Integrating Diverse Aspects of North East India

Contexts and Perspectives

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Integrating Diverse Aspects of North East India

Contexts and Perspectives

Dr. Jilmil Bora

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AKHAND PUBLISHING HOUSE
DELHI (INDIA)

Published by



AKHAND PUBLISHING HOUSE

Publisher, Distributor, Exporter having an Online Bookstore

Head Office : L-9A, First Floor, Street No. 42,
Sadatpur Extension, Delhi-110094 (INDIA)
Phone No.: 9968628081, 9555149955 & 9013387535
E-mail : akhandpublishinghouse@gmail.com,
akhandpublishing@yahoo.com
Website : www.akhandbooks.com

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Contexts and Perspectives

© Editor
Ist Edition 2020
ISBN 978-81-948850-1-6

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Printed in India

Published by Jhapsu Yadav for Akhand Publishing House. Cover Designed and Laser Typesetting at VM Graphics and Printed at Aarna Enterprises, Delhi.

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Foreword

I, on behalf of Dakshin Kamrup College fraternity convey my best wishes to the members of the Dakshin Kamrup College Study Forum for their vision to take out their first book in English and welcome our well wishers, students, faculty members, guardians, research scholars and the general readers to this volume entitled "Integrating Diverse Aspects of North East India: Contexts and Perspectives". I respect the decision of the Study Forum to entrust the responsibility of editing the book to Dr. Jilmil Bora and thank her for her sincere endeavour to bring out this book pertaining to issues related to North East India according to editorial norms. I offer my sincere gratitude to Dr. Ramesh Chandra Kalita, former Principal and Dr. Phanindra Chandra Kalita, former Principal-in-Charge Dakshin Kamrup College for their unconditional support to the project. I appreciate the scholars and writers belonging to varied fields of specialization for their valuable contributions in this volume. I hope the book will be appreciated by the academia and the general readers alike and stimulate further research on North East India. I will be very grateful if this volume of articles succeeds in adding to the corpus of already existing academic works on North East India.

August, 2020

Dr. Nabajyoti Das
Principal, Dakshin Kamrup College, Mirza

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Preface

Until a few decades ago the dominant narrative about North East India had hardly been plotted not by people who belonged to this region, which is in fact known for its diversity, be it cultural, social and geographical. From the time of the British Raj to the post independent periods the North East part of India is always viewed with awe due to its proximity to the mongoloid culture. The physical features of the people helped in contributing to its segregation from mainland India. It was only during the 1960's that it came into focus for the first time in independent India due to the Indo-China war. Thereafter various student movements, rise of separatist groups and insurgency, gave enough scope to national news coverage of the region. In such a scenario the dominant national concern naturally had to be on issues, such as insurgency, ethnic clashes etc. which ultimately have made people call the region as trouble torn. It was because of such discourses the narrow 'chicken neck' which divides the North East region from the rest of India metaphorically further got narrowed down fuelling its aloofness from the mainland India. The region however has come out from the stigma with a new found identity, its assertion of being an integral part of the country.

Though a number of scholarly books are available in the market to deal with North East India, what makes the present volume different from most of them is the insiders' gaze with its interdisciplinary approach which has been incorporated as the very essence of the volume. Covering a wide range of topics in 26 chapters concerning politics, economics, sociology, environment, history, literature, law, educational, geography, folklore and women studies pertaining to North East India the book has been designed to bring into fore diverse issues. The volume focuses mainly on Assam along with other states of the North East. Some articles incorporated in the volume have nationalistic relevance. The

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articles are empirical, analytical and explorative in perspective keeping the door open for further debate and research. The contributors' deep insights and variegated perspectives have rendered the much needed distinctiveness to the volume.

If this volume in any manner draws the attention of the academia, policy makers and the general readers towards the rich treasure house of North East India, our efforts will be rewarded.

On behalf of the Editorial Board

Jilmil Bora
Editor
September, 2020

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Acknowledgements

I express my sincere gratitude to Dakshin Kamrup College Study Forum for entrusting me with the responsibility of editing a book in English - the first of the Study Forum so far. I am grateful to all the members of Dakshin Kamrup College Study Forum. Special thanks to Dr. Ramesh Kalita, former Principal of Dakshin Kamrup College, Dr. Phanindra Chandra Kalita, former Principal-In-Charge, Dakshin Kamrup College and Dr. Nabajyoti Das, the present Principal of Dakshin Kamrup College for their full support in taking out the volume. I am very much grateful to my editorial board that stood by me in my whole journey. I am really thankful to Dr. Jogendra Kumar Das, Dr. Dharanidhar Mali, Dr. Dandadhar Bora and Dr. Jyanaendra Barman for agreeing to review the articles. This volume would not have been possible without the contributions of the scholars and writers. I thank them from the core of my heart for their erudite contributions. I am indebted to my college fraternity and my family for their blessings and cooperation which has always inspired and encouraged me to accomplish the task. Lastly, I thank Akhand Publishing House for publishing works of the volume.

Jilmil Bora
Editor
August, 2020

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Spiritual Approach to Nature – A Tool for Environmental Protection: Its reflection in the Socio-Religious Beliefs of the Bodos

Dr. Aditi Devi Choudhury

Introduction

Our environment is a matter of great concern for us. The word 'environment' refers to the external conditions or surroundings of both animate and inanimate objects. It is a system in which various living beings as well as non living things can exist with proper relationship. Man being an integral part of environment, influences the environment by his activities whether positive or negative. In the same way man is influenced by the environment. Environment is individual's life space. Our environment can remain in stable condition when all the parts of the environments are in perfect harmony. Organisms can survive, grow and reproduce only in such a stable environment. So it is the moral responsibility of every individual to protect the environment.

Environmental degradation and the notion of spirituality

Our ancestors could fully realize the importance of conserving nature. Their way of life seemed to be more eco-friendly than that of the modern people. However, with the help of science and technology people have been developing a sense of superiority over nature and are trying to make themselves master of the earth. People, being proud of their achievements have destroyed the

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natural balance of the earth, renewal of which becomes very much difficult. Modern people have made their needs unlimited and have been consuming natural resources considering the environment as a reservoir of resources, not as a vital component of human life. They forget that a war against nature is inevitably a war against them.

Nobody can deny the negative impact of excessive scientific and technological practices. However, mere science and technology should not be made responsible for bringing environmental ills to the world. In other words our problem lies not only in science and technology, the factor responsible for the worst condition of the world is the human race itself with polluted human mind. We have not only a polluted physical environment; we also live in a polluted mental and spiritual environment. Degradation of physical environment is the result of degradation of our mind and spirit. It is important to make our physical environment clean. However, the most important task on the part of human beings is to make their mind clean. It is said: *The pollution of the planet is only an outward reflection of an inner psychic pollution: millions of unconscious individuals not taking responsibility for their inner space ..... if humans clear inner pollution, then they will also cease to create outer pollution* (Uhl, 2004:342). In such a situation different philosophers and religious leaders come forward and become seriously concerned with the question of degradation of moral values in human society. They feel that such degradation of moral values has alienated the human race from the natural world. Accordingly they try to reunite ecology and ethics and have developed different lines of study that emphasize eco-centric values. These new approaches have been referred to as environmental philosophy. Environmental philosophers give much emphasis on the point that mere formulation of government laws or rules, environmental policies will not solve the problem of environmental degradation. They find that the present environmental degradation is the result of changing attitude towards our life. Accordingly they have been guiding people to re-think over the original questions concerning human obligation to or for nature, to investigate the environment as field of philosophical concern. Some key sentences within environmental philosophy are –

1. In environmental philosophy the world is regarded as a sanctuary.

2. Environmental philosophy encourages people to show respect for life, for nature.

3. If we want to save our planet first we must heal ourselves.

4. From the above it follows that development of spirituality is essential.

Thus, the notion of spirituality arises in the study of environment. Spirituality is not an abstract concept. Also it does not mean something religious. It is simply an innate human potentiality. Men possess rationality but at the same time men need to be spiritual. Spirituality is not irrational but a transrational state. According to Mahatma Gandhi, simple reason and logic are regarded as guide posts of physical sciences. But humans require another dimension; viz. Spiritual dimension. In Gandhi's view, spirituality is the tool of synthesis which enables one to overcome the dichotomies between 'I' and the 'other'. Such a notion has been clearly described in the following words: *When we feel ourselves as part of the whole, and think to ourselves how this creation is working, how our own being is working within it and who has created it and how; when we try to find the motive force behind all these – this is spirituality. Without this internal dimension we may have external culture but we will use it for the wrong reasons – selfish ones – and we will not benefit others by our actions* (Prime, 1996:20).

With the realisation of spirituality, people can move beyond a self centered world view and can think for the world. Such realisation helps people to understand the perennial questions like 'who we are', 'where we are headed' and the nature of the reality in which we are included. People acquire tremendous power to develop high values of humanity like love, unselfishness, faith, compassion, peace, satisfaction, integrity, simplicity etc. with such qualities they become bold enough to identify themselves not only with their species but with the whole non-human world. It results in a broad and beautiful human- nature relationship. Nature becomes a part of one's own self. In such a situation human self is extended. One gets one's own identity in the midst of nature. Alienation from nature results in the loss of one's self identity. Thus, with spirituality it becomes natural to protect nature. *The current deplorable environmental crisis demands a spiritual response. A fundamental reorientation of human consciousness, accompanied by action that is born out of inner commitment, is*

very much needed (http://www.hinduwisdom). In this way spirituality is always attached with environment. It is said: *True spirituality cannot survive without reference to the natural enviornment* (*op. cit*., p.20).

Spirituality when used in environmental philosophy can be described as eco-spirituality. In Indian philosophy this concept is very clearly explained by the *Upanisadic* philosophers. The *Isa Upanisad* teaches us to treat the planet carefully. Here it is said- *Everything in the universe belongs to the Lord. You should therefore only take what is really necessary for yourself, which is set aside for you. You should not take anything else, because you know to whom it belongs* (*ibid.* p.32). Such teaching becomes very much relevant in the present environmental thought. On the basis of such view the edifice of ecological spirituality is formed. Ecological spirituality is regarded as a plea to root out human egoism. It is the only principle that shows us the way to protect and preserve the planet. Thus spirituality becomes a tool for environmental protection.

In the study of eco-spirituality, ethical principles of Jainism and Buddhism are regarded as very much relevant. The ethical principles of Jainism are considered as profoundly ecological. Among the ethical principles, the principle of non-violence or *ahimsâ* is very much important and is strictly followed by the Jains. Positively non-violence means universal love and compassion. The principle of non-violence is accompanied by other great vows of *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *brahmacharya* (desisting from sensuality) and *aparigraha* (virtue of non-possiveness). With such principles human soul is made clean and it results in reverence for all life forms. Like the Jains, the Buddhists also consider self purification as the ultimate goal of life. It requires one's commitment to the ideals of non-violence. Along with the principles of non-violence different other ethical principles of Buddhism are very much significant. Buddha asks people to take vows for desisting from stealing, lying, sensuality and intoxication. The present environmental philosophers show their willingness to accept such traditional teachings and they have re- interpreted all such teachings in order to cope with present environmental issues.