Gandhiana

Bodo Youth Pledge to End Violence,
Gun Culture in Bodoland

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I wish to share with the readers a report of a highly important event organized by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) on the 2nd of October, 2009, i.e., on the Gandhi Jayanti Day at Kokrajhar. I had the good fortune of being present at this historic occasion.

The ABSU having witnessed thoughtless killings and destructions spread over many years has come to strongly feel that this must be stopped. It has resolved to start a campaign from Gandhi Jayanti Day-2009 to usher in a violence-free society. They had kindly invited me to be the special guest. A senior journalist friend of the North-east, Shri Sanat Chakraborty was also with us. He is the representative for the North-eastern region of the English daily The Pioneer published from Delhi. His report of the event has been carried by the edition of The Pioneer dated 6.10.09. He had sent a copy to me for my information. I find that the reporting has been very well done. He has also placed the entire event in the right perspective.

This event is historic because it is for the first time in the North-east that a youth organization has publicly rejected violence and has resolved to invite everyone in their territory to support their campaign for abdication of violence. This fact must be appreciated and encouraged. I am, therefore, glad to reproduce below the report of The Pioneer for the information and perusal of our readers.

Let me mention a few facts about the Bodo tribe. They are the biggest tribal group in Assam with a population of 12 to 15 lakhs. There are various militant factions amongst them. All factions except one has opted for leading normal lives. But the violence is going on. In 2009 alone till date, there have been 40 killings. In 2008, there were more than 70 killings. Hence, it would be appreciated how important the ABSU initiative is. The strength of ABSU is 50,000. I have observed that theirs is an efficient, disciplined and well-managed body. I have added these facts so that the background of the ABSU campaign is understood in correct perspective.

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It was a quiet but extraordinary expression of resolve. Thousands of Bodo youth, who gathered at a function to pay homage to the world’s most acknowledged apostle of peace and non-violence — the Mahatma Gandhi — signed up on a pledge to shun the path of violence and use of guns. Young boys and girls lined up at the site of ‘People’s Assembly on Non-Violence’, organized by influential All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), at Kokrajhar to enlist their name in a public campaign ‘to build an arms and violence-free society’.

A huge white ‘democratic wall’ was erected at the entrance of the venue, where anyone who wanted to end the cult of gun, could sign on it to express his or her voice against militancy in the autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council areas of Assam.

ABSU chose the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi — celebrated country-wide as Gandhi Jayanti — as the occasion to start-off this civil society movement against violence and gun culture. The idea is to collect as many signatures as possible of people of Bodoland who are against the pervasive violence, which can be mobilized to pursue peace.

“There is possibly no way to secure justice other than principle of non-violence so effectively employed by the Mahatma to free our country of foreign rule. Same holds true even today,” said ABSU president Pramod Boro.

He said the Bodo society today was cowering under the shadow of gun. A section of politicians and opportunist people are promoting this culture of violence to perpetuate their personal ambition and vested interest.

“The most distressing fact is that young people, who are lost and find themselves without any direction and hope, are being sucked into this evil design, and tearing apart the social peace and harmony,” Boro said. As a result, a naturally peace-loving, gentle and democratic society finds itself in a situation where people cannot express their opinion freely, fearing retaliation from the arm-wielding men.

Bodos by and large believe in mainstream and democracy, even as a section took to arms to achieve social justice and political rights for the Bodos. After decades of violence and bloodshed, two peace accords were signed in 1993 and 2003 to achieve self-rule and all round development in the Bodoland areas.

Bodos whole-heartedly supported creation of autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), hoping that would bring peace and
development in the violence-ravaged areas. “We did achieve some semblance of peace and development in the past few years,” ABSU president said, but even this, he felt, was now in jeopardy with the spreading virus of corruption and suppression of democracy by brute force.

“We are now in such a situation which is governed by gun, inflicting unbearable sufferings to ordinary people,” ABSU president said. In the past one and half years, at least 107 people died in fratricidal killings or encounters with the security forces. All together 34 women lost their husbands while 74 children never saw their fathers, he said.

“We (ABSU) can no longer remain a silent spectator to this mayhem; we need to come together and help rebuild our society rooted in non-violence and democracy,” Boro said. ABSU had always stood for peaceful resolution of all problems and would continue to work for that goal.

“This (call against violence) is a timely step and also a very significant development in the region, which is mired in mindless violence,” said noted Gandhi worker Padmashree Natwar Thakkar, who was invited as the key speaker on the occasion.

The youth, which is often seen as the purveyor of violence, pledge to non-violence as a means to secure social justice and peace is not only praiseworthy but also exemplary, Thakkar averred. He also praised ABSU, a highly efficient and organized student body in the region, for spearheading this silent but highly motivational campaign for non-violence.

“In fact, non-violence is not a mere slogan; it’s a potent weapon of peace, which is being advocated across the world,” the noted Gandhian worker said. He suggested that the ABSU carried out a year-long signature campaign against violence and use of arms launched on the auspicious day of the Mahatma’s birthday at the people’s Assembly on Friday. “Move out to village to village and enlist their support for non-violence, which eventually can be used as people’s referendum against violence,” he opined.

Speaker after speaker, including former Bodo Sahitya Sabha president Brajendra Brahma and national Sahitya Academy awardee and leading intellectual Mangal Singh Hajowari, passionately reminded the youth of futility of violence and armed action, which is self-destructive. They exhorted the people of Bodoland to follow the path of non-violence shown by the Mahatma, which is the only way of sustained peace and social harmony.
The new initiative of non-violence, though failed to attract enough media attention, if sustained could have overwhelmingly positive impact on the entire trouble-torn region.

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