

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW
MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 4 | Issue 3

2021

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Cultural Nationalism in Northeast India

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ABSTRACT

Due to various socio-economic causes, India's northeastern territory is internally engulfed in political turmoil spanning over decades. The area is almost like a cauldron of people of diverse cultures and backgrounds. This vast diversity has also contributed to this internal disharmony resulting in cross-cultural conflicts. Over the decades, numerous instances of rebellion, insurgency and ethnic violence have occurred in this area. The Nagaland war, fueled by the Naga and Bodo nationalism, are examples of this insurgency. Internal disputes and hostility added to this struggle with the widespread immigration from Bangladesh and Myanmar's fleeing from the state-sponsored oppression. This paper will demonstrate the importance of cultural identity in North East's perceived nationalism and how large-scale immigration, which often leads to economic stagnation in the country, aids the growth of cultural nationalism. The case study of Chakmas and Hajongs will be used to demonstrate this culture-based nationalism.

Keywords: Nationalism, Chakmas and Hajongs, Immigration, Economic Stagnation.

I. INTRODUCTION

We shall address the idea and the roots of cultural nationalism to understand the issue of Chakmas and Hajongs' nationalism. Cultural nationalism is the term used to describe a country based upon its people's common culture. It is often considered a transitional type of nationalism between civic and ethnic nationalism. Therefore, the national identity is founded on ethnic identity rather than on ancestral or racial identity. A somewhat different view from its predecessors is the vision of cultural nationalism. Political nationalism, for example, seeks to connect the country and gain full political autonomy. On the other hand, ethnic nationalism focuses more on cultural assimilation and the nation's integrity. The primary purpose of cultural nationalism is to cultivate the country. Here the nation is not a political institution but a moral culture (Herrin, 2020). The basis of its cultural nationalism is the culture of a country. Cultural nationalism has traced its roots back in Europe in the late 18th century. The period marked many progressions in cultural, ideological, scientific, political and other spheres. A broad fusion of various concepts and ideas, such as the emergence of romanticism in the arts and

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publications and the increased attention to people's notions of the government.

From this age of upheaval and change, a polycentric world view emerged that indicated a world's pantheistic conception. All-natural entities were guided by a power of individualized and desired realization. The nation was one of these primordial divine powers that shaped people's moral status. This new vision of the world led us to believe that progress was essential. When the French began to assert their superiority and propagate the concept of culture-oriented nationalism, intellectuals and scholars in central Europe became conscious of their "backwardness". They stated that every nation of Europe had a culture of its own and from the beginning with distinct characteristics. Europe, thus, lost a sense of intimacy and brotherhood, which was at one stage seen as the bouquet of disparate flowers bonded together harmoniously (Hutchinson, 2013).

II. ESSENTIAL FACTS

We need to grasp certain things with certainty before we go on. People are also confused by immigrants, immigration, migration, migrants and refugees. We must also take an economic look at immigration and explore the scholarly view of it. As stated before, "Immigration is the process of moving in the hope of living permanently in the new country from one country to another." An individual who undergoes this process is called an immigrant. This also takes place on economic grounds, as the immigrant seeks a better life and moves to a place where his economic success is enhanced. Migration is more common and involves both the inter-state and intra-state movement of persons. It is also done willingly, including immigration, mostly. These migrants have the freedom to return home anytime they want if things don't work out as planned, if they feel homesick, or if they're going to see their relatives and friends who have remained behind. On the other hand, refugees are those who, because they fear being persecuted, are forced from their land and vacate their property. Human rights and their protection are of concern to refugees, not economic gain. They are forced to leave home, property, family and friends. Some people are forced to leave beforehand and are traumatized because of torture and abuse. (Edwards, 2016)

Experts on Immigration are primarily split into two camps. The first one claims that economic factors drive the immigration process, and others argue that cultural factors drive Immigration. The theorem of Stolper-Samuelson is frequently used by those who analyze the economic factors in shaping their opinion on Immigration. This theorem shows that, as the total size of the State's economy increases, Immigration has separate distributional impacts. Immigration increases the working pool's value, and then return to the capitalist population can also be

increased by reducing wages. Inherently, citizens benefiting from immigration, economic business owners, and those suffering from immigration should favor immigration due to lower wages should be against it. Moreover, the Stolper-Samuelson model indicates that trade openness should have the same consequences as free immigration; thus, both trade and immigration should be opposed or preferred. The early scholarship has tested these projections and found that immigration is much more opposed to business. Those who derive a great deal of their capital income are opposed to high immigration rates. Therefore, a group of academics concentrated on the extra costs that immigration entails, but not trade. In contrast to goods, migrants place a strain on the welfare system, leading to a loss of immigration, especially from the wealthy. Other scientists noted that immigrants work in trade-free industries, particularly in the services sector, explaining their opposition to immigration. Finally, a third party claimed that cultural concerns and xenophobia contribute to resistance to immigration in the first place. This discussion is now continuing with more complex survey data being examined by both sides. (Peters, 2017)

Now citizens typically immigrate to developing countries from economically underdeveloped countries. Many would argue then that since India is still a developing-economy, third-world nation, immigration is not a big issue. This argument is somewhat rightly stated, but even in India, the North-East states had seen a significant invasion of refugees due to religious and cultural persecution by majorities in their countries. As these refugees seek shelter in the northeastern states, they further differentiate the country's already different composition. North-East is geographically not rich in economically valuable natural resources such as iron ore, charcoal etc. Also, the states are cultural in the degree to which many languages are spoken at times in a single country. These countries are not, above all, developed, and the local people are finding very little employment. Both of these reasons make them vulnerable to major demographic changes. (Singh, 1987)

III. IS HINDU NATIONALISM A FORM OF INDIAN CULTURAL NATIONALISM?

From India's viewpoint, Hindu nationalism may be referred to as cultural nationalism, but also, it has the components of ethnic and national mysticism. Ethnic nationalism, also called ethnonationalism, is a kind of nationalism focused on people's race. The concept that the nation projects to the role of a spiritual being are the word 'National Mysticism'. The Third Reich would be the best-known example of that. Cultural nationalism is not an Indian thing and was imported in the 20th century from war-torn Europe. Nationalism was a reaction to colonialism, and it has been used for uniting populations of diverse origins to overthrow the colonial rulers

in most third world countries. Cultural nationalism was something that the Hindu nationalists propagated because they saw Hinduism as more of a culture than religion. Nevertheless, many people who could not identify themselves with it in India have particular difficulties with the idea of cultural nationalism. There are many reasons why it fails, with the main reason being the inability to spread the notion of Hindu nationalism as a culture of Hinduism. Another important explanation was that in regions like the Northeast, the actual cultural distinction was that tribal populations were highly concentrated. Every tribe thought that they had a different culture. (Thampu, 2018)

Now, we look at Indian North-East culture, and it was tainted over time by numerous insurgents. The cultural difference that exists among the people who live there and the cultural divide between them and the rest of India all contribute to these insurgencies. In mainland India, feelings of isolation and ethnic inequality have resulted in different cultural identities. When these different cultural identities are mixed with each other's animosity and continental India, various nationalistic cultural identities emerge. For example, Naga nationalism has tried to achieve complete autonomy from the Republic of India based on the Naga community's conservation and support. The foundation on which Naga nationalism lies is Naga culture. Bodo nationalism and Bodoland demands are also like this and speak to Bodo's conservation and history (Bhaumik, 2006). The formation of independent cultural identities has increased for many reasons. The increase in large-scale immigration by people from nearby countries represents one of the most important reasons. Those are the persecuted people who are finding safety and shelter from this injustice.

IV. CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND IMMIGRATION' RELATIONSHIP

Many scholars have been debating on the relationship between mass immigration and an increase in cultural nationalism. The process by which a person moves from one country to another seeking the new country's permanent residence can be described as immigration. Historically, the immigration process has caused nations significant cultural and economic changes. Immigrants from various countries and cultures carry with them multiple languages, standards and religions. Take the Hispanics, for example, who belong to the United States. American countries with a huge Hispanic community now have a very similar culture to Mexico, which borders Mexico as New Mexico, Arizona. This is evident if we look at the changes that these people are causing in the culture. These reforms have a different interaction with the local people, which results in different immigration responses. There has been an increase in racial discrimination against Hispanics in states such as Texas, which borders with

Mexico because Hispanics are thought to be a lawbreaker. However, the key explanation behind Hispanic discontent is that wages have dropped. In Donald Trump's pre-2015 presidential election speeches, he frequently threatened the Hispanics and sought benefits with his electorate's anger toward the Hispanics. The results revealed that he was successful, and also, the local Americans were genuinely resented and afraid that immigration would lead to lower wages and job losses. (Portes, 2011)

This is not only the United States but also several European countries in recent years. From the UK to Italy, nationalism and populism have risen in recent elections. Political parties that speak openly about stricter immigration policies have been elected. Many governments and countries already regard the European Union as a sovereign institution. The massive influx of refugees from warring Asian countries and sub-developed Balkan states was one factor behind Brexit. In several nations, the inflow of immigrants led to conflict because local people were concerned about the impacts of demographic transformations on their culture and economy. This apprehension led to an increase in politics focused on nationalist and cultural prejudice. People want to preserve their economic and cultural rights. In countries such as Austria and Italy, this sense of apprehension and need to protect identity has contributed to cultural nationalism.

V. CASE STUDY: CHAKMAS AND HAJONGS

In the states of northeast India, there are many instances of insurgency and conflict over the years. Unfortunately, research is not possible on all of these because of the limits on the subject's size. Therefore, we will be discussing one case in which massive immigration has resulted in an increase in discrimination and cultural nationalism. This is the situation of Arunachal Pradesh's Chakmas and Hajongs who lived in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. Chakmas are primarily Buddhist, and Hajongs are often Hindus. They can be found in the cities of northeast India, Myanmar, Western Bengal and Bangladesh. Chakmas and Hajongs who reside in India have Indian citizenship. Due to conflict with Mizos, the residents of Mizoram live in relief camps in Tripura's southern region. These Indian Chakmas are also Indian people in the relief camps, and they take part in the elections. In the Chittagong Hill Tracts, however, there was a loss of land due to the construction of a Dam named Kaptai on the river of Karnaphuli, which led them to flee East Pakistan from 1964-65. Both, Chakmas and Hajongs were non-Muslims who did not know Bengali. Therefore, they also had to endure religious persecution. In India, they were forced to seek asylum. Aid camps were founded in Arunachal Pradesh, where most people are still living five decades later. The 2011 census shows, "47,471 Chakmas live alone in Arunachal Pradesh, which explains how life is hostile for these people."

What makes their lives even harder is the lack of citizenship and land rights for refugees, both Chakma and Hajong, who have lived in those relief camps since the 1960s. Over the years, the local people and the state government have discriminated against these refugees. For example, since 1990, the Student Union of All Arunachal Pradesh has demanded their ouster from State. The question now arises as to why they had suffered discrimination and precisely why the locals are hostile to this discrimination.

The Chakma refugee camps of a former 'North-Eastern Frontier Agency', a governmental sector administered by the Central authorities, were established in the 1960s on the so-called vacant lands of the former districts Tirap, Lohit and Subansiri (Biswas, 2018). Then, subsequently, it attained statehood. Local and regional parties have already resisted the relocation of refugees in their countries because they fear the demographic transformations it would bring to their country. Therefore, they have to distribute their resources which were already limited. There were rallies in Arunachal Pradesh against the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019, which would enable these refugees to obtain citizenship by referring to religious persecution. Within three months in 2015, the Apex Court ordered the government to permit them nationality. The state government subsequently lodged a motion for clarification with the Court, but it was suppressed. 'All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union' (AAPSU) mentioned that the order of court would dilute constitutional protections for its people and threaten their national identity. In 2017, over a lakh Chakmas and Hajongs, without land ownership rights in Arunachal Pradesh, were given citizenship by the Union Home Ministry. This resulted in violent demonstrations, and their decision had to be reviewed by the Union Government. The refugees were then promised citizenship under this law after the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 was passed. At present, citizenship and fundamental land rights continue to be sought. (Desk, 2017)

This case tells us how large-scale immigration leads to oppression and dehumanization of different communities and shows the fear it brings about economic stagnation. Local citizens' discontent, which tends to protect their cultural identity and interests, is being taken advantage of by cultural nationalism. We also looked at how the world has developed because of immigration over nationalistic politics. Fear of economic stagnation is the primary concern that links cultural nationalism to immigration. People all over the world fear that immigration will result in job losses and lower wages. There have been several studies investigating whether or not this fear is sensible. Some reports argue that immigrants choose different jobs than those chosen by local citizens (Brau, 2016). However, to support this point, there is no proper analysis. Some claim that immigration increases the number of crimes since people arriving

usually have no employment or livelihoods, and therefore they are expected to commit a crime. While that argument does have some empirical evidence, it is not enough and, even if it did, it must also be taken into account for humanitarian reasons.

VI. CONCLUSION

Chakmas and Hajongs endured years of discrimination due to politicized Islam in Bangladesh, rash developmental projects, and a cultural disparity between them and the people of Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, both refugees and the local population should have equal immigration laws. Furthermore, the local people's economic interests must be secured and taken into account. This must happen, and they cannot be forced to assimilate properly. Furthermore, a stopping point should be set between cultural nationalism that brings solidarity and togetherness and cultural nationalism that contributes to domination by another community. Through this paper, we addressed the roots and emergence of cultural nationalism and how this originated from undergoing a radical cultural and political change in Europe, cultural nationalism in India, the increase in nationalist politics through mass immigration in the contemporary world, and how this could be accomplished in light of the case of Chakmas and Hajongs. We have also shown how the interplay of politics could be used to solve the problem. Because of the difficulties involved, it is extremely difficult to address this issue successfully, but it can be achieved by implementing specific laws that must be enacted appropriately.

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