regarded it as a conspiracy plotted by the Indian Government and the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy[3] (Rai, 2002; Ray, 2013; Sen, 2007; Sen and Dutta, 2012).

(2)   The partition of 1947 led to the huge influx of Bangladeshi refugees to the Northern part of West Bengal region. Presumably they are all Hindus coming out of Muslim dominated areas. They occupied the land belonging to the Rajbanshi community and were financially supported by the West Bengal Government (Ray, 2013 and Sen and Dutta, 2012).

(3)   The language spoken by the Rajbanshi community is known as Kamtapur language. But, the Rajbanshi language has been incorporated as a dialect of Bengali in the census report (Census 2001).

(4)   One of the main objectives of the Education Commission of 1964-66 was to promote social and national integration and for this one of the major recommendations was to teach three languages comprising of mother tongue, Hindi and other Modern Indian Languages in schools, but then, the mother tongue of the Rajbanshi community is highly neglected and was not introduced at the primary level of education (ParthaSen and AbhijitDutta, 2012). Also, the West Bengal Government did not include the history of the Rajbanshis into the official history of Bengal and destroyed many historical memoirs belonging to this community. In Assam also, the state language was forced upon the Koch-Rajbanshis and their history turned into a footnote (Prodhani, 2012).

(5)   Instead of betterment through the protective policies the flaws of these policies became barrier in the way of development of the Rajbanshi community (Ray, 2013).

Based on these above mentioned dimensions of marginalization, it may be possibly assumed that the Kamtapur movementis due to discontent towards faulty state policies. A number of demands of varying nature came up in different times from various groups and organizations representing

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[3] The merger of Cooch Behar with West Bengal on 1st January 1950 was unconstitutional. It was done by an 'order under section 290A of the Government of India Act of 1935' (Majumdar, 1977)

the Rajbanshi community. In north Bengal the demand mainly revolved around a separate statehood, recognition of Kamtapur language in the eight schedule of the Indian Constitution, cultural betterment of the Kamtapurians, economic as well as social opportunities (e.g. Reservation of 70% of the seats for the Kamtapurians in the North Bengal University and the North Bengal Medical College, 80% reservation in government jobs, Establishment of agricultural university and engineering college etc.[4]), solution of the enclave as well as refugee problems and protection from police atrocities. In Assam, the demand was mainly for scheduled tribe (plain) status and a separate statehood.

Conclusion:

The above review of different scholarly works suggests that faulty state policies give rise to social movement. Sometimes it may be the case that proper implementation of state policies is not done. It is necessary to keep in mind the linguistic, cultural and religious diversity of India before formulating different policies and implementing them. Added to this,upliftment of already marginalized groups is required and they should be bought into the mainstream. But while doing this they should not be overshadowed by the powerful groups. Further, development be it economic, cultural and regional is need of the hour and should be in a balanced manner throughout the country in order to minimize the social movements rather than applying divide and rule policy between different ethnic groups.

Acknowledgement

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[4]Derived from a pamphlet of All Kamtapur Students' Union dated 6th January 1999.

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