



INSURGENCY AND STRATEGY OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN INDIRA GOSWAMI'S *THE SHADOW OF KAMAKHYA* AND ANJUM HASAN'S *LUNATIC IN MY HEAD*

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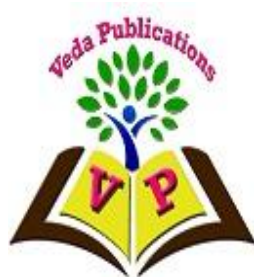
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ABSTRACT

Subnationality is a several decade-old trending prioritized concept prevalent in various communities, tribes and minority sects, demanding from the national government, a separate sovereignty without any external influence that would conserve their cultural and traditional identity. Subnationality, in political terms, may, sometimes, lead to insurgency that is very much visible in many parts of the country. Considering the area of this study, self-determination is a concept dealing with motivation that results in a psychological development of interest in various issues, values, tradition, culture, individual difference, etc. Indira Goswami's *The Shadow of Kamakhya*, a collection of short stories and Anjum Hasan's *Lunatic in my Head* discuss the stark conflict between subnationality and self-determination and its consequences having impact not only on the people but also on the health of the country and its governing states. Issues of insurgency, demand of a separate state, intolerance for people from different states, secessionist ideas, and regional identity and aspirations, are very much reflected in these select fictional narratives. The impact of subnationality, aided by self-determination has been rhetorically discussed by Goswami and Hasan. In a country like India where socio-cultural unity is pleaded amidst extensive diversities, subnationality, acts as a national threat that haphazardly shatters the nation's peace and prosperity.

Keywords: *Insurgency, Identity, Culture, Tradition, Self-Determination.*





As a socio-political movement, subnationality is a decade-old trending concept that deals not only with the identity but also with an entire self-rule of the communities, tribes, etc. Encyclopedia Britannica defines self-determination in the words of the UN Charter. In an article published in their digital website, it says:

“The UN Charter clarifies two meanings of the term self-determination. First, a state is said to have the right of self-determination in the sense of having the right to choose freely its political, economic, social, and cultural systems. Second, the right to self-determination is defined as the right of a people to constitute itself in a state or otherwise freely determine the form of its association with an existing state. Both meanings have their basis in the charter (Article 1, paragraph 2; and Article 55, paragraph 1). With respect to dependent territories, the charter asserts that administering authorities should undertake to ensure political advancement and the development of self-government (Article 73, paragraphs a and b; and Article 76, paragraph b)”. (Encyclopedia Britannica 1)

In the socio-political history of India, subnationalism has proved to be inclusive in the most triggered issues of religion, community and ethnicity. There is a history of tensions between pan-Indianism and subnationalism since the early days of Indian nationalism. Subnationalism has proved to sustain India as a nation state for 70 years, respecting the diverse socio-cultural identities that complement each other. The existence of subnationality is deeply rooted in culture and moves forward through criticism and skepticism. Subnationalists are the people who have always sidelined and marginalized from the political history or can be regarded as a community that has no history of its own. But, after the rise of sub-nationality, we come across these groups of sub-nationals, who always refused to join shoulder with the mainstream nationalists. A state or a region, under the influence of subnationalism, vehemently demands a different interest from that of the interest of the nation. It promotes the idea not only of an intact identity but also of self-sufficiency. The

demand of a separate sovereignty has been one of the characteristics of subnationalism. It is very broad, everybody fits in. It could be referring to a second level of government (state or province) or to a third level (municipalities). It is also broad in the sense that it could encompass characteristics that are political, or financial (like the ones associated with the sub-sovereign term). In fact, it is broad enough that the only thing that doesn't fit here is the national government. GK Today defines subnationalism in the following words:

“If subnationalism emphasizes aggressively on its regional identities then it can break the sensitive thread through which India remains a nation. As much as it is a matter of pride it also remains a matter of concern when regional aspirations become too strong. As a country who has faced partition due to rising religious motives and who has been plagued by secessionist movements in Jammu and Kashmir and Nagaland based on regional identities, great efforts and sacrifices have been made on both sides to keep the nation intact. Therefore the fears of political leaders in granting a state flag to a particular state are not completely unfounded. Secondly, it is also to see if the expression of one community or region is at the cost of the other community. It should be critically studied that whether the state's assertions are to freely exercise their own culture and language or to belittle and suppress others. However, a third and a rather optimistic view emerges which characterises subnationalism as the strength of a multi cultural nation such as India.”

(G K Today 1)

Prerna Singh in her work, 'How Solidarity Works?' has mentioned that subnationalism encourage social development. She demonstrates through her multiple researches and works that if the level of solidarity is high in a state, so is the state's commitment towards its social welfare. It means that a region becomes more and more dedicated to its work in the state if it is able to freely express, profess and promote its cultural and linguistic identity within its country.



Whereas, self-determination is the process by which a country determines its own statehood and forms its own government. **In this process of self-determination**, a group of people, possessing a great deal of zeal to do something fair for the nation, for its growth and development, usually possessing a certain degree of national consciousness, form their own state and choose their own government. To give "self-determination" a political definition, it can be said that it first evolved as a political principle, as a by-product of the doctrine of nationalism. A truly determined subnationalism is the epitome of social development and solidarity. One has to consider the pleasures of agency: the positive effect associated with self-determination, autonomy, self-esteem, efficacy, and pride from the successful assertion of intention. UNPO talks rightly of self-determination:

Essentially, the right to self-determination is the right of a people to determine its own destiny. In particular, the principle allows a people to choose its own political status and to determine its own form of economic, cultural and social development. Exercise of this right can result in a variety of different outcomes ranging from political independence through to full integration within a state. The importance lies in the right of choice, so that the outcome of a people's choice should not affect the existence of the right to make a choice. In practice, however, the possible outcome of an exercise of self-determination will often determine the attitude of governments towards the actual claim by a people or nation. Thus, while claims to cultural autonomy may be more readily recognized by states, claims to independence are more likely to be rejected by them. Nevertheless, the right to self-determination is recognized in international law as a right of process (not of outcome) belonging to peoples and not to states or governments.

Again, UNPO further adds to the concept of self-determination. It says:

The concept of self-determination is a very powerful one. As Wolfgang Danspeckgruber put it: "No other concept is as powerful, visceral, emotional, unruly, as steep in creating aspirations and hopes as self-determination." It evokes emotions, expectations and fears which often lead to

conflict and bloodshed. Some experts argued that the title holders should be or are limited in international law. Others believed in the need to limit the possible outcome for all or categories of title holders. Ultimately, the best approach is to view the right to self-determination in its broad sense, as a process providing a wide range of possible outcomes dependent on the situations, needs, interests and conditions of concerned parties. The principle and fundamental right to self-determination of all peoples is firmly established in international law. (UNPO 1)

For socio cultural development of the unnoticed and underprivileged communities and sections of people, subnationalism opens new opportunities and avenues that help their re-growth. But, taking in consideration the history records of India, subnationality has taken the shape of insurgency, resulting in revolts and mass murder. The craze of subnationality, aided by self-determination, takes toll on the lives of many and also facilitates the unemployed citizens' urge to join a futile movement in the guise of a subnational fight. The re-emergence of subnationality in India has the very possibility of leading to the nation's ramification. Identity, playing the foremost concern of subnationalism, has given rise to the notion of the regional, or cultural "I", "we" and "us". It is the collection of identities that politicize the whole concept of subnationality.

In Sanjib Baruah's Introduction to *Beyond Counter-Insurgency*, it is said:

A pressing contemporary problem with broad relevance for the history of nationality while offering an important contribution to the study of ethnic conflict. The region's insurgencies, human rights abuses by government security forces and insurgents, ethnic violence, and a steady slide toward illiberal democracy... are largely due to India's formally federal, but actually centralized governmental structure... multiethnic polities, loose federations not only make better democracies, in the era of globalization they make more economic



sense as well. Poverty, underdevelopment and lack of economic opportunities, are after all, everyone's favourite bogey, as causes of armed civil conflicts. (Baruah 4)

Apart from its mesmerizing scenic beauty, the northeastern part of India, the congregation of the seven sisters, has always been considered a land of insurgency and chaos. Literature of the Northeast India has often dealt with the acts of terrorism and the aiding factors behind it. The conflict between the self-determination of the government, its policies, rules and the extremists, have cost the lives of many innocents. In this paper, the two works of fiction, *The Shadow of Kamakhya* by Indira Goswami and *Lunatic in My Head* by Anjum Hasan, have been taken into consideration. In the collection of stories, *The Shadow of Kamakhya* Goswami has dealt with that time of Assam, when insurgency was at its peak. The picture presented in one of the stories, 'The Journey', radiates a horrific feeling of fear that comes with terrorism. The love for one's own land has taken a different shape, shape of a desire to be free from not the government, but poverty and unemployment. In the beginning of 'The Journey', Goswami has projected the condition of Assam through the words of Professor Mirajkar, who is on a visit to this beautiful yet haunting corner of India:

Professor Mirajkar kept asking her, "Have you been able to control terrorism in this beautiful land of yours?" I really did not know what to tell him especially since on our way we crossed quite a few checkposts where we were examined and had torches shone on our faces. (Goswami 1)

The government, though has a vital role to play in dealing with the extremist has often failed to come to peace with the latter. It has never reached a solution because the adamancy of these groups. Not being able to meet their irrational demands, the government has always been seen struggling with peace talks, encounters, losing innocent lives and also, the judgemental public. Samir Kumar Das says: There are issues underlying the conflicts in India's Northeast that the state can do little to resolve except by bringing the conflicting parties together around a negotiating table... the central government can do little to settle the conflict- except to facilitate a dialogue process that aims to bring the groups

together and encourage them to arrive at some form of compromise. (Das 54)

Another instance in the story, where the growing tension of terrorism has taken toll on the lives of common people is:

Mirajkar sat worrying about terrorists. Someone had told him that terrorists owing allegiance to Babbar Khalsa and the JKLF had managed to infiltrate the jungles of Assam to join local group of extremists. (Goswami 1-2)

A horrific and unpleasant picture that resulted from the roots of eccentric subnationality has been presented in the novel. In the words of Goswami:

The driver broke the silence. "Last year, this road was smeared with blood. There was always crossfire of machine guns, exploding grenades ..." (Goswami 2)

The constant struggle with the national forces of India, and falling prey during the combats were a common scene that prevailed. The determination of the extremists formed a negative impact not only on their own lives but on the entire state and the country. The spirit of subnationality and the governance of self-determination have created a border of extreme hatred among the extremists for the soldiers. This situation is perfectly depicted in the article "Nationalism" by the Encyclopedia Britannica:

The ideal of the nation-state is never fully achieved. In no historical case does one find all members of a particular nation gathered within one state's boundaries. Conversely, many states contain sizable national minorities. This lack of full correlation has frequently given rise to dangerous tensions that can ultimately lead to war. A government inspired by nationalism may conduct a policy aiming at the assimilation of national minorities, as was the general tendency of central and eastern European governments in the interwar period; it may also attempt to reunite the members of the nation living outside its boundaries, as Adolf Hitler did. National groups that are not in control of a state may feel dissatisfied with its regime and claim self-determination in a separate state, as demonstrated in the attempt to carve Biafra out of Nigeria and the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan. There is no rational basis for deciding on the extent to which the self-determination principle should be applied in



allowing national minorities to break away. As a rule, the majority group violently opposes the breakaway movement. Violent conflicts can ensue and, through foreign involvement, turn into international wars. No suitable method has been found for divorcing nationalism from the state and for meeting national demands through adequate social and cultural provisions within a larger unit.

Apart from the mentioned factors, the author has depicted some other factors that have always been shadowed in the process of lamenting terrorism, a result of cynic subnationality. Innumerable cases of rapes by the soldiers, affairs, pregnant village girls, and illegitimate children are a few of the many reasons that trigger the violence of the local people. In one of the incidents in the story, we come across a terrorist abusing his pregnant sister, kicking her at the belly. The visitors, traumatized at the incident, enquired her parents regarding the same. They said, "...The girl fell in love with a soldier in the Indian army which had come here to flush out the terrorists..." (3) During encounters between the terrorists and the soldiers, the dead bodies of the formers are often found lying in secluded areas of the regions. At the end of the story, the terrorist who had kicked and abused his sister is found bleeding due to a combat with the soldiers. The following lines of the mother are evident of the incident:

"Oh my Kanbap, my son! I told your father a thousand times to bring you from the railway tack. Oh my son, what has happened to you? Why are you bleeding like this?"(Goswami 11)

Murders of the government officials, kidnapping of the innocents, demand for lump sum money, loot, etc were very much evident. Such an incident was mentioned in the story when the terrorist, on the verge of dying, says, "Those poachers are selling a US carbine. It's an old gun but sturdy. With this money." (Goswami 12)

Another similar incident is stated by Hasan in *Lunatic in My Head*. Here, the only difference is that the action is performed not by terrorists but by a bunch of Khasi children who have been illogically and immorally instigated by subnationalistic feeling and hatred for the non-Khasis. Being the mouthpiece of

the 'dkhars'- outsiders or non-Khasis, Anjum Hasan describes the incident in the following words:

"They'd come the other day. Some ruffians. Young fellows- couldn't have been more than sixteen or seventeen. Barged into the clinic and started demanding money. 'Give me thousand rupees.' Crude fellow. I told them to get out." (Hasan 69)

This attitude of a non-Khasi is rarely witnessed. Aman, the son of the speaker (Mr. Moondy) of the above lines, stands in stark contrast to his father. This often seen meek nature of the non-Khasis, and Aman being one of them is described in the words of Hasan:

Aman, still conscious of the fear that had overtaken him at the aloo-wallah, felt shamed by his father's more resolute way of dealing with troublemakers. It was a dangerous attitude, he decided. (Hasan 69)

A vehement evocation of a negative subnational feeling engrossed in the minds of the people is very much reflected in the following statement, "Near the escarpment on their right, on which graffiti in dripping red paint read, 'We Are Khasis by Blood, Indians by Accident'..." (32). This sense of utter hatred for the nation, they are residing in, availing all the facilities provided by the ruling government and reverting back with violent speeches and discussions delineate a strong involvement of cynic nature. When the self-determined government and an obstinacy of subnationality give rise to not only terrorists but also a sense of hatred among the common native people, situation becomes worse. This also gives rise to a horrendous belief of racism, where prejudice, discrimination or antagonism is directed against the rest of the nation. It takes the shape of an institutional racism that is very much evident in the normal behavior of the common people. In the novel, we find, the raucous whistling of the college Khasi boys towards the non-Khasis is a proof of the self-acclaimed sense of superiority. Another incident of violence that has been depicted by Hassan is a tussle between a few Khasis and two non-Khasis (Aman-an aspiring IAS and Sarak Singh- a Bihari aloo-muri vendor). Ribor, a Khasi, is the friend of Aman. The following excerpt deals with this incident:

His friend, Aman, was in the language of the bullies, dkhars- an outsider. As was Sarak Singh. Ribor, on the



other hand was Khasi, and the boys now clustered in a threatening ring around them were his kinsmen. (36)

"Stop it," he mimicked. "Shut up, dkhar." He rattled Aman's arm, ignoring Ribor's protests. "Shut up and go home. Don't interfere." (37)

"They keep doing this. And they never even pay," complained Sarak Singh, who had been standing in that spot for the last eighteen years. (38)

The secret desire of the rest of the people who are not affected by the fundamentalist idea of subnationality is to live a harmonic life within an acceptable diversity. "Dkhars were afraid of tribals, tribals were afraid of dkhars" (72). This form of physical and mental chaos hovers constantly in the air. In one of the statements, Hasan speaks of this desire:

She privately liked the idea that Mr. Nivedita, as she thought of him, was in love with a tribal girl. It made her happy to think that connections were still being established between people from opposite sides of that invisible, yet very palpable, line that divided people in Shillong. (12)

According to Purna Singh,

Units – national or subnational, whether they be provinces, cities, municipalities, or villages – are more conducive to the institution of a progressive social policy and the realization of welfare outcomes if they are a source of shared identity and solidarity. (5)

It has always been an unusual sight to see a Khasi and a non-Khasi being friends or in quite good terms. Hasan has mentioned about a similar situation, where the queer looks of the people act as an irritation and stress. The following lines say it all:

They sailed leisurely into Litumkhrah- an old woman and a young girl. They were a strange sight, Sophie knew that. She knew that little dkhar girls were not, as a rule, seen with old Khasi women, that old Khasi women were not seen driving antique cars, that taken together there was something odd about the whole thing, even funny. Sophie stared straight ahead, trying to ignore the stress. (95)

One of the important objectives of subnationality is to preserve one's own culture and identity; and not

be affected by the external forces. The issue of identity has not always preserved the ethnicity or the reality of a particular community because a strong lack of self-love has often led to the hatred of the different surviving cultures. It is very much apparent in the tribal sections of the country, the only among them who do not have a proper access to education and to an environment of diverse cultures. This has led to many riots among the communities. Thus democratic principles of a country are under a constant threat when the regions and communities of subnational states represent themselves with individualistic identities rather than considering themselves as one state. Language, being the first identity of a culture, has always been prioritized when it comes to save ethnicity. The constant struggle of the subnationals, on the basis of the rigid love for their tribe is very much reflected when Hasan writes, "Something to do with the need to include Khasi in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution." (56)

Paolienlal Haokip comments on the problem of insurgency in North-East India; he says:

The problem of insurgency in the hills of North-East India has defied solution for the past fifty years. The transition from a tribal polity to a parliamentary democracy left the hills communities losing their political foothold within their own territories. The accession to the Indian state and the having the plains people as their new political masters bred discontent in these communities. The resulting insurgence for self-determination was dealt by the state through military means with an overdose of integrationist policies.

The dominant manifestation of the quest for self-determination at the present time is the ethnic variety as illustrated by the "subnationalism". Government and the extremist groups, aided by subnationalism, should have been struggling for a same cause that is the welfare of the community. Because of this desire, the terror of the extremists is sometimes overlooked by the common people. As a result, a vehement protest from the public against this terror is very less witnessed and they have also been seen providing shelter to these extremists. In



the words of Sanjib Baruah, who questions Hiren Gohain, a widely respected Assamese intellectual, known for his consistent opposition to the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), "Why is it that Assamese who condemn ULFA's atrocities still 'demur at the plan to physically exterminate them and insist on a sincere attempt at peace'? (5) This nature of the people is imbibed in such a manner that they forget the rationality that has been blessed upon them, and that has been a distinction from that of the animals. The adverse effects on subnationalism and their insecurity can be overcome only through literature. Nationality in the present world is more physical, relating to the geographical borders than the inner contents. There are no threats subnationalism is facing right now, as they have already created their own space. It can be added that subnationalism gains importance only when modernisation is connected with it. Even though issues like gender inequality exist, as long as freedom of speech exists, subnationalism is safe along with its writers. Subnationality and self-determination, moving forward hand-in-hand, shall very rarely give birth to freedom in true sense, but it is very evident that it shall bring down only chaos not only in that particular community but also in the entire nation. In this vicious cycle of war and peace, and in the hullabaloo of a constant struggle, the true motive of freedom is lost.

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