

Effects of the Insurgency activities on the people as well as the Nokmas, Village Council and Village Leaders of Garo Hills, Meghalaya

Abstract

Today we find that the whole world is worried about the activities of various insurgent/ terrorist groups threatening peace, security and peaceful co-existence. Insurgency in North – East India first started in Naga Hills District of Assam in the early part of post independent era. In North East in general and Garo Hills of Meghalaya in particular, the insurgent groups have created an environment of insecurity on the lives of the people. Some of the expressions of insurgency activities are killing, kidnapping, demanding of money and even bombing of some public places like markets or stations. This study will try to examine and highlight the activities as indicated in the title.

Keywords: Activities, Insurgent, Worried, People, Insecurity.

Introduction

The motive behind the emergence of insurgency groups in Meghalaya is to fight for the independent as well as to protect the indigenous settlers. The non-indigenous settlers coming from various parts of India and the rampant unchecked foreigners coming to settle in Garo Hills have been the sources of fear among the indigenous people. The negligence both by the state and the Central Government particularly for the youths has given rise to a sense of deprivation and exclusion. The fear of identity in the midst of non-indigenous as well as fear of being reduced to minority like that of state of Tripura, growing corruption and so on, prompted the indigenous youths to form militant groups hoping to get protected through arms struggle. Even within state, the Garos feel that they are ill-treated and discriminated by the Khasis and the Jaintias socially, politically and economically. For that reason they desired to carve out of Meghalaya as an independent separate 'A'chik State'. But we have seen and experienced that such separation is not possible through arm struggle. The Militant groups so formed do not have clear political ideology and vision. They are also deviating away from their main objectives and goals. Hence they lost the support of the people.

Aims of the study

1. To examine the effects of insurgency activities on the life of the people of Garo Hills
2. To highlight the effect of insurgency on Nokmas, Village Council and Village Leaders of Garo Hills, Meghalaya

As we know that hopes have been expressed in many quarters that with the formation of the State of Meghalaya, development process will take in all parts of the state. The political leaders have fore told of sea changes in the development process through proper management of all the means of resources such as natural resources and human resources as well. However, all these expectations were belied and the State still remain backward and excluded from this development process taking place in rests of the country. It must be noted that political leaders particularly in Garo Hills have failed much in their obligation and duties. Though Garo Hills have produces stalwarts and popular political leaders such as Captain Willimson A. Sangma, the first C.M of Meghalaya and P. A Sangma, the former Lok Sabha Speaker as a matter of the fact almost all Chief Ministers of the State were from Garo Hills, even the present Dr. Mukul Sangma belongs to Garo Hills, surprisingly Garo Hills remained backward when we compare with counterpart of Khasi and Jaintia Hills of the State. The fact is quite clear that almost all political leaders of Garo Hills failed miserably to



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P: ISSN NO.: 2394-0344

RNI No.UPBIL/2016/67980

VOL-3* ISSUE-10 (Part-1)* January 2019

E: ISSN NO.: 2455-0817

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do justice, to bring development and progress in their respective constituencies. So in the absence of development, poverty and job opportunities is comparatively less, the educated youth in particular were having a kind of social exclusion and frustrations which were manifested in movements such as peaceful means as well as violence means.

Effects of Insurgent Activities

Garó Hills is noted for natural beauty and rich in mineral wealth if exploited properly it would bring about development to the whole region. Garó Hills is also known for natural vegetations and very rich in forest resources such as timber, rubber, lac, etc. If peace prevails in the region it would have sustained the livelihood of people to a large extent. Though in the early year's peace and tranquillity prevailed in Garó Hills, however, in the last three decades, the insurgent groups have reign supreme and convert it into an unsafe region where the outsiders hesitate to come.

The emergence of insurgency in Garó Hills has affected the law and order. It has really affected the governmental machinery to maintain law and order. Business houses, traders, contractors, government officials were served demand notes if not comply with dire consequents they have to face. So in this way it has affected the economy of the whole region. Developmental fund which is supposed to develop the region got diverted into the purse of the outfits. It is a common knowledge that one insurgency group emerge one after another. The reason behind is due to easy money making. In the absence of job opportunities, insurgency is like a flourishing industry which provides alternative employment. Unemployed youths in most occasions are attracted to them. The situation becomes unpredictable and worse day by day as many youths join the outfit. It is imperative to mention here that because of the above mentioned factors insurgency is growing. According to the newspaper reports killing, kidnapping and abduction of children/businessmen, contractors, government officials for ransom happen frequently.

The effect of insurgency is not touching only to the rich people, government officials, business men etc but it has affected the leaders of the villages as well. Most of the time the traditional leaders such as Nokma, Sardar, Head man, executive members of the villages in Garó Hills are the most sufferers in the sense that they are the target point in the remote areas/villages. If they are not complied with their demands or orders they have to face the consequence. In most occasions the Nokmas/Sardars/Headman etc. are harassed, kidnapped and sometimes lost their lives in case they are suspect as police informer or cooperate with the police/government. It so happened also if they refused/failed to provide food and shelter in their houses or villages they are beaten up by them and sometimes at gun point they are targeted.

Consequently the traditional leaders in the interior villages had faced lots of problems of insurgent activities in to the region. In such a critical situation, some Nokmas/Sardars/Headman etc have left their villages in search for a safe place.

Probable Recommendations and Conclusion

To bring back the normalcy in Garó Hills the youths must be properly utilized in nation-building activities. If the human resource is properly utilised particularly the youth of today will be asset of tomorrow. For that I would like to suggest some measures for proper utilization of human resources particularly of Garó Hills :-

1. Children must be given proper education from the grass root level onwards. More colleges and Technical Educational Institutions needed to be set up so that youths of today can equip themselves with technical know-how. This will definitely change their mind sets and they will not only depend on government jobs but can outside to work in private enterprises or set up their own firms.
2. Garó Hills need Industrialization which can help in absorbing the youths. Government must take initiative to attract and bring big Industrialists to invest and set up industries on the basis of locally available resources.
3. Government must have the policy to establish small-scale and cottage industries to encourage the unemployed youths to be employed and earn their livelihood.
4. The youth must be given proper training so that they can start new industries, business centres, etc of their own.
5. It is undeniable fact that political solution is also the ultimate solution and political good – will is required to tackling the problems. If all the political parties of Garó Hills sit together and take definite programme and plan of action in solving insurgency problems, there is strong hope for amicable solution.
6. Another important point to be noted here is that Government of Meghalaya must give scope to the surrendered extremists for a proper rehabilitation and other financial benefits. In this way different groups will be growing at very short intervals to get the benefits offer by government with the good intention of bringing them to the main stream.
7. Looking at the formation of different insurgent groups within a few period of time in Garó Hills, it is an urgent time and right time on the part of the state and central governments to win the militants from both sides. It should not encourage or use one in order to neutralise another. This will be a self defeating step.
8. The insurgency problems in Garó Hills should be given priority and serious attention otherwise the theory of 'son of the soil' will break the ideal of federal government which constitutes one of the basic pillars of Indian Constitution.
9. Last but not the least to curb the menace of insurgency problem, the NGOs and religious institutions of Garó Hills can play as mediators between the insurgent groups and the government in the sense that through their peace methods – dialogue, reconciliation, counselling, etc they can provide important avenues to bring them back to the negotiable table. Of course,

P: ISSN NO.: 2394-0344

RNI No.UPBIL/2016/67980

VOL-3* ISSUE-10 (Part-1)* January 2019

E: ISSN NO.: 2455-0817

Remarking An Analisation

some NGOs like Shalom Meghalaya, United Christian Peace forum (UCPF), etc have come forward to tackle this problem. However, not much success has been achieved in this direction. Therefore, to bring development and progress in Garo Hills, ensuring peace and security is the prerequisite conditions.

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The Traditional Institutions of A-king Nokmas as A Part of Rural Governance in Meghalaya: Some Observations

Abstract

The traditional institution of Nokmaship is as old as the first settlement of the Garos in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya. The word 'Nokma' is the guardian and custodian of a particular motherhood. The position of a male Nokma (husband) is the guardian and manager of his wife's ma'chongs' property. In Garo society 'Nokma' refers to A-king Nokma i.e. the land of a particular clan. This study will examine and dwell thoroughly the Nokmaship as it is prevailing and functioning in Garo Hills.

Keywords: Traditional, Institution, Nokma, Guardian, Manager.

Introduction

The word, 'Nokma' means a 'Mother of a house' or a 'motherhood' (nokni ma-dot or ma-bikrom) whereas the position of a husband is that of a guardian and a manager of his wife's property. According to the Laws and practices of the indigenous Garo tribe of Meghalaya, the A-king land belongs to the *ma-chong* (motherhood) in which a mother of a house (Nokkrom) belongs to her and not the husband. The A-king Nokmas both the husband and the wife are merely the guardian and the custodian of the A-king land on behalf of the particular motherhood. Any decision pertaining to affairs relating to the A-king Land must be consulted with her *chra* (male members of the family). She can exercise her power and authority, and even carry on responsibilities bestowed on her by her *chras* and the *mahari* through her husband and protect the unity and integrity of her *ma-chong's* A-king Land. Traditionally she has to perform all social and religious functions of her clan. However, A-king Nokmas has to take a lead in all the social, religious, political, administration of justice and the welfare of their own people.

Aims of the Study

1. The paper try to highlight the working of the traditional institution of A-king Nokma in Garo Hills of Meghalaya
2. This paper will also examine the changes that have taken place of this institution.

Pre-British Period

Prior to the advent of the British into Garo Hills, every A-king Lands were Independents of each other. People living within the A-king land were governed by a simple system of administration in both civil and criminal cases. Nevertheless the administration of justice was carried on by the A-king Nokmas and his Council. The procedure for administration of justice was through an act of "Bobil dinga" or "Gro dinga" and *be-en malua*. With passage of time this system was modified to be more refine as an administration of justice through a Council known as "Melaa or Bichal" by the village elders and the *mahari* headed by a *Nokma*. The decisions taken in such a *Melaa* or *bichal* is very strict and have to be executed by all means. Any unlawful acts are considered wrongs because they violate and obstruct moral precepts as well as hamper an individual reputation or feelings. In order to appease the feelings of an offended person or to compensate for any loss or death penalty through an act of 'be-en malua or Gro dinga' was awarded to the guilty. A-king Nokmas play important role in managing the village affairs and the administration of justice within their own respective jurisdictions.

British Period

When the British occupied Garo Hills in the early part of 1824, they recognized that the *A-king Nokmas* were Independent of each other and subject to none of the outside power. They even refused to co-operate with neighboring rulers. And so, British Government appointed *Laskers* and



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Mouzadars to look over them to help in collecting revenues, taxes and administration. The *Laskers* and *Mouzadars* were appointed in place of the *A-king Nokmas* to rule and serve for their own interests. They snatched away all the political, administrative and judicial powers from the *A-king Nokmas*. In this way they have reduced the position and status of *A-king Nokmas*. Apparently the *Nokmas* became mere titular heads of their own respective *ma-chongs* (motherhood). They continued to be the custodian and guardian of *A-king* lands without any revenue, administrative and judicial powers even though the traditional customs, laws and practices were left untouched.

Under this new acts of arrangements the administration of justice as per the existing Customary Laws and practices were conferred to the newly appointed *Laskers* and *Sardars*. British administration then introduced the system of payment of 'dai' (Compensation) in lieu of death penalty imposed by the people by practicing "Gro dinga" or 'B-een malua' with motive of killing others. The *Laskers* so appointed were given a *Sanad* by the Deputy Commissioner and were empowered a third class magisterial power to try cases and offences of certain categories. *Laskers* were empowered to try offences of theft, injury to property and persons, house trespass, gambling and drunkenness and enforce fines up to Rs. 50 to the guilty.

Post Independent Period

After India got an Independent in 1947, Garo Hills Districts was administered under the Provision of Para – 1 (1) of the Sixth Scheduled to the Constitution of India. Under these Provisions of Law, the Garo Hills District Council was constituted in 1952. With the establishment of Garo Hills District Autonomous Council a number of Acts were passed to assist and manage the administration, protecting and preserving the Customs and traditions of the people as well. After the formation of Garo Hills Autonomous Council, in 1952 under the Sixth Scheduled to the Constitution of India, which is meant for self-governance protecting the indigenous Tribal cultures, customs and law, continued to follow the policy of British colonial rulers by sidetracking and neglecting the indigenous tribal institutional chiefs, i.e the *Nokmas*. Garo Hills Autonomous Council, which is the authorized body under the new Constitution of India, to protect, promote and preserve the traditional institutions, custom, cultures and Laws failed to restore the powers and functions of the *A-king Nokmas* in social, political, administrative and judicial which were usurped by the British colonial ruler to suit their own interests.

The traditional institutional chiefs of *A-king Nokmaship* became mere figurehead and custodian of the properties of the *m-achong* (Motherhood). The powers and functions of these *A-king Nokmas* so long exercised by them were disturbed amongst the newly created office of *Laskers* and *Mouzadars*.

Conclusion

The indigenous institution of *Nokmaship* that has existed since time immemorial has continued till this present generation. Therefore, it is necessary to

protect and preserve these institutions by reviving and improving them. The selection, appointment and disqualification of *Nokmas* must continue as it is in the past i.e. to leave in the hands of the *Chras* and the *mahari* as per existing customary laws. Moreover, the existing structure under the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council particularly 'The Village Council Act, No. 1 of the 1958' may be amended making the *A-king Nokma*, to be selected, as the chairman in the place of *Laskers*.

There is a need to involve the *A-king Nokmas* and his Council making them more responsible in checking the Land alienation by issuing documents, sale mortgage and transfer to the people other than the indigenous tribe. The empowerment of traditional institutions and making them more responsible towards the society and their *ma-chong* by involving and participating in social, political, maintenance of peace in their localities. By doing so, it will even help them to revive their status and position as they used to enjoy in the society in the past.

As it has been discussed above that the real *A-king Nokmas* are wife or the mother and their husbands are the guardian and managers on behalf of their wives, the responsibilities of the mother in shaping their own destiny is essential. Garo society, although, it is a matrilineal society, every decision has been taken by their husbands. *Nokmas* or *nokni ma'dot* should be allowed to voice their grievances in shaping their own future destiny.

Today we find that most of the *A-king nokmas*, no longer care taker of their *A-king* lands, as they are being neglected and sidetracked by the *Chras*, *mahari* and the State Government. And if this trend continues, the systems of the *A-king* land will disappear in future. There may be some merits and demerits in empowering and involving these traditional institutions by policy and decision making body as most of the *A-king Nokmas* both wife (*Nokma*) and her husband (manager and guardian) are illiterate especially in some remote villages.

But, the time has come to empower and involve these traditional institutions in the developmental processes of rural areas. The judicial powers to try petty cases both in civil and criminal cases needs to be restored to the *Nokmas* and his Council which was once taken away by the British rulers.

Under no circumstances, Garo women marrying a non-tribal husband are selected to succeed and inherit the *A-king Nokmaship* even though one may not have female issue to succeed. Garo society, culture, traditions, customs and laws need to be continued and flourished amongst the Garo community and maintain their own identity in the midst of present challenges. *A-chik* women must unite and come up to defend their rights and the rights of their sons and the daughters. *A-chik* women need support and help by the government and cooperation from the society by making necessary legislation in the matter of marriage, divorce, succession, inheritance and so on. The necessary backups are to be given to the Garo Hills Autonomous District

P: ISSN NO.: 2321-290X

RNI : UPBIL/2013/55327

VOL-6 * ISSUE-5 * (Part-1) January- 2019

E: ISSN NO.: 2349-980X

Shrinkhla Ek Shodhparak Vaicharik Patrika

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