

## Nationalism and Communism: A case study of Assam.

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### Abstract:

Justice is an abstract idea. Law is the tool to attain it. The formulation of law depends upon the ideological element it practices. Nationalism is a outcome of independence struggle. Communism is shares the same heritage. Various scholars have interpreted the ideologies in various ways. In Assam it is the geographical condition and tribal mode of production that has effected in shaping communism and nationalism much.

### Introduction.

Nationalism has been termed as **imagined** by Benedict Anderson. Assam was an independent state, detached from **main land India**, ruled by many rulers of various races, *Ahoms* and the British prominent among them. The culture of this land is tribal in many characters .Many scholar is of the opinion that those who share many common cultural traits can be termed as a nation.

Indian Communism can be regarded as ideological output of colonial,post colonial, post industrial society .In Assam, where communism did succeed in getting double figure MLAs ,declined after **Assam Agitation** is a matter of enquiry. Whether nationalism overshadowed communism is the question of hot debate in Assam.

Marxism has been termed as intellectual luxury by many scholars. Marxist stands of the view that society can be arranged in some designs and those social designs must support the weaker section. Nationalism this way supports some selective people, those who share some definite social policies. Both these theories exclude a section.

### Result and discussion:

Regarding religion, nationalist opts for equality among various religions.

Religion is regarded as some kind of cultural aspect and thinks of practice as a cultural right. Marxism regards religion as central to this heartless world. He says:

Karl Marx famously said, 'Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heart-less world, just as it is the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.'<sup>1</sup> This famous quote has been most miss-understood line of Marx. After terming religion as the opium of the masses, Marx said that it is spirit of the sprit less world, a hope in the otherwise hopeless world. Marx professes religion as a cultural weapon against oppression. In the same way nationalism wants culture as a medium of social change and unity at the same time.

Hiren Gohain has credited the leftist of Assam of keeping aloof the proletariat from the womb of ultra-nationalism.<sup>2</sup> Ultra nationalism can breed xenophobic tendencies. On the other hand nationalism breeds in Marxism a sense of communal unity, however classical Marxism only regards family as only social unit having social reality.

Many Marxist thinks that social progression is slow in nature. Thus Hiren Gohain credits *Sankar Deva* (the 16<sup>th</sup> century *Vaishnavism* saint) of being progressive although his ideas of social progression are

sluggish in nature. Nationalist thinks of human agent as active agents who can change social flow with their labor. Marx himself has termed labor as the most conscious activity of a human being. Lenin has advocated physical force to break the status quo. This questions and the stand taken by individuals can be termed as base from where we can brand them left nationalist, radical communist, social democrats and as such.

The first student organization *Assam Satra Sonmilon* was born in the year 1916 in Guwahati under the president ship of Lakshminath Bezbaruah <sup>3</sup>. Nationalist sentiment was infused among the students through this organization. Assam's pioneering literary organization *Assam Sahitya Sabha* and political organization *Assam Pradesh Congress Committee* was established at 1917 and 1921 respectively<sup>4</sup>. *Assam Sahitya Sabha* molded various communities into one Assamese identity and make people conscious of nationalistic sentiments.

Chinese war (1962) is a watershed event in the left political discourse in Assam. A section of left in India called it **left imperialism** and a section supported the theory that it was Jawaharlal Nehru's fault and defended China. The communist that supported the dialogue between India and China as a way of resolving the conflict, were termed as pro-Chinese <sup>5</sup>.

Marx has called all workers of the world to unite. Proletariat has been asked to form government by Marx. Achinta Bhattacharya says that, 'Indian revolution is a part of the world revolution' <sup>6</sup>. Within a state, various religion resides. How proletariat unity can be infused is a matter of different aspect.

Homen Borgohain supports the stand taken by the leftist intellectuals in the

language question as he goes on saying that a person cannot think properly if he is in improper in speaking a language.<sup>7</sup> Language is the most sensitive social affiliation. Marxist in Assam supports linguistic prominence of Assamese but without domination. Nationalist thinks and urges towards practice of Assamese language in all sphere of social life. The question however remains that how tribal people will respond to the **caste hindu version of assamese**. Assamese owes much vocabulary to the tribal origin.

The growth of economic activity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Assam is discussed by the leftist intellectuals like Sibanath Barman <sup>8</sup>. Assam, in 20<sup>th</sup> century, was primarily a **peasant based society**. Industrialization was in developing stage, with a slow pace of growth. Semi-industrial society is not capable of building a proletariat class. Other hand, peasant society imbeds nationalist society. That's why nationalism surpasses communism in Assam.

Indian nationalism has not hold much ground in Assam. Central policies have not been successful in fringe areas of Indian state. Tarak Chandra Goswami emphasized the point that the Central Parliament of India had taken the oath of establishing the socialist pattern of society in the year 1954 <sup>9</sup>. Besides central initiative assam have not shown much interest in socialism.

**Assam agitation** (1979-1985) is a prime factor in 20<sup>th</sup> century Assamese history. Hiren Gohain and Amalendu Guha talks about '**assimilation**' and '**assamiyasation**' during the Assam Movement <sup>10</sup>. This two theory has large value in the 20<sup>th</sup> century left politics in Assam. Assimilation was happening from the time where written evidence is not available. *Assamiyasation* is a modern phenomenon. *Assamiyasation* is more of a cultural term than a social one. According Bishnu Prasad Rabha *Narakasur*, *Bhismak* and *Bana* kings were contemporary and they signifies assimilation of

Mongolian and Aryan culture in Ancient Assam<sup>11</sup>.

Hiren Gohain calls Assamese middle class as 'the regional bourgeoisie'.<sup>12</sup> In the same breath, Gohain calls, 'It seems to me that it is unsatisfactory to regard the question from an abstract economic point of view and ignore its creative social and political initiatives'<sup>13</sup>. Regional bourgeoisie functioned as a creative force in the social life of 20<sup>th</sup> century Assam. The colonial legacy also played a role in the lives of Assamese middle class. Gunabhiram Barua, Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan, which was product colonial education, was nationalist also because of the modern British education. Lakhsminath Bez Baruah, Chandra Kumar Agarawala was exposed to colonial atmosphere in Calcutta. Colonial influence brought the *Assamese renaissance* of 18<sup>th</sup> century. This renaissance has a trickledown effect in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Leftist were itself, a product of the renaissance.

Relation between society and politics is largely determined by money and it's market<sup>14</sup>. In short, mode of production, determines the socio-cultural scenario. Leftist political parties judged it correctly that in peasant majority, they (leftist) must practice peasant culture.

## Cocclusion

Abraham Lincoln once said that one cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong. Marxism professes to do the same. But with the growing inequality of capitalism, nationalism and socialism serves as a regulatory mechanism. In Assam, socialism and communism derives its inspiration from the unique geographical feature of its kind.

It is interesting how communism and nationalism connected with the fringe elements of Assamese society like tea garden workers. Nationalist thinks of the proper assimilation of tea tribes and schedule caste to the umbrella of Assamese society. Growth of rebellious tendencies can be mitigated through distributing fruits of development among them. Keshab Mahanta draws parallel between a rice cultivator and tea-garden workers in the poem '*Tumar Matit Sahor Bagan*'.<sup>15</sup> Tea garden workers worked for big business owners sustaining on bare minimum. Corporate paid money that was much less than what workers deserved. So there is a parallel between a peasant and tea garden worker, they were victims of exploitation.

The approach towards industrialization by the communist and nationalist has been mixed. Communist opposed all out industrialization, without proper regularity mechanism. Plus, they pay equal importance to labor and the owner. Nationalism have advocated native capitalism and oppose foreign capital. Modern industry has been termed as a honeycomb by A.R.Desai.<sup>16</sup> Despite this, productive capital, factory employment and gross value of output in Assam in comparison to Indian value(100) in the year 1950 were 0.56,039 and 0.62 respectively.<sup>17</sup> This shows how nascent was industrial development in Assa

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