

Role of Assam Human Rights Commission in Promotion and Protection of Human Rights – An Analytical Study

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1. Introduction

Humanity is above all. In modern days promotion and protection of Human rights become hot topics across the world. Human Rights should consider not as an obligation, but as a way of life. Human rights do not know any religion, caste, creed, sex, name and place of birth. If anybody thinks he is a human being he or she must overcome from all types of narrowness. Being human is the sole religion for mankind – Hatred and ignorance to any particular religion, name, gender, itself in a crime against humanity. Gender injustice and behavioural differences in male and female is also inhuman.

Article 15 (I) Reads that, state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them. Non tolerance is an antithesis of human rights.

The concept of human rights is known as ‘Natural Right’, ‘Basic Rights’, Fundamental Rights and other different names at different times.

The Indian History reveals that human rights thinking had started from the Vedic period as a source of justice and equality. Not to use a weapon of war, which could destroy the entire humanity, The king should protect and support all his subjects without any discrimination in the same manner as the earth supports all living, in the happiness of the subject lies the happiness of the king and Vasudhaiva kutumbakam remains India’s ideology, the whole world is one family and every human beings is our relative¹.

The mission of promotion and protection of human rights was formally started on 10th December/1948 through Universal declaration of human rights by the United Nation Organization. But non – formally working on human rights started in 1215 which is popularly known as Magna Carta, American declaration of Independence in 1776, French declaration of 1789, and the Bolshevik revolution of Russia of 1917.

Promotion & Protection of Human Rights are the sine-qua-non for the survival of humanity. Promotion & Protection of human rights is an important topic for research. A huge number of legislation from International Level to National and Regional Level shall be valueless if there

¹ The constitution of India, Kautiliya’s Arthasastha, Article 15 (I) of the Constitution of India

will be no mechanism for promotion protection of Human Rights. Promotion & Protection of human rights is the prime duty of every State.

The concept of human rights is based on the assumption that human being are born equal in dignity and rights. According to Durga Das Basu, “Concept of Human Rights is as old as the original doctrine of natural right founded on natural Law”. The expression of human rights is of the recent origin and has emerged after the Second World war.

Human Rights are those fundamental, inherent rights without which we cannot live as human beings and protection of human rights are part and parcel of that chapter.

According to Mr. Justice M.H. Beg, former chief justice of India. Human Rights implies – “Justice, Equality and freedom from arbitrary and discriminatory treatment”.

The philosophy of the development of the notion of natural rights of man was contributed by the stoic philosophers. They first developed the natural law theory and by virtue of it, they explained the nature of ² human rights for example – which every human being possesses by virtue of being human. Some universal approaches in the development of the concept human rights are as follows:

- i) Magna Carta -1215: - Magna Carta set limitations to arbitrary rule and laid the foundation of for the rule of law. The Manga Carta in England could be cited as an important landmark in the development of the concept of human rights.
- ii) American declaration of Independence –1776: - The declaration is the landmark in the development of the concept of human rights for which slavery in America was legally abolished.
- iii) The French Declaration of 1789: - The French declaration of proclaiming liberty, equality and fraternity for all.
- iv) The Bolshevik revolution of Russia – 1917: - The revolution emphasis that the social and economic rights are as important and civil and political rights.
- v) Formation of UNO: - Universal declaration of human rights was adopted by UNO on 10th December, 1948 a landmark for protection of human rights.

Establishment of Assam Human Right Commission

The Assam Human Rights Commission was established in 19th March 1996 for the Promotion, Protection of human rights. The commission has disposed hundreds of the cases, imposed fines on the guilty and provided compensation to the victims.

This analysis of the role of the Assam Human Rights Commission in the promotion and protection of human rights, will be an analytical study. The role of the Assam human rights commission in promotion & Protection of human rights is a very important topic having socially important ramifications and hence, a matter of thorough analyses³.

² Universal Declaration of Human Rights, AHRC News Letter October- December/2012

³ French Revolution, ABC of Human Rights

Promotion of human rights means activities that supports or encourages the action of raising someone to a higher position, a publicity campaign, and advancement. On the other hand the word protection means – State of protecting, a document guaranteeing immunity from harm, preservation, system of protecting.

In exercise of the powers conferred by sub-section (2) of Section 10 read with section 29 of the Protection of Human Rights Act. 1993 (As amended by the Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Act. 2006 No. 43 of 2006] the Assam Human Rights Commission hereby makes regulation.

Constitution of Assam Human Rights Commission

Chapter 5 of the protection of Human Rights Act 1993 provides for the Setting up of the State Human Rights Commission in state constituting.

- a) A chairman who has been a chief justice of the High Court.
- b) One Member, who is or has been a Judge of a High Court.
- c) One member who is or has been a District Judge in that state.
- d) Two members to be appointed from among persons having knowledge of or practical experience in matters relating to human rights.

The Chairman and other member of the commission shall be appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of a committee consisting of the

- a) Chief Minister (The Chairman)
- b) Three members (i) Speaker of Legislative Assembly (ii) Member in charge of the Department of Home in the state.
- c) The Leader of opposition.

Functions of the Assam Human Rights Commission are as follows:

1. Inquire sou-motu or on a petition presented to it by a victim or any person on his behalf, into a compliant of-
 - Violation of human rights or abetment thereof, or
 - Negligence in the prevention of such violation, by a public servant⁴.
2. Intervene in any proceeding involving any allegation of violation of human rights pending before the court, with the approval of such court;
3. Visit, under intimation to the State Government, any jail or any other institution under the control of the State Government, where persons are detained or lodged or lodged for purposes of treatment, reformation or protection, to study the living conditions of the inmates and make recommendations thereon.

⁴ The Assam Human Right Commission (Procedure) Regulation - 2001

4. Review the safeguard provided by or under the Constitution or any law for the time being in force for the protection of human rights and recommended measures for their effective implementation;
5. Review the factors, including the act of terrorism that inhibit the enjoyment of human rights and recommended appropriate remedial measures.
6. Undertake and promote research in the field of human rights.
7. Spread human rights literacy among various sections of the society and promote awareness of safeguards available for the protection, media, seminar and other available means;
8. Encourage the efforts of non-government organizations and institutions working in the field of human rights; and
9. Such other functions as it may consider necessary for the promotion of human rights.

The following Categories of cases registered with the Assam Human Rights Commission-

Custodial death in Jail, Custodial death in Police Custody, Custodial Torture, Custodial Rape, Death in Police Encounters as reported by Police, District Magistrate, Government, Death due to allegedly Fake Encounters as reported by the media / public, Rape⁵, Illegal Detention / arrest, Police Excess and negligence, Jail conditions, Violation of the rights of prisoners, Violation by Health & Family Welfare Dept., Dowry Torture /Death, Indignity to Woman / Sexual Harassment at Workplace, Violation of the Rights of the Child, Violation of the legal right of Mentally Retarded Children, Complaint against Education Dept., Violation of the Legal rights of physically challenged, Mysterious Death, Mysterious disappearance, Abduction, Violation by Public Health & Engineering Dept., Electrocutation, Pension, Cases of Pollution, Condition of inmates in relief camps set up during natural calamities, Violation of the rights to religion, Erosion of River and resultant Treat to life, Ragging in Educational Institution, Hill cutting and treat to life, Negligence by Forest Dept., Unlawful eviction by Public authorities, Referred to NHRC, Miscellaneous.

Statement of cases registered and disposed of by the Assam Human Rights Commission since inception till 25th January, 2016

Year	Registered	Disposed of	Balance
1996-97	271	741	0
1997-98	1358	1358	0
1998-99	891	891	0
1999-2000	464	435	29
2000-01	Balance case	252	49
	Bought forward = 29 Case Registered +272+301		
2001-02	Balance Case = 49	428	0

⁵ Assam Human Rights News Later July- Dec. /2016

	Bought Forward Case Registered	+379=428		
2002-03	604		373	231
2003-04	Balance Case Bought Forward Case Registered	=231 +473=704	315	389
2004-05	Balance Case Bought Forward Case Registered	=389 +397=786	405	381
2005-06	Balance Case Bought Forward Case Registered	=381 +468=849	293	556
2006-07	Balance Case Bought Forward Case Registered	=556 +356=912	327	585
2007-08	Balance Case Bought Forward Case Registered	=585 +357=942	442	500
2008-09	Balance Case Bought Forward Case Registered	=500 +318=818	309	509
2009-10	Balance Case Bought Forward Case Registered	=509 +260=769	372	397
2010-11	Balance Case Bought Forward Case Registered	=397 +255=652	266	386
2011-12	Balance Case Bought Forward Case Registered	=386 +309=695	366	329
2012-13	Balance Case Bought Forward Case Registered	=329 +322=651	297	356
2013-14	Balance Case Bought Forward Case Registered	=354 +337=691	443	248

2014-15	Balance Case Bought =248 Forward +260=508 Case Registered	382	126
2015-16	Balance Case Bought =126 Forward +370=496 Case Registered	328	168
2016-17	Balance Case Bought =168 Forward +89=257 Case Registered	190	67

Total Cases registered	= 9293
Total No. of Cases Disposed of	= 9226
Number of cases under process	= 67

Role Played by the Assam Human Right Commission its role in the promotion and protection of Human Right in Assam. Investigation process and judgement

It is observed that court are not sufficient in themselves in attending rights because of the weak support structure for legal mobilization. The view that courts and existing regional institutions are sufficient to attend to the human right agenda is based on the assumption that support for legal mobilization is uniform throughout.

Coming to the Assam Human Right Commission case study it becomes clear that the commission has been hampered in realizing its full potential by external as well as internal factors. External factors are those, which are controlled by or influenced by the state and its agencies. Some of the external factors are numerated below⁶:-

- The AHRC emphasized the need to set up four clear functioning, but the state government categorically dismissed the commission's proposals
- Dealing with the human rights violations committed by armed force personnel, but the privileged status of armed forces continues and the government has dismissed all such proposals as unnecessary, even case of death and rape while in the custody of armed forces.
- AHRC does not have its own campus. The office has been running from the GMDA Office premises near Guwahati Medical College Hospital, Bhangagarh.
- For last few years the government has not appointed to members.
- At present the post of the chairman and other members are lying vacant.
- IN the area of the child labour, education and other aspects of child welfare the commission has made policy recommendations, but the State Government has not responded to them.

Notable Cases: - AHRC case no-7275/2010; - It is a case of custodial death of one Putul saikia, a life convict confined in the Sivsagar jail who expired at AMCH Dibrugarh. The cognizance of the case was taken on intimation of superintendent District jail, sivsagar received by the

⁶ Assam Human Rights Commission News Letter Jan to June/2016

National Human Rights Commission. New Delhi and later forwarded for disposal to the commission. The commission issued notice to the D, C Sivsagar for submitting reports regarding the death of the convict. After receiving the reports, the commission again issued notice to the D.C to collect the chemical analysis report and the histo-pathological report for holding a final opinion regarding the cause of the deceased convict. But such reports were not produced by the D.C on the ground of non collection of the viscera by the police. The chemical report could not be prepared by the medical department. Thus the cause of death could not be ascertained for want of the chemical analysis report. The magisterial enquiry report also failed to provide the probable cause of death of the deceased. The commission decided to close the case on 02.04.2012⁷.

AHRC Case No. 378/12-13; - On 30.04 2012 Assam saw one of its worst boat tragedy wherein a double decked ferry carrying more than 380 passengers being on its way to Madarttari under the Fokirganj police station from Dhubri town sank in the mighty Brahmaputra on Monday after being caught in a severe storm midstream. The tragedy was reported in several newspapers published from Assam. The Assam Tribune dated 2nd May 2012 published a news - "Most vessels plying in Brahmaputra flout norms" and an editorial. The Sentinel dated 2nd May 2012 also published an editorial under the caption of "Monday's Boat tragedy" in addition to a news report under the caption - "After macabre Tragedy, flaws crystal clear". The commission took so-moto cognizance of the entire issue pertaining to security and safety of the passengers ferrying in the boat run by the lessees under the Indian Water transport Department, Government of Assam, over the mighty Brahmaputra as well other tributaries of Assam. Notices were issued by the chief secretary, the commissioner, and to the secretary of Inland Water Transport asking them to set up separate enquiries into the boat tragedy and update the commission on the following:

- If there are any foolproof guideline/norms to ensure safety and security of the boat/ferry travelers.
- Condition of ferries and boats used in ferrying travelers across the river Brahmaputra and its various tributaries
- Whether the ferries and boats are equipped with lifesaving equipment, life belts in adequate measures and if not, then what are the measures to supervise the safety and security measures.
- Measures taken to prevent overcrowding in the boats and ferries.

AHRC Case No. 435/25/12-13: - The Assam Human Rights Commission took cognizance of a complaint petition regarding the suffering of the residents in the Indo – Bhutan areas of Udalguri District due to non – supply / absolutely inadequate supply of potable water⁸. The residents prayed for issuing order by the Commission to the PHE Department, Government of Assam, to repair the inoperative water supply system in the area. Taking cognizance of the case the Commission issued notice to the Commissioner & Secretary to the Government of Assam, PHE, to cause an inquiry into the complaint. The report submitted by the Chief Engineer, PHE, and the comments of the complaints convinced that scarcity of drinking water in the locality is mainly due to the peculiar geo- physical condition of the locality characterized by thick lear of underground

⁷ The Assam Human Right Commission New Latter April to June, July to Sept/2012

⁸ Assam Human Right Commission News Letter – Oct to Dec. /2012

boulders and that the Public Health Engineering Department is making every effort to improve the water supply situation in the locality .

Considering the facts, the Commission, on 26 Dec. 2012, recommended the PHE Department, Government of Assam through its Commissioner & Secretary, to expedite implementation of schemes to improve the water supply in the locality.

ARHC Case No., 714/24/13-14: - Taking serious note about the fact that one Basanti Devi was electrocuted on 09-05-2013 at about 9.30 P.M. at Anil Nagar, Guwahati, while returning home from market after coming into contact with an exposed, live electric wire on the footpath during a heavy down pour allegedly for the neglect of the electrical department, in the main, as widely published in the various Local Daily Newspapers and vividly broadcast through the different T.V. News Channels. The Assam Human Rights Commission (AHRC) comprising its Chairperson, justice Dr. Aftab H. Saikia and Member Tarun Phookan, by its order dated 13-05-2013 passed in AHRC Case No. 714/24/13-14 had taken cognizance of the instant case Suo-Motu on the fatal incident and ordered for an inclusive probe into the tragic death of the women to be caused to be conducted by the Chief Secretary, Government of Assam, within a period of 30 (thirty) days for which due notice has been issued to him by the Commission⁹.

ARHC Case No., 1602/9/15-16: - A division bench of the Assam Human Rights Commission, on 24-02-2016 issued notice to the Chief Secretary, Assam, calling upon him to cause an inclusive enquiry to be conducted into the incident of leakage of some toxic gas through the concerning technological as well as administrative authorities and submit the report thereof before this commission within 30 (Thirty) days or receipt of the Notice.

The Commission took suo-moto cognizance of a news item which appeared in a number of local news regarding a Mysterious Gas Leakage of some toxic gas affecting a large number of the residents of Navagraha, Silpukhuti, Chandmari and Kharghuli of the metropolis of Guwahati on Friday night and thereafter resulting in nausea and vomiting amongst some of the affected people besides the reported death of an elderly woman. The accusation had been made against the Guwahati Refinery for being responsible for the release of the said gas, which could have triggered a catastrophe like that of the Bhopal Gas Tragedy. It was expected that the best of the technologies be used by the concerned authorities to prevent any further leakage of such obnoxious substances so as to avert and evade any possible disaster being detrimental and deleterious of life and property.

AHRC Case No. 977/9/13-14: - Sri Aditya Lahkar and Sir Pranjal Kumar Sarma, respectively the Secretary General and a Member of the MASS (Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti) Assam, Guwahati, through their joint complaint dated 26-02-2014, have accused the Government of Assam in the Home Ministry, in general, and the District Administration of Kamrup Metro and especially the Police Authority of the District, in particular, of Sheer negligence and inaction inasmuch as they allegedly failed to take timely action and prevent the tragic death of one Pranab Boro, reportedly an activist of the KMSS (Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti) Assam, on 24-02-

⁹ Assam Human Right Commission News Letter – Jan to March, April to June/2013

2014 at about 10 A.M. in front of the¹⁰ Assam State Secretariat, Dispur, Guwahati, who resorted to self-immolation after setting himself on fire allegedly in protest against the apathy of the State Government in allotting land to the landless persons concerned who have since been fighting therefor.

Since the matter in the complaint involves public interest and apparently there is no authorization made on behalf of the family of the victim to file the present complaint before this Commission, it has been decided to take up the case Suo- Motu by the Commission.

In the Commission's Order dated 26-02-2014 notice was issued to the Chief Secretary, Government of Assam, to cause an inclusive e inquiry to be conducted into the said allegations immediately and submit the report thereof before this Commission within 30 (Thirty) days of receipt of the notice.

2. Aims and objects of the study

The Assam Human Rights commission has been working for the promotion and protection of human rights in Assam since 1996. Promotion and protection of human rights and the role played by the Assam human rights commission since its inception is to be assessed.

Aims

- a) Focus on the role played by Assam Human Rights commission.
- b) Evaluate Social response.
- c) Assess public benefit.
- d) Review public awareness.
- e) Find out short comings.
- f) Make public awareness.
- g) Find out the causes of violation of human rights.
- h) To analyze the successful and unsuccessful role played by the Assam human right by in the promotion and protection of Human Rights.

Objective

The objective of this research work is to highlight the role of Assam Human Right protection of Human Right to analyze its success and failure. Finding out its weakness by putting light on the grey area. Other main objectives of the proposed study are as follows

- I) To analyze the legal weakness and technical defect in playing the role to promote and protect life .
- II) To focus on the insight knowledge of the working of the Assam human rights commission.
- III) To discuss the case study method and its effects and social impacts in Assam.
- IV) To discuss the various problem faced by the Assam human rights commission.
- V) To analyze execution of order / judgement of the decided cases by Assam Human Rights commission.

¹⁰ Assam Human Right Commission News Letter – Jan to March, April to June/2013

Under this proposal I want to start researching about the role of Few International covenants also contributes in the protection and promotion of human rights which are

1. The International covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, adopted on 16th Dec. /1966.
2. The International covenant on the elimination of all form of racial discrimination in 1969.
3. The convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against woman 1st Dec. /1979.
4. The declamation in the elimination of violence against women 1993
5. The convention against torture and other inhuman or degrading treatment 1984.
6. The convention on the rights of the child 1989.
7. The declaration on the rights of persons belonging to National or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities 1992.
8. The Vienna declaration and program of action 1993¹¹.
9. The United Nation Decade for Human Rights Education 1995-2004.

Key Issues of UN for Human Rights

1. Promotion of sustainable Economic growth and sustainable development.
2. Maintenance of International Peace and Security.
3. Support of the development of Africa.
4. Promotion of protection of Human rights.
5. Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance effort.
6. Nuclear, chemical and conventional weapons disarmament.
7. Drug control, Crime prevention and Counterterrorism.

3. Research Hypothesis

The main Hypothesis of this research will be visiting of the affected area, meeting of victim persons, review of the workings of the Assam Human Rights Commission till its formation and actual happenings reported of the electronic and print media, personal knowledge and the data already available in the office of the Assam Human Rights Commission Library.

4. The Statement of Problems

Lack of awareness, weak implementation part of Assam Human Rights Commission. The problem of collecting data in respect of violation and protection of human rights from reliable so that the compensation awarded by the Assam Rights Commission and the problem of the execution, order of the departmental proceeding and its consequences. Non inclusion of all Human Rights problems etc.

A detailed study in the matter of promotion and protection of Human Rights and also draw a picture about the first generation of Human Rights on civil and political rights, the second

¹¹ The Law of International Human Rights protection by Walter Kalling

generation of Human rights on economic, social and cultural rights and third generation, press, Assemble, movement, residence, profession, Education, Food, water, privacy, puberty, slavery, compensation, Nationality, strike, trade, vote and to be presumed innocent until proved guilty. And right against un-reasonable search, seizure cruelty, double jeopardy, slavery arbitrary arrest, etc. Promotion & protection an above mentioned human rights are very important to spend day to day life as human beings in the society.

5. Research question

How and when human rights are violated and by whom? What are the measures taken by the State authority in respect of protection of human rights? How criminal racket, militant and other forum violates human rights? How Assam Human Rights Commission has been workings for protection of human rights and why machinery fails to protect human rights? What is the role of the Assam Human Rights Commission in promotion & Protection of Human Rights? Further questions are-

- a) Why only a specific institution (Assam Human Right Commission)?
- b) What leads to its adoption?
- c) What are its effects?
- d) Whether it suits the state?
- e) What is its past, present and future?
- f) How can it be improved?
- g) Whether it needs to be replaced?

6. Proposed research methodology

An empirical and non-empirical method of study will be adopted in this research, such as- case study method, interview method, questionnaire method, field visit, library study etc.

7. Survey of Literature

Human Rights jurisprudence starts its study from “Nature Right” which is also called birth rights. After the second World War the term Human rights were in use and at present those vital human rights such as the right to life, liberty, equality, security, opportunity, live, food water education becomes human breath. This is one of the untouched areas of research aimed to be unfolded by this analytical study. I have gone through many Literature. No one till date done research on the role of the Assam Human Rights Commission in the promotion and protection of Human Rights. How far the Assam Human Rights Commission remains successful in the promotion and protection of Human Rights in Assam shall be the core subject. This analytical study of the Assam Human Rights Commission in the promotion and protection of Human Rights will hopefully be a socio–Legal Study through which a true message will come out¹².

¹² Research Method by J.S. Patil

8. Tentative Chapters

- i. Introduction History and development, structure aims and objective.
- ii. Role and function of Assam Human Rights Commission.
- iii. Procedure of investigation, judgement and its execution.
- iv. Constitutional provisions and Legislatives Measures to promote and protect Human Rights.
- v. Role of Assam Human Rights Commission.
- vi. Promotion and protection of Mechanism.
- vii. Summary, conclusion and suggestions.

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