

A Brief Study of Bodoland Movement and Formation of BTC in Assam

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ABSTRACT: The Bodos are an ethnic and linguistic aboriginal tribe of Assam. There is a huge contestation of the exact number of sub-groups under the larger Bodo family. It is generally accepted that there are eighteen sub-groups under the larger Bodo family. The Bodos are also found in various North-Eastern states.

Ethnicity and identity have been the key factors for the Bodoland Movement. The movement has its emergence since the colonial period. The general feelings of the Bodos is that neglect, exploitation, alienation and discrimination for decades. Bidyasagar Narzary has also pointed out that structural factors. All these factors accompanied by the approach of Assamese mainstream towards the Bodos caused the growth of Bodo sentiments. The feeling of Nationalistic attitude among the educated Bodos grew with the formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) in 1952. Bodoland movement has taken a huge leap and for the first time has demanded an arrangement for autonomy. The Bodos thus take a new turn in its movement with the formation of the Plain Tribal council of Assam (PTCA) in 27th February, 1967. The PTCA has taken the front seat in the movement during this phase with the whole hearted support of the "All Bodo Student's Union (ABSU). The movement for the Bodoland continued with two approaches Socio-Political Movement and the Arm Movement.

Keywords: Bodoland, Ethnic, Movement, North-East

INTRODUCTION

The Bodos are an ethnic and linguistic aboriginal tribe of Assam. They are an ethnic community comprising a number of groups speaking a more or less common language and claiming a common ancestry. In the pre colonial history, they are referred to a kacharis of Assam. There is a huge contestation of the exact number of sub-groups under the larger Bodo. It is generally accepted that there are 18 sub-groups under the larger Bodo family. In the present times, they are the largest plain tribes of Assam who inhabit the northern areas of the Brahmaputra valley; namely in places like Kokrajhar Udalguri, Chirang, Baska, Darrang, Sonitpur, Kamrup, Nalbari, Barpeta and Dhubri among other places. The Bodos are also found in various North-Eastern States like Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh etc. According to census report of 2011 their population is two million.

OBJECTIVE

The main objectives of this paper is to highlight the various factors of the Bodoland Movement and the formation of the Bodo Territorial Council in Assam.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the objectives of the research paper following methodology was adopted. The research paper would like to follow mainly Descriptive and Analytical methodology has been adopted for the study.

While deciding about the method of data collection to be used for the study, the researcher should keep in mind two types of data primary and secondary data. Moreover in order to make the study information will also be collected from other secondary data like related Books, Journals, Newspaper published or unpublished materials.

FACTORS FOR THE BODOS MOVEMENT

Ethnicity and Identity have been the key factors for the Bodoland Movement. The movement has its emergence since the colonial period. The issue of land alienation, marginalization faced from the mainstream and dominant community and the prolonged social and Economic backwardness due to the step-motherly treatment of the state has been the main driving factor of the movement. The Bodos thought they claim to be the original inhabitants of the Brahmaputra valley has suffered in the hands of the dominant Assamese community in terms of allocation of resources, land alienation where a large chunk of land was grabbed from them and also dismal electorate representation in the colonial era. The general feeling of the Bodos is that of neglect, exploitation, alienation and discrimination for decades.

Bidyasagar Narzary has also pointed out that Structural factors, including economic, social and political issues relating to land and resources, facilitating factors, including the degree of politicization and ethnic consciousness and triggering factors, such as discriminatory government policies and demographic aggression into tribal lands are considered to be root causes of the Bodos conflict in Assam. All these factors accompanied by the approach of Assamese mainstream towards the Bodos caused the growth of Bodo sentiments. The Bodo movement can be classified into Four Phase.

The First Phase (1933-1952): The Phase of Political Awakening

The Bodo leadership propagates the idea of Bodoland through the assumption that political autonomy will remove their deprivation. The first phase commenced with the formal organization of the Bodo polity with the Bodos feeling the need for a political party that represented their interests. This phase is also considered the phase of political awakening that lasted from 1933 to 1952. A memorandum to the Indian Statutory Commission was submitted in 1929 by the Bodo community of Goalpara and "Kachari Juvak Sanmiloni" (Kachari Youth Meet) demanding political power. Subsequently, the All Assam Plains Tribal League (AAPTL) was formed in 1933 as a political party under the leadership of Rupnath Brahma.

The Second Phase (1952-1967) Issue of Language and Script

The feeling of nationalistic attitude among the educated Bodos grew with the formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) in 1952, which submitted a memorandum to the Assam Chief Minister Bishnuram Medhi for the introduction of Bodo Medium schools in 1953. The movement during this time is to the threat posed by the dominant Assamese community due to the introduction of the Assam official language bill, 1960. This phase is also marked by aggressive mass movement on questions relating exclusively to Bodo identity for the first time in history. This phase has also witnessed radicalization of the Bodo language as the medium of instruction in school in Bodo dominated area in 1963.

The Third phase (1967-1967) The Demand for Political Autonomy

With the quest for linguistic identity in progress, the movement has taken a huge leap and for the first time has demanded an arrangement for autonomy. Assurance given by Congress to the Tribal League, the promise of the protection of tribal rights and land was not codified in its true sense. The Bodos thus take a new turn in its movement with the formation of the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) in 27th February, 1967. Its aim was to demand a Union Territory called "Udayachal" in the Bodo dominated areas. The "All Bodo Students Union" (ABSU) was also formed on 15th February, 1967 at a time when the Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi proposed to reorganize the state of Assam on 13th January 1967. This period has also witnessed the anti-foreigners agitation of the All Assam Student Union and All Assam Gona Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) in 1979. The PTCA and the ABSU has supported this movement.

The Fourth Phase (1986-2003) Demand For Separate Statehood

The PTCA and ABSU worked together till 1979. ABSU withdrew the support of PTCA as it felt that the PTCA has failed to fulfil the aspirations of the Bodo people for a separate state during the reorganization process of Assam. From the 1987, the ABSU has taken central stage in the movement. The ABSU under the leadership of late Upendra Nath Brahma launched vigorous mass movement on 2nd March, 1987 with a political demand the most resounding of which is demand for separate state of Bodoland. The demands were for a Bodoland within the Indian Union and not within Assam.

In 1986 Upendra Nath Brahma, a young and dedicated Bodo, became the president of the ABSU and he steered the organization towards the most decisive phase of the Bodo political movement. An umbrella organization named the "Bodo People Action Committee" was formed to bring a mass movement for redress of the Bodo grievances. The ABSU under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma, submitted a 92 points charter of Demands to the state Government of Assam and to the Central Government of India on 1st January, 1987 and on 22nd January, 1987 respectively. In the 18th Annual conference of the ABSU, only three major demands were raised before the governments of India and Assam. The major one was the creation of the separate state for the Bodos and other plains tribal's of Assam. In that historic conference itself the decision to name the proposed separate state as "Bodoland" was accepted unanimously by the ABSU and the entire Bodo Community.

Subsequently, the movement led by the ABSU and the BPAC, which was started in 1987, came to an end with the signing of the Bodoland Accord on 20th February, 1993 for the formation of Bodoland Autonomous Council. It was the first Bodoland Accord signed between representatives of the state and the Central Government and leaders of the ABSU and the BPAC in the presence of Hiteswar Saikia and Rajesh Pilot in the Kokrajhar Circuit House, Kokrajhar. The Assam Accord provided for the formation of Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) especially, the proposed area of BAC to be demarcated became the extremely contentious issue between the ABSU and the BPAC leaders and the government of Assam. The ABSU and the BPAC leaders demanded that all villages and localities having 50 percent or more plains tribal's population should be included in the proposed Bodoland Territory and in the same case even those villages having less than 50 percent to be included in order to maintain continuity in the whole area.

The movement for the Bodoland continued with two approaches Socio-Political Movement and the Arm Movement. The various social and students organisation like All Bodo Students Union, Bodo Sahitya Sabha. All Bodo Women Association and other led the Bodoland Movement through social and political movement. On the other hand arm movement was led by some armed organisations like Bodoland Liberation Tigers and National Democratic Front of Bodoland. First accord was signed between the ABSU, State Government and the Central Government in 1993 for the creation of Bodoland Autonomous Council and the second accord was signed in the year 2003 between the BLT, State Government and the Central Government for the creation of BTC under the amended Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

FORMATION OF THE BODOLAND TERRITORIAL COUNCIL, ASSAM

BTC is an autonomous council within the state of Assam under the Six Schedule of the constitution of India. It has been formed with the aim to fulfill the long pending aspiration of the area. The Memorandum of Settlement (2003) signed by the three parties- Government of India, Government of Assam and Bodo Liberation Tigers explores various aspects on the formation of BTC within the state of Assam. Important aspects as reflected in the Memorandum are being discussed in this paper. The total villages and areas is divided into 4 Districts after reorganization of the existing districts of Assam. The Bodoland Territorial Council comprises the districts of Kokorajhar, Baska, Udalguri and Chirang and it has been further sub-divided into 10 civil sub-divisions and 40 Development Blocks, some of which are partly in BTC and partly outside. The provisional geographical area is 8795 sq.km.

- a. A provision is made in para 2(1) of six schedule for increasing the number of members for BTC up to 46 out of which 30 is reserved for Schedule Tribes, 5 for non-tribal communities, 5 open for all communities and to be nominated by Governor of Assam. The nominated members have the same rights and privileges as other members including voting rights.
- b. Provisions of Article 332 of the constitution is to be modified that the existing status of representation of BTC the parliamentary and Assembly Constituencies shall be delimited by the Delimitation Commission in accordance with the provisions of the constitution.
- c. The Panchayati Raj system ceases to be in force in the council area, the powers of the Panchayati Raj institutions in such matters is vested with the council.

POWERS AND FUNCTIONS OF BTC

- a. The council has legislative, Executive, administrative and Financial powers in respect of subjects transferred to it. The BTC authority for all round development of the people in this area. Subjects namely (i) Tribal Research Institute (ii) Lotteries and Theatres etc... (iii) Intoxicating liquors etc... (iv) Registration of Birth and Death yet to be taken up by the council.
- b. The Executive council comprises of not more than 12 Executive Members, one of whom is chief and another one Deputy Chief of the Executive Council. There should be adequate representation for the non-tribal members in the Executive Council.
- c. The BTC have the full control over the officers and staffs with the delegated subjects working in the BTC area and are competent to transfer these officers and staff within the BTC area.
- d. BTC is competent to make appointments for all posts under its accordance with the rules of appointment followed by the government of Assam. However, the posts, where recruitment is made on the recommendation of APSC, shall not be covered under this provision.
- e. Development functions and bodies within the competence of BTC is transferred to BTC. In respect of District RURAL Development Agency (DRDA), concurrence of Government of India needs to be obtained.
- f. The office of the Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of police is outside the superintendence and control of BTC.

FUNDING SOURCES

- a. The State Government provides an amount, decided every year on population ratio basis, as grants-in aid in two equal instalments to the BTC for executing developmental works. The proportionate share for the BTC is calculated on the basis of the plan funds available after setting aside the funds required for earmarked sectors and the salary. The BTC disburses the salaries of the staff under the control of BTC and maintains strict economy in the matter.
- b. BTC is entrusted to prepare a plan with the amounts likely to be available for development works, both under state share and Central share, covering any or all activities of the departments under the control of BTC. The Council has full discretion in selecting the activities and choosing in amount for the investment under the same in any year covering all groups of people in fair and equitable manner. The state Government can't divert the funds allocated to the BTC to other heads and also ensure its timely release. BTC may have Planning Department to prepare the plans for BTC area to be submitted to Planning commission through the Government of Assam.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION

The Executive functions of the BTC is exercised through its Principal Secretary who is an officer of the rank not below that of Commissioner Secretary to the Government of Assam. The Principal Secretary and other officers exercise their powers under the overall guidance and supervision of BTC. At present the BTC Government has been running under the chief Executive of Sri Hagrama Mahilary.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion we have seen that the Bodo Movement makes the Bodo people compatible to face every types of competition. A modern and urbanized trend also comes in the life of Bodo people which make them confident to take part in the political affairs of the state like other advanced people. Today they are firmly settled in their own Homeland with a revitalized and highly spirited Bodo entity of their own.

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