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Erstwhile Greater Assam and Her Lost Heritage: It's Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract:

Heritage- it passes from one generation to the next, something that can be conserved or inherited, and something that has historic or cultural value. Though the word 'heritage' is synonymous with 'history' but heritage is not history at all; it is not an enquiry in to the past, but a celebration of it. Heritage must be seen as separate from the pursuit of history, as it is concerned with the re-packaging of the past for some purpose in the present.

Greater Assam had her glorious past with the enriched heritage with heterogeneous ethnic tribes and castes with their various languages and culture, colorful dresses and costumes, folks and foods and many more. But her enriched heritage starts fading away as time rolls on inviting various challenges and threats. Here, an attempt has been made through this paper to find out the roots of it and at the same time, solutions to rejuvenate that.

Key-words: allegiance, bohemian, chauvinistic, disdainful, eschew, internecine, parochialism, recalcitrance, transmute.

INTRODUCTION

Heritage is our legacy from the past, according to UNESCO, what we live with today, and pass on to future. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'heritage' as property that is or may be inherited; an inheritance, 'valued things such as historic buildings that have been passed down from previous generations', and relations to things of historic or cultural value that are worthy of preservations. Heritage passes from one generation to the next, something that can be conserved or inherited, and something that has historic or cultural value. In addition to these physical objects and places of heritage, there are also various practices of heritage that are conserved from one generation to another. These intangible practices of heritage, such as language, culture, popular songs, language and literature, dress are as important in helping us to understand who we are as the physical objects and buildings that we are more used to thinking as 'heritage'.

David Lowenthal, the geographer and historian has written extensively on the important distinction between heritage and history. For many people, the word 'heritage' is probably synonymous with 'history'. He says 'heritage is not history at all; it is not an enquiry in to the past, but a celebration of it. Heritage must be seen as separate from the pursuit of history, as it is concerned with the re-packaging of the past for some purpose in the present.

Nationalistic ideology is not unhealthy for a country or for a nation provided the very ideology rolls on in exact direction. Exact or right direction means catholicity in lieu of parochialism, do away with narrowness for the greater interest of openness. For not treading in right direction in the first half of the 20th century, what happened to the bohemian and chauvinist Germans, it will just be a redundant to elaborate. Almost all the Germans once united under one roof but as and while, the time started to roll on, they entered in to the narrow and thin corridor. The Non-Germans, once upon a time, had to count their days under the German heels. Like infectious diseases, their unhealthy and perverted character began to spread unprecedentedly among the other nations of Europe. French, Italians, Spanish, Russians, English- all came out openly so as to prove their might in the world. As a bitter consequence, the entire communities of Europe had to witness and suffer another devastating world war.

Assam has been the meeting ground of various races of mankind viz. Austric, Mongoloid, Dravidian and Aryan and they entered the Brahmaputra valley at different time from the west and the east. There had, thus always been divergence of culture, tradition, language and social custom among its population. All of them, in the course of time, contributed their respective shares towards the growth and development of a composite Assamese society and began there a process of socio-cultural fusion among them. This process was consolidated during the Ahom rule (1228-1826). Su-Ka-Pha when established the Ahom kingdom in 1228 AD, stretching-out his friendly hands to the heterogeneous tribes like Moran, Borahi and Chutias ; he proved his political far-sightedness. The Ahoms embraced the Non-Ahoms and therefore, all felt safe and comfort under them. Royal house was kept open for all irrespective to castes and creeds. Had it been kept confined and restricted to only for the Ahoms, belligerent as well as recalcitrance tendency would surely have been abated, that cannot be denied. As a result, menace towards the territorial integrity of greater Assam would have been jeopardized at that time. Of course, it cannot be denied that there was no enmity as well as rivalry among the Ahom-Kacharis; Ahom-Koch;Ahom-Chutiyas and others. But the causes behind that were different out and out. For having no variations among the tribes as well as the castes, all could live peacefully and thus they passed their halcyon days under the Ahoms making the Ahom kingdom a great kingdom who besides consolidating their military power gave cohesion to the diverse social groups. The process of assimilation became weak under the Colonial regime leading to clashes of interest among divergent groups.

History of Greater Assam after independence is the story of division and split of the land in to several pieces. Like the collapse of erstwhile USSR during Mikhail Gorbachev's regime, Greater Assam had to undergo operation giving birth to Nagaland, Meghalaya, Arunachal etc in the second half of the 20th century. Discriminatory territorial and economic development, racial differences and disdainful expression of some sections of the upper castes towards the tribes were the sole causes that worked in for separation. Territorial division could have been checked and done away with had special care been taken for the territorial and economic amelioration of all.

In 1979, while the Assam movement set in, all sections of people irrespective to tribes and castes wholeheartedly took part in that. Nationalistic feelings till those days rolled on in positive and healthy direction. None took part in that movement with parochial and narrow vested interest. The Koch-Rajbangshis; the Bodo-Kacharis; the Rabha-Garos; the Mishing-Deuris; the Tiwa-Karbis all jumped in to that movement spontaneously. Finally, these tribes keeping themselves alienated from the mainstream began to give birth organizations under their own banners. Excessive over lordship and mastery of some sections, regional and economic exploitation, categorical inferior status –all these gave impetus to the separationists. Bolinarian Bora, an elite and middle class gentleman neglected the Bodos, Kacharis, Mikirs, Hojais and expressed even his apprehensions that if the population of these tribes let to increase, the upper caste Hindus would be minority in Assam and therefore, supported the migration of upper caste Hindus from the outside of Assam. Indeed, such type of narrow and disdainful mentality of some sections added fuel to the fire giving tremendous boost to alienation.

The year 1979 is a red letter day in the political history of Assam. Like the Surat session of Indian National Congress of 1907 that bifurcated the Congress, that special year (1979) also divided the leaders of the Assam movement in to two wings- moderates and extremists. Some stepped up in non-violent way and the some in violent way. Moderates sought development of Assam under the shade of Constitution of India and the extremists, on the contrary, expressed their disdain towards the Indian Constitution and demanded separate sovereign state. Call and demand for sovereign state encouraged the other tribes also to demand for separate states within Assam starting a race of competition for that. From east to west and north to south- each and every tribes of Assam demanded and are even demanding today for separate states letting a unhealthy rule to continue. Today, the *Asamiya* nationality remained weak, underdeveloped and small with the people not having much confidence in their destiny. If this is let to continue, the traditional unity and integrity of the greater Brahmaputra Barak valley would suffer and jeopardize the physique of Assam which is quite natural according to 'Adijamal' also where it is mentioned that the states would destroy and taxes would be collected unjustly (*rajya saba nasta houba, anyaye karak laba*)

The people of Assam succumbed to emotion gave opportunity to some immature, passionate and farsighted less leaders to sit on power. Those who talked of golden and colorful Assam once upon a time, had led luxurious and gorgeous life letting the masses, who were the main force behind the leaders' prosperity, count their days below the poverty line. Unfortunately, the very concept 'nationalism' now transmuted to easily accessible goods. Matter turns to be proudly when musk of nationalism is put on the face of it. The chauvinistic attitude and tendency that crippled once mightiest Germans, if not halted today in Assam though it is too late, it would jeopardize the territorial integrity of Assam in the days to come. It is universally accepted truth that each and everything seeks to establish balance in nature. If the Hindus are united as the Hindus, then it is quite natural for the Muslim to unite as the Muslim. Taking air, water and food; respecting language and dialects; art and culture; costume and traditions; embracing costume and custom of each and every tribes and castes who had and have been living in Assam from time immemorial, they are '*Asamiya*'. Despite that, if one respects only his own culture and traditions nauseating disdain to the culture and traditions of others, result would be volatile as well as detrimental.

Today in and around our state, gloomy and hazy atmosphere prevails. Our alarm is on all the time and panic button hung round our neck. While some people say we have been unlucky, others say we are lucky not to have been raped or murdered. What kind of society is this where one is considered as lucky not to have been raped or murdered! Now rich and abundance that teemed the land are no more in Assam what once were there in the state ! Richness of Assam province even attracted the covetous eyes of Bakhtiar Khilji, Turbak, Shah Jahan and Aurangzeb. Our state while she could have been treaded in the field of science and technology; art and culture; health; education and agriculture like the other states of India ; arms and ammunition had and have been given at that time to our youths's hands for creating disturbances in the land so that the state could not compete with the other states of India. Once golden Assam has been transmuted today to a poverty ridden state. A.D. Phukan who life long dreamt for the golden Assam and aspired for fetching halcyon days to the land, now becomes the cry in wilderness. Fear and terror now besiege our heart and mind from dawn to dusk. It is referred in 'Adijamal' that man to man fear would be the common happenings (*milaibo loka bhoy*) in the world. Our generation what they would get from us in future though that can't be predicted but can be inferred surely that they would be the inheritor of our fear and this fear would rob them all. Violence, jealousy, internecine, feud would abate among the masses in such way, if these are not stopped and let to continue for about fifty years, the *Asamiya* would eliminate from the human civilization of the world.

Assam today is in a state of volatile condition and there may be many factors to that. Most acceptable one to get rid of this may be- 'instead of respecting and showing allegiance to one tribe or one caste's art and culture; language and dialect; one's costumes and traditions; we the people of Assam should respect the art and culture of all. It is the prime onus and responsibility of the government for restoring status quo of already endangered unity and culture of Assam. Literary and socio-cultural organizations of various groups; various regional and national students' organizations can also play pivotal role in this regard. Time arrives now at the threshold for shedding and discarding either of parochial nationalism or of chauvinistic contemplation whatsoever, in termination of which time is too near to see a devastating future in the state who once boasted of her enriched heritage !

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