

Asom's Generation Next – Are they directionless?

I've been in IIM, Ahmedabad for around two months now and I'm thinking at the state of affairs in my home state – Asom. It is a world of difference. Out here, there are no power cuts, no *bandhs*, good infrastructure including well maintained roads – the perfect recipe for development. And back at Asom, it is just the opposite. The saga of *bandhs* continues– on petty issues. Power cuts are increasing, less said about the infrastructure, the better. I'm afraid, but more than the political parties, it is the student organizations of Asom – the so called representatives of Asom's Generation Next, which are to blame for most of our woes. I'm aghast at the way of functioning of the leaders of these organizations – no rules, no accountability; they behave as if they are the last word in what is right, what is wrong.

I'm using strong words, but truths are hard to swallow, people say. Let me bring out to the fore what they have done over the past quarter a century starting with the Assam Movement which was a turning point in the state's history. I've no problem with the issues that were raised – but what did we achieve finally? A bundle of compromises over the blood of 800 plus martyrs. But in the process, an entire generation was crippled – the young and impressionable minds were corrupted to an unthinkable extent. We had the spectre of *easy money* – where not hard work but intimidation, *goondagiri* is necessary. We had the concept of *extreme localization*, even a lad from XYZ place in Dibrugarh cannot work at ABC place in Dibrugarh. We had the culture of forcible *chaandas* – for everything under the sun! We had our invisible liberators – the ULFAs. We had...

I have personally met / seen the *elected* student members of many universities / colleges. A majority of them hardly attend classes, live opulent lifestyles and still pass. Our student leaders think that *bandhs* are the panacea for all the problems – big or small. You do not suffer because you do not need to work for a livelihood. Do you realize how much harm you have done? I often see photographs of vernacular school students taking part in processions to protest these and that at the call of these organizations (read their leaders). I wonder how many students actually know what they are actually doing. What is more important - attending classes, studying or allowing them to bunk classes? Why should parents send their children to these schools? And our dear student leaders complain – classes are not held, blah, blah...I have seen newspaper reports where student leaders lead people to ASEB offices to protest unavailability of power and damage public property. I have never seen them lead people against power theft? You stop this practice, and the power situation will improve dramatically. Guaranteed! You people collect crores of rupees from all and sundry for organizing functions and doing these and that. Is it not your duty to be accountable? You talk about unemployment, what have you done? Before any organization / individual even get on with their business – you reach there with demands for money, these and that. Come on, it is not easy to do business and make money as you people might think. No organization in today's world will be aloof of the society around them. It makes pure business sense to hire locally and practice CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility).

All said and done, I appreciate the good works done by the student organizations and whole heartedly support them in all worthy causes which will take Asom forward. Please, do understand that you people need to fight for economic equality rather than political equality. Take my word – if there is economic equality, political equality will automatically be there and not the vice-versa. And economic equality can be realized only if we can improve the quality of our education, improve the infrastructure, bring in a sense of equity where only hard work pays, have an atmosphere of peace and trust and not of suspicion and hatred and above all pride in being the inhabitants of this land.

Where can you help? Bring a halt to the culture of *bandhs*. Improve the education scenario; see to it that classes are held regularly. See to it that only competent teachers are appointed, don't allow incompetent teachers even if they say they have a right because they are local. Improve the cultural scenario – you can not do that by organizing bihu functions on stage (even in June!) but by making the young people aware of our culture and our rich heritage. I'm shocked to see the state of affairs of many of our heritages – defaced and destroyed, of our jungles and hills – cut and made barren, of our traditional crafts being lost. Can you stop these? If you can, stop the free flow of liquor and other intoxicants (don't blame the Government – they are worrying about the revenue – citizens be damned). Stop corruption in public life but for that you must first yourselves be accountable. You do not need a hell lot of money to do these but a sense of priority. You do not need power to serve the society – if that is what you want to do. And for God's sake, be practical, talk sense. (You can not halt the inundation of Asom by illegal migrants by making noises. They will continue to come whether IMDT is there or not. You can stop them by making the people self reliant, aware of their surroundings so that these migrants do not have any work, any place once they reach here). Above all, be united. Asom do not have a *future*, if we still talk about *myland*. Don't preach that somebody is an Assamese because he/she speaks the language but because he / she inhabit this great land and thinks and feels for it. We are at a crucial point of history. We can together build a future for us or perish. Let us not talk about *Sonar Asom* but work for it and it is the students – the Generation Next who has to take the lead because ultimately it is your future. You simply cannot be indifferent and directionless.