

What North East wants?



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Rajiv Roy 11 November 2014 16700 views

Every time a northeasterner is at the receiving end in mainland India the entire focus shifts to protecting their rights, security and rest of it. Who are these northeasterners, after all? Are they some sort of an endangered species who needs protection as seen in [Wildlife](#) Acts, whereas mainlanders who encounter similar treatment in this region are ignored as if they are no human? After all those NGOs who raises their voice in this region whenever a northeasterner is targeted in mainland is woefully and tragically [found](#) mute when their own tribesmen is involved in similar inhuman acts against mainlanders. In such cases why these NGOs and unions do not condemn at the first instance? Does it not amount to utter shamelessness on their part? This issue will never change if the tribesmen mindset towards mainlanders does not change. They will continue to receive what mainlanders gets here. It cannot be that affected tribesmen issues are a matter of human rights and security and that of others is nothing.

The youths of Meghalaya should read Chetan Bhagat's "What Young India Wants". In this book the author said that there is a need to reset our society in terms of behavioral pattern, attitude and values for any lasting change. This he said after his tour across the country and his interaction with youths. He [found](#) that everybody wants a better life in a good society. Meghalaya today is a state which is confined to the triplets called hatred, jealousy and lethargy. It has to come out of this squadron. There are those few tribesmen who are doing really well in mainland but then the majority of their brethren's deed back home is belittling them. Bhagat is correct in his findings but what is saddening is the complete opposite happening in Meghalaya. This is a state which is in fact averse to change. They abhor anything that centers on change even if that comes with a good price. And so we do not see organizations like Sulabh International, which is successfully running toilets all over the country, here despite Shillong becoming dirtier. This attitude of the people confining themselves within a cocoon fearing their culture and tradition will otherwise be threatened is doing more harm than good. And after one is raised in this cocoon with a 'frog in the well mentality' it is bound to create frenzy when they move to cities in mainland which are moving forward at a rapid pace and where the outlook of people is exactly the opposite to those here.

While condemning the attack on Naga youths in the national capital territory recently what cannot really go unlooked is the other side of the coin. It is known to all that the northeastern tribesmen repeat their cocoon habitat wherever they go. In New Delhi, there are certain areas where they are concentrated. But what is alarming is the staying of both boys and girls together under one roof. As it is said, “In Rome, act like a Roman”, this author is told that this opposite sex staying together even if they are students is often detested there because it is outside the culture of the people of New Delhi. The author is also told that food habits of northeasterner are something which has always earned ire and is not in consonance with the vegetarian society there. Whereas we have read several times about smelly food items being cooked by people of this region and earned public ire, there are also those who cook their foodstuffs secretly. But then how can one prevent the smell from airing. Well it is for the benefit of the tribesmen, who trust in “either it is my way or highway” back in their den in the northeast, to realize that it may not always be the case wherever they go. It is only sane to shift one’s habits if that is not matching with those in whose vicinity one has moved into.

Being a Bengali let me comment here the relationship of love and hate that we have with the tribal population of Meghalaya. I am recently asked by a lady of an NGO, where I am originally from. I told her that I am born and brought up here and this is the third generation running. But she insisted upon my original house, from where I have come. For her that is more important than anything else. I told her that our ancestral property is at Salt Lake, Kolkata. She was relieved after she heard that since she did not want to hear [Tripura](#), Silchar, Karimganj and rest of it. This lady is also spearheading the cause of physically challenged females for their rightful entitlements. She has been invited for an employability workshop for such challenged people in Chennai where she is contemplating to go or not. Now a person who is fighting for the rights of these people and engaged in a generous cause is at the same time carries a distorted image about people is not understood. This author is told by several Khasis that they find Kolkata more suitable for staying than other cities in the country. They could feel the freedom in that city despite their blotting track record against Bengalis back home. This they say because in Kolkata there is no such detestation for northeasterners as seen elsewhere in the country. Is it then not just sane to return what they get when they go to that city? But in return what do they do to the genuine Bengalis in Meghalaya. “Kharbang”, “Dkhar” are the two most common terms they use against this community although the latter is meant for the entire non-tribal community besides detesting them in every possible manner. Although those who are aware uses terms like “Khasiabhoot” in Kolkata but then it is rarely heard. We have not heard or seen any tribal from Meghalaya or this region being targeted in the city of joy. They get better treatment in Kolkata despite their Asuric dealings with Bengalis back in Meghalaya. Nonetheless there is an increasing avenging lot who wants to treat them the way they are treated. But to expect similar treatment everywhere in the country in the face of despising mainlanders in NE is like expecting the stars.

In fact, a renowned writer from Shillong has written in a local daily recently that the Hynniewtrep people of Meghalaya are constantly fighting for their identity since time immemorial. This has been an infinite journey for this community and now it seems that it is going nowhere like the search for cure for cancer. Some source them to Austro Asiatic origin whereas others have different versions altogether. They have been sourced to Tibeto-Burman ancestry besides Mongolia. But one thing is clear there is still no clarity on this. Whereas on the other hand if we see the geographical transformation of this region since the time of undivided Bengal and the reign of British Raj what we find is that this entire region was part of Bengal. Principal Secretary, Government of Meghalaya, PW Ingty's historical novel on an unknown warrior prince from this region also delves in this aspect wherein it is mentioned about Gour, a name that identified the large Bengal tracts then. So one thing is clear that the Bengalis are never an outsider in this region since this was Bengal to [start](#) with, rather they are an integral part of it. Now, later provinces were created by the British Raj, like Assam followed by the states in Independent India. As we always read and see that different tribal races in this region is said to have their Mongoloids akin origin and looks then it is quite clear that they are the one who have come from outside and settled here. So how can the question of we being outsiders arise when their own identity is at stake. Who are they to call us outsiders? We can still say that we have come from Sylhet, Dacca, Kolkata and rest of it, which were part of undivided Bengal then but what about the tribesmen. Is not their Mongoloid origin and other ancestry links tells us much? I would like to mention here the words of a professor of Rajiv [Gandhi](#) Indian Institute of Management who once said in a public function that why do we have to go to the Brits always while researching. He observed that our tradition and culture is so vibrant, such as the names of places et al, which can take us nearer to our roots.

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Shillong

BY RAJIV ROY

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