

Tai Buddhist Community in North-East India

Globalization threat to their identity

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Introduction: - At present time there are six Tai communities in the north-east region, namely – Tai Ahoms, Tai Khamti, Tai Khamyang, Tai Phake, Tai Turungs and Tai Aiton. Tai Ahoms were the first to enter Assam at the beginning of the 13th century, while the rest of the Tai communities made their entrance during the 18th century by crossing the Patkai hill because of the rising power of the *Maans* in the middle and northern part of Myanmar. At present, the Tai Ahoms inhabit in most parts of Assam; the Tai Khamtis inhabit in the districts of Lakhimpur and Lohit of Arunachal Pradesh ; the Tai Khamyangs inhabit in the districts of Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat and Lohit ; the Tai Turungs inhabit in the districts of Karbi Anglong , Golaghat, Jorhat ; the Tai Phakes inhabit in the districts of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia and Tai Aitons inhabit in the districts of Karbi Anglong and Golaghat.

Except the Ahoms, the rest of the Tai communities of the north-east region are Buddhist and therefore, one can find cultural similarity among them. The five communities use the same written language and the same books. So, their written have 100 percent similarity and 90 percent similarity can be seen in their spoken language. Their religious festivals are held at the same time in a same manner. Besides, similarity can be seen in their residence, social customs, domestic tools, food habits, style of cooking, cloths etc. For such reasons, the five Buddhist Tai communities can be discussed impact of globalization with both positive and negative influences upon them.

The problems of globalization and self-identity –

Low population : A chief cause of the problem of self-identity among the five Buddhist communities is the low population. So, a major problem arises among them under the influence of globalization. The population of the Tai Khamti, the Tai Khamyang and Tai Turung is about 15000, 5000 and 4000 respectfully, while that of the Tai Phakes and the Tai Aitons is less than 2000. Their villages are scattered among different regions and therefore, other societies influences their life-style. Whenever they come out of their indigenous rural atmospheres, they have to accept the wider culture as they have to live under the presser of other dominant societies, and then globalization make the final impact on these minor communities. That why, low population often becomes a problem for them.

Language (written and spoken) : The Tai communities have been using the same script. So, they have the same writing method and literature. But for several reasons, they are facing problems in the practice of spoken and written languages. The Turungs now communicate their ideas through the Shingpho language in their day-to-day life as they have been living among the different tribes for hundreds of years. The use of spoken language is in the process of extinction among the Tai Khamyangs. The Tai language is also disappearing among them except in one or two villages. The new generation is facing the problem of self-identity as it is busy with modern education and losing touch with the Tai language. The language is alive in the spoken form among the societies of Tai Phake, Tai Khamti and Tai Aitons, but the main is in its

written form. In case of spoken language also influences can be seen from other languages as mainly English and Assamese languages as the new generation is losing touch with it and as the people very often have to stay away from their villages. In this way, the Buddhist Tais are confronting problems related to traditional language with its written and spoken form.

The extinction of the skill of indigenous and natural dyeing of thread : An Important element of self-identification among the Tais is the traditional way of dyeing thread, which was in vogue among the five communities in the past. They used to weave clothes by producing colour from various roots, barks, fruits and leaves of different plants. But this tradition is on the process of extinction due to the disappearance of trees and impact of globalization. Globalization brings the artificial chemical dye of various colours which is now available in nearest market. The natural method is used only in a few colour and consequently they are losing an important element of their self-identity. A change can also be visible in their use of colour in their dresses.

Problem arising out of emigration : The Tais used to live in unity and co-operation at villages in the past. But under the influence of globalization, emigration is taking place among them. Many families have settled up outside their villages in search of modern education and job. They have been establishing themselves in different parts of Assam as well as India. This process of emigration has a negative effect in their language, culture, customs etc., which cause fatal damage in their traditional way of life.

Dresses : Globalization brings a noticeable change in traditional dress code among these Tai groups. The new generation is getting bored with their traditional outfits. Availability and modern style of dresses of different cultures allure this generation.

Food habits : Like dresses, changes occurred in their traditional food habits also. Traditional food habit is a most distinct characteristics of tribal identity.

Traditional utensils: Tribal utensils, mainly the tools used in their day-to-day life are changing their shape, size and material used in making tools . Usually for making tools these people use (*kah, pital, bell metal, brass*) bamboo, wood, cane, etc which is available nearby forests and these are made by themselves. These indigenous utensils are rapidly replacing by plastic metallic ones made by and transported by the corporate industries.

Besides the negative impact of globalization there are so many positive impact which we can observe among these groups.

They came to contact with modern science and technology, markets, education, culture, society etc., which open a window to a unknown world. They can exchange their views, ideas and also refined their mind in a wider context.

Conclusion: Whether the globalization has negative or positive impact on all tribal groups, under discussion, are on their way to a distinct socio-cultural change. Positive impact of Globalization makes these people more confident and self conscious about

their identity. They are trying to intact their identity as well as match with global changing trends.

References

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