CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

The federal fabric of Indian political system has grown up and survived in the midst of crisis and conflict situations. This has happened in spite of its continental dimensions. "The new political system in India threw open, possibilities of mobility and advancement for those classes and sections of the society which had remained more or less isolated and backward in the process of development and change."¹ "These sections in their efforts at enhancing their political power and economic privileges have started asserting their identity."²

As a regio-political sub-cultural unit of India, Assam has considerably travelled with the issues of economic development, assertion of its strategic location and most important, Socio-cultural strains throughout its way, especially in post-independence years. Over the last few years, precisely from 1979, agitation was carried out by the students to preserve the Assamese community from various Socio-cultural pressures. Studies regarding students' unrest are by and large limited to the examination of political influence on their activities in India. Student violence is often studied in context of academic unrest. Generally they are termed as unorganized and anything regarding them is vaguely put as student violence.

"Our knowledge is fragmentary regarding every aspect of student disruptions, but it is especially meagre regarding the structure and process of disruptive action themselves."³
Why the students resort to violence in India, has been researched by many, but their organized effort on a certain theoretical guideline and definition of a goal has been a matter of examination. Ashis Nandy says that students are not only numerically weak, they are rarely given to the kind of dissent, which would be susceptible to standard political analysis. He further holds the view of the student politics reflecting "chaotic, inefficacious and anomic elements." Other areas of student learning towards politics may be, inadequate employment opportunities or ambitious idea of students to become prominent figure in college or university campus. A very small section of students are in fact aware of system performance and their role in it. "Increasing stability of the nation's political institutions has reduced the impact of student politics on national politics." There is not much attempt to examine the students' own experiences which lead to their future ideological thinking. Generally the political parties maintain a student base or conversely students unions have political affiliations, but the attention remains to be diverted towards those students who capitalise their long cultural experiences, to prepare a platform for the sub-culture's identity. It not only requires a sense of belongingness to the national culture, but the sub-cultural disturbances motivate them to agitate against the elite for the maintenance of their culture. It brings out their continued search for interest articulation outside the ambit of party organizations.

Student politics in Assam is of such type. It was one of the rarest instances, in which students carefully avoided the
pulls of the political parties. Long history of influx and, demographic as well as cultural imbalance socialized them to define needs and goals. Need to be a majority in their own state determined their goal of preservation of socio-cultural identity.

Such goal of identity preservation was not easy to realise. It required a lot of organization and cohesiveness among the lead group, AASU. Also it was not easy to achieve without a theoretical guideline. It testifies the relationship between "means and ends". If they had reasonable clarity regarding their ends, the selection of means was the crucial area to be decided. The whole dynamics of the agitation depended on the means selected for pursuing the ends.

Their selection of Gandhian means of peaceful persuasion through non-violent methods was the indicator of their preparedness to carry out a long and steady struggle. It is interesting to examine through their nature, the avoidance of violence as official resistance, against the authority. Nevertheless, it was wise thinking on the part of leaders to go ahead with non-violent methods to achieve the goal. It made them aware of their own leadership requirements. Leadership that came to AASU was almost unanimous. There were no other claims of leadership. In fact when AASU’s choice for the leadership seat came around, there was a leadership vacuum. It was also a pre-requisite as well as requirement of non-violent means of persuasion involving a huge mass following. Vital changes and shifts in the AASU came from such participatory
programmes. It is interesting to examine the group dynamics in the articulation and aggregation function of the AASU.

Communication of the AASU with the masses was very effective. There by, one witnessed steady increase in the violence. Decidedly, after a certain phase, pro and anti forces to the agitation became apparent. Minority awareness was also the result of AASU's envious place in the lead group. Depending upon one's own past and upon the community's experiences and expectations the AASU tried to protect the 'good' of the Assamese community, and was caught in dualism of non-violent means and violent occurrences. In Assam agitation, the students' union, AASU, carried on a mass movement to preserve Assamese Community, Socio-culturally. They gave a totally new aspect to their position of being merely students (Politically non-professional) and achieved, a status of leadership. Certainly it was an agitation, because an agitation could be the show of opposition or even powerful exhibition of dissatisfaction over a certain issue. People get the feeling of being agitated out of discontent leading to frustration. Frustration out of discontent may have the roots of deprivation of negligence from the elite. It (Assam) saw a huge mass upsurge. The conditions were not sufficient for revolution. "A revolution is a rapid fundamental and violent domestic change in the dominant values and beliefs of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership and government activity and politics." Revolution involves a complete change of set up and therefore revolutions are rare."
central one, in the process of modernization, revolutions provides conclusive, although costly answer..."^9^ But this much is not sufficient for the revolution. It involves the whole reconstruction of society and political institutions. Revolution here is characterised by the decay and breakdown of political institutions, fragmentation of political community, the assertion of local claims, pursuit of private goals, the dominance of loyalties to the family and other immediate groupings."^10^ 

This involves a definite motivation of an ideology and accordingly the mass awakening destroys the old social order through a revolution. So, revolution is process and change, both. It is evolutionary in the sense that it may take a hundred years or more before it is completed. There are two important things about the revolution, that, it occurs in relation to particular social systems and in particular form of human behaviour. 

Though Assam agitation included the identity problem, it did not aim at overthrowing the political institutions. If revolutions are studied in context of particular social systems, then, Indian society is not much prone to revolution. Its sub-system is independently guided by respective subcultures. Awakening throughout the Assamese society was present but it also confirmed its struggle against the government and its execution of policies but not against the whole society. Assam agitation viewed from particular parts of human behaviour
then it was the feeling of being neglected, that took the form of a mass movement. This means that the need to be 'recognized' in the human personalities guided the Assamese people to exhibit anger or displeasement. Though the reasons for a movement were flowing from years, but the desire was for the corrective steps from the elite. On delay of which the process of accumulation of frustrations began. Need for decentralization of the decision making process of the Congress in the states became obvious because, in India the culture is as large as the geography. There was a feeling of discontent, which did not include the idea of destruction as a whole.

Agitation could occur due to dis-equilibrated social system. It is concerned with the articulation of demands which have grown out of discontent of many years, to the elite, but in the process does not challenge the political system as a whole. "Political leaders occasionally adopt policies which are contrary to social realities or in other words, contrary to social requirements which are necessary for the continuation of a particular social structure." The conditions generated by a dis-equilibrated social system generally called "social problems" cannot be sufficient causes for revolution. It can be termed as system disorder and "they do create demands that the system be adjusted through political action." Assam agitation was thus an expression of discontent to the elite but never was it against the system.
The choice of the subject was obvious because, the nature and the course of the agitation were a little different from any other students movement in India. It was just not a fight for a simple cause, but was an expression of a strong desire to be rooted in one's own origin. The need for cohesion occupied prime concern of the Assamese people. Nature of the agitation carried a big "why" to the Indian political elite and the system as a whole for Assam's Socio-cultural and economic neglect. Assam's strategic location and as a border state, the government did not work out the steps for prevention of influx from Bangladesh. Being blessed with natural resources, especially oil, the unrest grew up with inadequate number of refineries in Assam. The issues underlying the agitation compelled the governmental attention and that was the purpose of the agitation. The course of the agitation followed the organized and planned strategy. It was carefully worked out to avoid confusion. Different programmes were designed to ensure participation. Nature and the course were a little different in the sense that the total Assam was influenced by the agitation. Its survival was entirely dependent on motivation. It is still a matter of interest that the movement was carried on for six long years without any involvement of political parties. It was clear in the minds of leaders, that political parties have petty interests to satisfy.

"Ideologies have played a comparatively minor role and prominent political parties in India apparently wedded to secularism have drawn strength and support from communal group loyalties."
Leadership that came from student organization, motivated general unrest to an organized process of articulation and aggregation in its own style. Their idea of the struggle was participation and response from the masses.

The issues involved were complex though looked simple and pulls were high, yet the agitation sustained the aftermath of every event reasonably well, but certainly not without a change and shift in its continuance. The uneasiness, which began with economic exploitation following victimisation of imperialist policies took a serious turn of socio-cultural pattern. Assamese began to think about their very existence, culturally and demographically. This drive against the influx was interpreted differently by various religious and linguistic minorities.

Each round of negotiation with the central government, which of late involve opposition parties, was almost a bargain. Slowly but steadily the whole movement generated violence in every programme. The non-violent means adopted by the leaders, became a formal covering for the violence. It is a matter of examination of dual existence of non-violent methods and violent occurrences.

After a prolonged struggle of cultural and social reassimilation the accord arrived at was not an exceptional achievement but was a formal end of the agitational proceedings. Agitation which was originally aimed at driving away the foreigners met the end of capture of power.
Its dynamics is a very crucial area of research. Every twist and turn felt by the issues involved, was directly proportionate to the course of agitation.

The thesis tries to examine its dynamics through personal contacts i.e. after meeting various people, face to face. Examination from the Assamese angle required to rely on such method because the past experiences which are hard to forget have become major portion of their (Assamese) culture preservation. Communal nature of the violence was observed during the course of movement. In India "Communal loyalties play a very vital role in economic, political and social, cultural life."\(^{19}\) So, "riots......are only an outgrowth of historically lived experiences and interest articulation along communal lines."\(^{20}\) So, another method was content analysis of local newspapers, to understand their viewpoint. Synthesization of the course of events in chronological order and also of round of talks between the AASU and the government, gives an idea about their individual and collective effects on agitation’s dynamics. Therefore, it was required to be psychologically involved in the Assamese feeling of being neglected.

The sources used are library studies, which contains, printed and unpublished reports, content analysis of press reports, collection of field literature like booklets, News paper notes on chronological version, observation of behaviours of various communities and interviews, structured and unstructured.
NOTES


2. Ibid., p-94.


5. Ibid., p-77.

6. Ibid., Altabach, Phillip, "Student Politics and Higher education in India" in Altabach, Phillip ed.,


8. Ibid., p. 148.

9. Ibid., p. 185.

10. Ibid., p. 187.


12. Ibid., p. 12.


15. Ibid., p. 79.
16. Ibid., p-80.

17. Ibid., p-80.


19. Ibid., p-117.

20. Ibid., p-117.