

## NORTHEAST: CRISIS OF IDENTITY

'Some one's IDENTITY' is, '*what he thinks of himself*' as well as, '*what others think of him*'. On both the sides dilution is possible at conceptual level; or if it is mistaken due to lack of proper knowledge or information. So, the true CONCEPT of one's IDENTITY is the KEY FACTOR which we should consider and analyze before we reach at any conclusion about a community.

'IDENTITY' is what a person is; or all his different aspects together- may it be his living standards and habit pattern or his civilization, his thoughts, his behavior, his knowledge, his concept of God, life and life after death, etc. etc. All these together form his Identity which identify him and also differentiate him from others.

What is happening in the NE is- the Church is changing the key factors- the very Conceptions of all the different janajatis and other communities as well. And so, the problem of Identity has arisen at alarming level! Though a revival process has been started here, but it will take a long time to reset the upset things, because it is to be set in the inner most corners of the individuals of the society. Things are so diluted and misconceptions took place to such an extent in the mind of people that it may not take its original shape again!

1. Christianity becoming real Identity:- When Church enters this region around 1820, it took them a minimum of 40 years to convert the first person of any particular community, into Christianity. It was a difficult task for them. They were searching the weaknesses of our society. A new tradition or arrangement took place in villages that when a family embrace Christianity, it is expelled from the village. Among many of the communities of northeastern states we find such villages which are divided into two blocks- Native Religionists *mohalla (elaka)* and *mohalla of Christian converts*.

The scenario changes when the Christian converts topple the Hindu population in a particular village or area (*elaka*). They try to seize all the rights of the Hindu minority there. If one compare the conditions of Hindus in Islamic Pakistan with the Hindus in Christian dominated states of Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, it will make no difference. Here, the real identity becomes Christianity and Hindus feels isolated and confused- whether they are following a true path or not!

2. Away from Hindu Society:- When the nationalist organizations like R.K.Mision, Kalyan Ashram, Arya samaj, VHP or RSS workers visits those villages, Church propagate that they have come to convert you into Hinduism. The innocent tribal people believe of this and use to keep them self away from such organizations. The simple hearted people could not able to analyse the things. The propagators are those who have converted their own brethren into Christianity, become their well-wishers! Such propaganda results to keep the Native Religionists (Hindus for all practical purposes) psychologically away from the Hindus of other parts of our country which is a great loss. It has created a new concept in the mind of many of the communities that 'they are not Hindus' but are Bodo, Khasi, Garo, Nyishi, Naga and so on. Due to Church propaganda, most of the tribes feel shame to identity themselves with the large Hindu Society. Cutting apart from the Hindu society, is half way to total conversion! Once I talked to a Hindu Khasi –

You are a 'Khasi' and the Christian converts are also 'Khasis'!

Yes we both are Khasis.

But they are Christians, what you are ..... ?

He said, 'I am Khasi- Khasi'. (Khasi by community and Khasi by religion)

It is very difficult to make them understand that once a person has embraced another religion use to lose everything- the very essence of his life, and so he seized to be a part of his previous community, because he becomes part of a new community that is Christian Community, where there is no idea of cast or tribe. There, Christians are Christians for all purposes like the Muslims, who do not count or remember their cast or tribe any more once they embrace Islam.

But in the above arrangements one good thing is there. Even after conversion people of different tribes like to remain part of their own tribe, for which they celebrate traditional festivals and wear traditional dress etc. Before, Church had termed all such practices as 'Satanic'. But when there was a resurgence of Culture in the psych of tribal people, Church compelled to revive all such things and started propagating, 'by changing religion, culture does not change'! It is a big lie but the death of Church also lies in this vital point. Church, who has destroyed culture of people here, has become a champion for its preservation, which is nothing but a drama in itself.

3. Use of Natives' Terminologies for Church propaganda:- We have our own terminologies for our own cultural and religious things which bear some conceptions. When some one utters that particular word (terminology), the same emotion or idea took place in our heart and mind. So, Church has started using our things in their propaganda. As I worked for 7 years in Khasi-Janajati Hills of Meghalaya, giving below some examples which are eye opener.

(I) Name of Almighty: For Almighty Supreme Being (*Bhagwan*) the Khasi word is U Blei. In Church literatures and in other mode of propaganda they use the same word. When a Khasi person listen it from a Christian missionary the same word- UBlei, he mute the same idea of UBlei which he has developed since his childhood. And he thinks, 'it is only a change of religion while U Blei will remain the same and his culture will also remain the same'.

The concept of the Biblical God is different than our concept of Bhagwan or U Blei. When one has to embrace Christianity, he will have to leave all his conceptions and to accept the new set of beliefs prevailing in that religion, which he is going to embrace. Biblical God is male only and He is heavenly- not omnipresent, as we believe that Almighty is present everywhere. Belief of multi God and Goddess is also not there. He is not even Omnipresent because He have to depend upon Jesus for everything. One has to pray to God only through Jesus; and Jesus can only be approached through Church priests- the Fathers and Pastors. Do we believe such thing that God do not accept prayer directly from an individual? But such basic differences do not occur in the mind of people when they give their consent for conversion. But nothing is made understand to the new person to whom they convince to embrace Christianity. Just saying UBlei is sufficient to wash out all doubts from the mind of new converts. (Such other examples of other places of our country are- Once I visited Mughalsarai. In a Church it was written there as '*Bhagwan Bal Yeshu ka Mandir*'. *It is to equate Jesus with Bal Krishna! Near Nasik a Church is constructed in the form of a Shiv temple with Cross marked on Shivaling; and Cross is erected on the top of the temple instead of putting a Trishul there. The Father worship there is in the dress of a Sanyashi, who use to say- I am hundred percent Christian with hundred percent Indian culture.*)

(ii) U Jesus U Khraw Jutang:- During my visit to Mawsynram area I reached Tyrsad, a small market place. There I saw that on the entrance of a Church building it was written as *U Jesus U khraw Jutang*. Khraw Jutang is a Khasi term given to Cock that plays important role of messenger in between Man and Almighty Supreme Being. By mentioning the Jesus Christ as Khraw Jutang they have equated him with a mere Cock in one way, but at the other, they gave a new conception that, if you are leaving your own religion Jesus will act as Khraw Jutang.

(iii) Only Religion changes not the Culture:- Smit is a small market place, 15 km. away from Shillong, which is also the centre of a Khasi King Ship. Kings were called as Raja and Maharaja before the arrival of British there. Church entered along with British and played vital role there. There are around 3,500 'Clans' or 'Gotras' among Khasis but people belongs to Syiem clan only can become a King. The term Raja and Maharaja was changed to Syiem which is nothing but only a 'Gotra'. In this way the authority of a Maharaja curtailed to some extent at psychological level because by then British officers were Maharajas.

Annual Festival- Nongkrem Dance is used to be held once a year here at Smit which is most important. Once I was there during this festival. Two Europeans were also present there; the sister of King (Syiem) was with these two guests to narrate the things there. They asked, 'what is the difference between Christians and you the traditional followers'? She replied- 'it is nothing! We are the same! Only difference is that, they embraced Christian religion, we have not, but our culture is same!' One can imagine what types of confusions are prevailing in the mind of traditional followers here.

(IV) Change of Script: - I met a person from mawpun village of Meghalaya whose name was Kuparstone. His father was a Nepali and mother, a Khasi. His original name was Gopal. But he wanted to put a Khasi name, so he changed it to Kuparstone. If there is some English word, it seems more familiar to them. Now they don't want to keep a Hindi name, because (as they think) Hindi is nearer to Hinduism.

Before, Hindi or Bangla names were in use among Khasi-Jaintias. Ram Singh was the Maharaja of Cherapunjee (Sohra). Tiro Singh (Tirath Singh) was the freedom fighter in Khasi hills. But by changing the script from Bengali to Roman for writing Khasi language, every thing changed. Rarely do you find a Hindi name now a day. They even feel shame to put a Hindi or Sanskrit name. Khasi elders do not search their roots in the soil of this country!

What a change took place in just a period of 160 years(1820-1980)! (Psychological changes took its complete shape by 1980). Now the spiritual science of this country becomes taboo to them. They forget every link, may it be cultural or social! All these only due to change in the Script which cuts them apart from the store of knowledge, which are not available in Khasi language, and become alien to them!

Many things can be mentioned on the topic of this write-up. A group of learned people should work for a few months in several parts of NE to study the identity crisis that took place among the communities here and to find out a solution. There is only way to revert the situation- the nationalist organizations should put learned workers in large number to reach each and every huts of North-East villages.

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