

The changing face of night life in Guwahati and its consequences

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Arindam Garg 27 July 2007 37217 views

The time was 10.45 pm. My friend Rajiv (name changed) and his friend Pallav (name changed) drove down the GS road stopped the car in front of a posh restaurant and honked. The doorman came near and gestured to him to park the car at the inner area next to the restaurant. They parked the car and walked in. The restaurant was dimly lit (they came to know it was a lounge) Enigma was playing in the background and there were comfortable sofas with tables in between. They were offered the table nearest the counter as it was empty. Rajiv and his friend sat down and glanced around. There was a lot of smoke in the air and the place was full and bubbling with energy and laughter.

The next table was occupied by some teenagers both girls and boys and in the table further down there was a couple whom they judged to be in their late thirties. The rest of the place was also full mainly with youngsters. Drinks and Music followed for the next two hours and the joint (he was no longer sure whether it was a restaurant, pub, or lounge) finally closed at around 1.00pm. Rajib stays in Mumbai and was down in Guwahati to visit his family. Rajib called me up the next day in the morning and told me, "This place is better than Mumbai. In Mumbai the pubs close at 11.30 and here I could sit at one till 1.00 pm." I told him then, "If you like it so much, why don't you come back to Guwahati? Anyway your parents need you". The reply was typical of Rajib and perhaps of many other Assamese and Northeastern people who stay outside, "Well, security you know. In a Mumbai Pub you enjoy and go home but in Guwahati you enjoy but you may not go home ever after that." I reflected on this later. Yes what Rajib said was true. Recently one Rajesh Kumar Shah, a sweet shop owner from Guwahati was shot dead by one Tarun Baruah a businessman in a bar in Ganeshguri. In another incident a couple was manhandled in one of the bars in Zoo road allegedly by some inebriated youths. And many other such cases have been reported.

The Police stations in Zoo Road. GS Road have various cases originating from bars and pubs recorded in their registers. Modernisation is a two way-street where the boons are equally proportionate to the banes of urban living. Guwahati is not lagging behind in the march towards progress the effects of which are out there for everyone to see, be it the cell phone revolution that has enabled all and sundry to flaunt one or the IT revolution. Similarly a cultural evolution is also going on hand in hand which is evident in the, mall culture, dress codes of the young people and the mushrooming of pubs and night clubs in the city. In keeping with the rest of the country Guwahati too has a few addresses some of them notorious for the nocturnal birds to let their hair down and relax. The total number of Bars in Guwahati is a voluminous 98 which cater to the increasing club hoppers. Though many are licensed to close in late hours some openly defy them and keep open their shutters till late at night. Though minors are prohibited in such places but many are still allowed to pocket a fast buck. Spirits flow in abundance here and sometimes these act even as pick up joints attracting unscrupulous characters. As a result brawls have become a regular occurrence in such bars. These bars are defying norms blatantly without the authorities noticing them or rather ignoring them. There are no adequate security measures in these bars and pubs. Security guards and bouncers are hardly there.

The closing times should be monitored so that the common public is not disturbed by the late night ruckus or loud music which is usually a fixture here. Minors should be refrained from frequenting such places by the owners themselves. The police have received many complaints in this regard but they shove their responsibilities towards the Excise department which is legally empowered to bring those offending bar owners to book. But the Excise department too is ready with a suitable excuse to shirk responsibility, which in turn has given the leeway to bar owners to jive in their own spirits. The night life in Guwahati is becoming murkier by the day with violence and crime interspersed with the flow of spirits both, alcoholic as well as emotional. The authorities are lending a blind eye to the abnormalities and in a way lending a hand to such incidents.

It is time the authorities acted before the situation gets out of control and we all need to guide the new generation accordingly

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BY ARINDAM GARG

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