

## **A Case Study of The Threat to Human Security Posed by The Assam Movement**

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### **Abstract**

Assam movement is an anti-foreigner's movement launched by the dissidence of Assam against the illegal migrants. The illegal migrants are those who comes from prior East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, some from Nepal. There were political, economic and social base of this movement. The agitators demand for 3D's i.e. Detection, Disenfranchisement and Deportation as the people of Assam can protect their cultural identity and demography from the threat of foreign nationals. The subsequent period of the movement was 1979-1985. Geographically, the movement was confined to the Brahmaputra Valley which has been traditional homeland of Asomiyas and the people who were participated in this movement. The movement started in 6<sup>th</sup> November 1979 under the leadership of All Assam Student Union(AASU) and All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad(AAGSU) and officially ended on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1985 after signing a historic 'ASSAM ACCORD 1985'. Initially, the movement was conducted most disciplined and peaceful manner but the evolvement of ethnic tension and anti-election seeds had given birth of violence. That violence lead to extreme threat to human security, as human security is a non-traditional security that pose threats to the survival and development of a sovereign state and human kind. The air of Assam mingled with violence mob with individual killing and bomb attack as well as communities pitting against each other. Many people had died, the women and the children were main victims of the movement. This paper discusses the Assam movement, its genesis and how it had affected the security of life of the people.

**Keywords:** Assam movement, illegal migrants, Assam accord, human security.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Assam movement is a very significant incident in the history of Assam. It was basically anti-foreigner's movement started by the dissidence as well as indigenous people of Assam against the illegal migrants. The movement continued from 1979 to 1985 which was termed as 'Asom Andolan'. Geographically, the movement was confined to the Brahmaputra valley which is the traditional homeland of asomiy as and the people were greatly participated in the movement from this region. The movement started in 1979 under the leadership of All Assam Student Union(AASU), All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad(AAGSP). Assam movement refer to that movement which demanded to stop illegal migrants of foreign nationals to Assam from the neighboring countries i.e. Nepal and Bangladesh. The illegal migrants are those who comes from the two neighboring countries illegally and their residence became threat to indigenous people when it was observed that there were vast majority of foreign nationals included in the electoral list as they were used as voter bank in the country's election. The social, political as well as economic cause of the movement had led the threat towards human security of huge number of people of Assam at the cost of death and homeless especially minorities including women and children. The violence was led by the indigenous people Ahom, Bodo, Assamese Hindus and Nepalese attacking the Muslims. To gaining the

security of the indigenous people Assam had serious loss of majority human lives as well as vast property. This paper highlights the various incidents occurred during the period of Assam movement which reflected how Assam movement had created havoc situation and challenged human security.

### **HUMAN SECURITY AS A CONCEPT:**

Human security is a concept which tends to emphasize the safety of the people from both violent and non-violent threats. It gives more importance to individual than nation-state. It is an effort to create a global society where safety of the individual is the priority and institutions are built to enhance it. It is relatively a new concept and used to describe the protection of the people from the threats associated with foreign enemies, natural and human made disaster. It is a composite of humanitarian, economic and social security. The term human security was popularized by United Nations Development Program in the early 1990s. The UNDP's 1994 Human Development Report is considered as a milestone publication in the field of human security ensuring "freedom from want" and "freedom from fear" for all persons is the best path way to tackle the problem of global security. Many critics delivered different viewpoint regarding the concept of human security. The UNDP's 1994 HDR's definition of human security argues scope of global security should be extended to 7 areas such as :

- 1) Economic Security: It assured basic income for individuals whether it is from productive and remunerative work or from a publicly financed safety net.
- 2) Food Security: It requires that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to basic food.
- 3) Health Security: It guaranteed a minimum protect from diseases and unhealthy lifestyles.
- 4) Environmental Security: It aims to protect people from the short-term ravages of nature, man-made threat in nature and deterioration of the natural environment.
- 5) Personal Security: It aims to protect people from physical violence, whether from the state or external states, from individual and sub-state actors, from domestic abuse or from predatory adults.
- 6) Community Security: It aims to protect people from the loss of traditional relationships and values and from sectarian and ethnic violence.
- 7) Political Security: It is concerned with whether people live in a society that honors their basic human rights. Human Rights violations are most frequent during periods of political unrest.

Thus, human security a theoretical concept which is people centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented that should be implemented to protection of overall development of the people.

### **HISTORY OF ASSAM MOVEMENT**

The genesis of the movement lies in the partition of India when hundreds of thousands of refugees from East Bengal streamed into the areas that presently constitute Assam, West Bengal, Tripura and Bihar. Initially immigration from Bengal was encouraged by Sir Mohammed Suddullah's Muslim League ministry during world war I. Between 1951-1961 Assam's population increased by 36%. Census report in 1963 says at least 2.2 lakhs illegal migrants. Between 1961-1971 Assam population increased by 35%. Between 1951-1971 government deported only 1.9 lakh persons, leaving 2.8 lakhs alien in Assam. Until 1971 central government adopt policy that would have given shelter to all Hindu refugees and deport all Muslims infiltrators to East Pakistan. The unchecked influx of East Bengalis into Assam after the partition led to the passing of Immigrants Expulsion (from Assam) Act, 1950. This allowed only those who were displaced by civil disobedience. This act was repealed in 1957, of 7.65 lakhs people registered under it, only 1.43 lakh applied for citizenship. The Nehru-Liaquat Pact agreed that all those who returned to Assam by December, 1950 would be considered as Indian Citizen. This agreement did not adhere to Article 6 of Indian Constitution which says that those who came to India after July 19, 1948 must apply for

citizenship. ASU and AAGSP insisted best cutoff date would be 1951, when a National Register of Citizen was drawn. The problems of foreigners have been compounded by the certain laws that govern citizenship. These are-

- Constitution itself.
- Foreigners Act of 1946
- Passport Act of 1952
- Citizenship Act of 1956
- Restricted Areas Act of 1963

Between 1972 -1978, 99,580 Bangladeshi nationals were deported, more than 60% of them were Hindus. Although no precise estimates exist about the numbers of aliens in Assam. It was revealed in 1979 when by election had scheduled in Mangoldoi constituency, with death of MP Hiralal Patowari. For this electoral list was revised, as a result ,7000 men of 45000, about 1/6 of the electors were detected as foreigners by competent court. The election commission was advised to scrutinize the electoral rolls after the election. Henceforth the AASU leaders under presidentship of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and General Secretary Bhrigu Kumar Phukan declared 'no revision, no election'. They said they wanted 3D's -Detection, Deletion and Deportation of foreigners prior to the election of 14<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha seats. Initially the movement was started in a very disciplined and peaceful manner. Butturmoil was presence among Bengali speaking people of Tinsukia, Dumduma, Duliajan, Naharkatiya and North Kamrup as they were evoked by Muslim MLA against these 3D's. Then PM Indira Gandhi agreed to remove the foreigners name from electoral rolls if when Assam had taken the burden of all immigrants in the year 25<sup>th</sup> March 1971. On the other hand AASU agreed to accept all the foreigners that entered Assam between 1951-1961. AASU along with AAGSP started mass movement from 6<sup>th</sup> September to 10<sup>th</sup> October with the slogan such "Brihattar Banglar Sapun Dankha Hauk"(Dream of Greater Bangla be Shattered) and "Bahiragatak Loi Nibarchan Nasalibo"(No Election with Foreigners as Voters). The initial process of the movement had only affected the functioning of the government bodies and also affected the railways, banks, post and telegraphs. In initial phase the non-violence strategies such as mass picketing, dhranas as well as hunger strike were adopted. Meanwhile, the Central Government announced the dates for state legislative assembly election to be held on 14<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> February 1980. But the leaders of the movement urged the people not to participate in the election. Various talks had been held in between but there would no conclusion and the only argument between the government and the agitators regarding the base year. On one hand the central government sticking 1971 as base year on the other hand agitators did not accept it. In this way the movement was going on, but situation was gradually deteriorated. Mrs. Gandhi declared the election in 1983 without the revision of polls.

### **SCENERIO OF ASSAM MOVEMENT AND ITS THREAT TOWARDS HUMAN SECURITY**

Though initially the movement was followed the path of non-violence, gradually the scenario became violence and agitators were engaged in violent activities. Some bloodbath incident discussed as follows:

1. **NELLIE MASSACRE**: In the char area of south bank of Brahmaputra, known as Nellie, in Nagaon district, a Bengali speaking Muslim dominated area. They were mostly from Mymensingh, now Bangladesh were target of Assamese. After the commencement of election, ethnic and communal violence had occurred in this area. The violence was geared up with the death of 5 Lalung children death in the Lahorighat near Nellie in 16<sup>th</sup> February 1983. The Lalung tribe were anti-poll and anti-PTCA (Plain Tribals Council of Assam). The matter had intensified by the death of 3 Muslim children on the place where Lalung children found death. On February 18, a huge mob had launched in Nellie, armed with guns, spears, swords, daos, glinting with the slogan 'long live Mother Assam' i.e 'Jai Aai Ahom'.

They were composed of Lalung, Mikir, Bodo, Assamese Hindus and Nepali and attacked the villagers. The main victims of this massacre were the women and children. One of the victims said that the attackers wanted to destroy the whole new generation and end up the new birth as well. The conservative estimates of death were 600, on the other hand intelligence sources said that it would be at least 1000 deaths with 10000 injured or homeless. One of the witnesses of the violence said that many bodies were thrown to Kapili River. It has been an unprecedented human casualty ever in the history of Assam as the death toll rose to 5000.

2. KHOIRABARI MASSCRE: An immigrant Bengali dominated area in the Khoirabari area of Darrang district was the target of indigenous Assamese people as the agitators of the Assam movement. The agitators wanted to boycott the assembly election as these Bengalis were the main voting bank of that election. With the weapons such as guns, spears, swords, scythes, bows and arrows led to the 100-500 deaths as well as 100-200 injuries on 7<sup>th</sup> February, 1983.
3. GOHPUR MASSACRE: In Gohpur on 14<sup>th</sup> February, rumours spread that more than 17 Assamese villages had been burnt down by tribal hordes and more than 1000 people were killed. On 17<sup>th</sup> February, Assamese had also attacked 27 Boro villages and at least 30 Boros were killed by torch-wielding Assamese. The death toll of both sides was more than 100.

The air of the state was filled up by the mobs of violence of anti-election agitators. In Mongoldoi, Sipajhar town curfew had been imposed, roads were blocked. People had been killed in police firing at Tangla, bridges were burnt, many people had been injured in police-civilian face-off, half a dozen of policemen had died before the election. The agitation became violent and disruptive. Towards Nalbari district, young men and women were stood all along the road with garlands in their hands to pay homage to men who had died in police firing near Piplabari. Apart from that another massacre had happened in Chaulkhowa chapor in Darrang district, in Silapathar in Dhemaji district several people had died. The riots not only killed the people but also led to severe destruction of property as well. About 150 supporters of the movement died as a result of state violence and many were injured when they resisted holding the election of 1983 February.

Between 1979-84 Assam had reported 471 cases of bomb blasts, a new kind of violence where 101 people lost their lives.

## CONSEQUENCES OF THE MOVEMENT

The question of identity led to an ethnic clash at first between Bengali-speaking Muslim immigrants and Assamese Hindus and engulfing the aboriginal tribespeople, the Bengali Hindus, and later Indian Settlers and the Assamese. Instead of the deportation of immigrants and the protection of Assamese identity, this movement had taken away many innocent lives. Only common people had suffered at the cost of their lives and livelihood. Assam had never experienced such a kind of vicious civilian violence. At last Congress(I) came into power in Assam in the 1983 election and a new ministry was formed under the leadership of Hiteswar Saikia but the leadership of the movement boycotted the government and called it a fraud government. After many instances of violence the support of the masses towards the leadership had gradually weakened. Though the base of the movement was secular, peaceful and democratic it was reflecting the opposite in expression. At the same time the growing political insecurity at the central government compelled the newly formed Rajiv Gandhi government to come to an end by signing the Assam Accord on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1985 between the government of India and the leadership of the movement. As according to the accord 1966 was accepted as the cut-off year for detecting foreigners and 1971 was recognized as the cut-off year for deporting foreign nationals. According to a report of People's

Union of Civil Liberties(PUCL),Delhi who studied the violation of civil and democratic rights in Assam examined between 1979-1980 there were 23 persons killed in Dibrugarh district alone,200-300 persons died in Kamrupas a result of mob violence and 25000 people were rendered homeless as a result of this movement. The ban on the movement of jute, bamboo, oil and plywood to outside Assam harassed many peasants of Assam and also affected rural masses of Assam.

## CONCLUSION

The character of the Assam movement in initial years was secular,democratic,non-violence.They used satyagrahas, rally,bandhs,hunger strike etc. It was a large-scale involvement of masses in Assam history which reflect the unity and solidarity among them. All were engaged to protect their identity from the threats of foreigners. Gradually the movement became violent, communal and ethnic clash and undemocratic in expression. Agitators had used mass-killing, bomb – blast, destruction of bridges, houses were burnt etc. Whereas thousands of innocence lost their lives especially minorities,women,police and children. Lakhs of people were rendered homeless, destruction property in millions. The imposition of Assam Armed Forces Special Power Act(AFSPA) 1958 which has given unlimited power to CRPF, BSF and other parliamentary forces, by which human security was challenged. The incidents mentioned above reflect the atrocities and challenges towards human security. The lives which were lost in these movement cannot be retain but the victim's family should be given proper rehabilitation and resettlement that neglected. It has been a great incident in Assam history which was extremely pausing unprecedented threat to human security.

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