



BODOLAND MOVEMENT: A STUDY FROM HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The Union of India has been witnessing different movements or separate struggle for revival of the Tribal's identity since independence .As result of such separate movements, Nagaland created as separate state in 1963,the Meghalaya in 1972,Mizoram in 1986.Then ,India as well as Assam faced another serious challenge from the Bodo tribe. Moreover, the Bodos are the aboriginals of Assam and the North Eastern region of India. They have their rich cultural and ethnic elements, which have helped them to create separate political identity. In fact, the Bodo tribe has launched a serious movement under the leadership of ABSU for separate homeland named as "Bodoland". Therefore, the main objective of the paper is to analyze the background of the Bodoland movement in Assam.

Key Words - Union, Identity, Movement, Bodoland, Ethnic.

Introduction

The Bodos are one of the earliest ethnic and linguistic communities of North East India. They are largest of the eighteen ethnic sub-groups within the Bodo-Kachari group of Assam. Today, the Bodo tribe of the Brahmaputra Valley has apprehended that their cultural and political identity is in threat under the dominance of the greater Assamese nationalism. Moreover, this identity crisis has compelled the Bodos to demand for separate state for them in the Brahmaputra valley. It is found that the Bodoland movement was started in the year of 1919 with the formation of the Bodo Chatra Sanmiloni. This organization spread the message of their socio-economic ethnic identity. However, All Bodos Student Union (ABSU) and its political wing, Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) want to demand separate political state in North East India. The political objective of the Bodos is to divide Assam as Bodoland and Assam. Therefore, the paper attempts to analyze the background of Bodos politics for separate Bodoland from historical perspective.

Objective of the Paper:

We know that the demand of separate state for the Bodos become a serious and sensitive political issue. The following objectives are formulated here-

- I. To analyze the background of the Bodoland movement.
- II. To study the politics for demand of separate Bodoland.
- III. To examine about the role of the All Bodo Student's Union for demand of the Separate State.

Methodology of the Research Paper

Historical Method has been used as the foremost suitable method of study because the study is mainly related to recent historical facts. All facts have been looked from the point of history. Similarly, Analytical Method has been used. The data or fact have been collected from the secondary data of source .The secondary data are collected from different books, research journal, statistical Handbook, census reports and daily newspaper.

The Background of the Bodo Movement

Ethnic conflict has considered as one of the most unavoidable issue in the Indian politics since the British colonial period. However, Assam has been experiencing different movements or separatist tendencies since post- independence period. Among these movements, the Bodoland movement is considered as the most important one. However, the

Bodoland movement is looking as a socio-religious movement but characterized by the manifestation of political demand to get the separate state for the Bodo tribe. In fact, the Bodoland movement can be seen from the angle of the Tribal movement .They were apprehensive of losing their distinct identity in future (L.K. Mahapatra:1992:p.7). It is this irretrievable discontentment and deprivation of their land and forest that has generated an emotion state of mind wherein the tribal's are forced to move for a better alternative of equitable social order for themselves free from exploitation and injustice (Madan, C. Paul:1992:p.359). However ,in past colonial period, the quest for identity in the Northeast essentially originated in the crisis of under-development.....the polarization and alienation eventually resulted in the demand for and creation of new states or autonomous areas within the state (J.B.Bhattacharjee:2011:p.6).

After the independence of India, Assam has witnessed a number of the tribal unrest and identity movements. Because of such movements, four new states came into existence. In this scenario, the political consciousness had infused among the Bodos. They were raising for separate Bodoland. However, the Bodos made a campaign to improving of their socio-religious and political condition. Some educated Bodos had started to form different organization to safeguard their community that solely played determining role in identity formation among them. However, while we try to analyze the historical process of Bodoland movement, it is clear that the Bodoland movement was the product of a long historical process of identity formation movement among the Bodos. The genesis of socio-political awakening and identity formation among the Bodos traced back to the socio-religious movement started by Kalicharan Brahmains the early part of twentieth century. It is found that the Bodos played a significance role in political, cultural and social life in the medieval age. However, it is to be noted that from 1832 to 1929, the Bodo tribe has disappeared from the socio-economic and political scenario of Assam. It is point out that this period is regarded as chaos, confusion and disorder for the Bodo society. According to Kameswar Brahma ,the Bodo society of the nineteenth century was totally backward and looked down upon by the other communities .There was total mess in the domain of religious practices too. Due to lack of education ,ignorance prevailed all round .There was no political and economic consciousness .The simple ,easygoing ,God fearing and mild-natured Bodos became the victim of exploitation and cheating by the other advanced communities, especially on the economic field.(Kameswar Brahma :1986:p.5-6).

The Bodo Chatra Sanmilani was established in 1919 at Dhubri for raise their issues such as language, culture, education. Towards the end of the 1920s, the Bodos became very conscious about their socio-political rights. In the later 1928, the Bodo youths under leadership Gurudav Kalicharan submitted a memorandum to the Simon commission on 14th January ,1929 at Shillong .In this memorandum, The Bodo leaders had demanded for a separate electorate and reservations in the state and Central Legislature Council and played for solution on many other serious problem belong to them. Hence, the Tribal League was formed in 1933.The basic purpose of the Tribal League was to fight against the socio-economic and political injustice and exploitation on the tribal society. The Tribal League dominated the tribal political affairs in Assam for more than twenty years and transformed into a socio-cultural organization in1954. Later, as a cultural organization, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) was formed on November 16,1952.

The main aim of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha was to encourage the development of the Bodo language and literature. It fought for a long period for the introduction of Bodo as a medium of introduction at the school levels in the Bodos dominant areas such as Kokrajhar, Darrang district. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha had also launched vigorous movement to get Roman script for Bodo language in 1974-75. However, in 1984, Bodo language was recognized as the

Associate official language of Assam in Kokrajhar District and Udalguri Sub-division due to the efforts made by BSS and ABSU .(ABSU:1987:p.4).Thus ,the language policy of Assam Government created resentment among the tribal’s including the Bodos.

At the same way, the immigrants who inhabited the Bodo dominated areas had created resentment and political consciousness among the Bodos. During the 1911 to 1931, many landless Muslims immigrated from East Bengal(now Bangladesh) and settled in all the Brahmaputra valley districts. The flow of increasing immigrants created land problem, particularly to the Bodo population. These massive immigrants had shaken the fabric of tribal economy, culture and society.

Table.1: Rate of increase of Muslim population in different districts of Assam in %(percent).

Name of the District	Total population	Hindu	Muslim	Hindu (%)	Muslim(%)
Bongaigaon	8,07,523	5,16,830	2,64,393	50.93	100.83
Darrang	12,98,860	7,86,332	4,15,323	34.00	108.10
Goalpara	6,68,138	2,66,499	3,35,275	22.76	86.23
Kokrajhar	8,00,659	5,31,447	1,54,801	54.09	100.83
Nalbari	10,16,390	7,87,485	2,02,653	38.11	92.78

Source: Census of Assam,1991

This table shows that how Muslim population increased in such districts where the Bodos originally inhabited Therefore; such factors have made the Bodos to feel unsafe and insecurity in their homeland. In such critical conditions, a new political organization formed in 1967 which known as Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA).This organization came to demand for full autonomy for the tribal people. Thus, it led to an idea for making separate union territory for the Bodos people.

Emergence of the ABSU in the politics for the Bodoland

The Bodoland movement has acquired a new way while All Bodoland Students Union(ABSU). It provided the leadership to the political articulation of Bodo demands in a more unified manner. The leaders of the ABSU submitted memorandum to the then prime minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi demanding for a separate state on several recessions in 1972 at Shillong, in 1980 at New Delhi and in 1983 after the turmoil of 1983 election in Assam.(ABSU: 1987:p:25). On 10th July 1985, the ABSU again submitted another memorandum to the then prime minister Rajib Gandhi. However, the Bodo movement was dominated by ABSU under the leadership of Bodofa Upendra Nath Brahma. Then, on 22nd January 1987 at New Delhi, the most important memorandum was submitted under the leadership of Mr. Upendra Nath Brahma for the demand of separate state for the Bodos in Assam. However, at the same time, an umbrella organization named the Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC) was formed. Moreover, all section of the Bodos people united under its umbrella. Both the ABSU and BPAC launched an agitation for the demand of the separate state, named “Bodoland” on 12th June 1987 at judge’s field in Guwahati (Assam). Then, they coined the slogan “Divide Assam Fifty-Fifty”. This slogan became the main motto for the Bodoland Movement.

The ABSU and its other associates wings realized that the state government would not easily accepted their demand. They observed that the State Government led by AGP and the Central Government led by Congress remained silent in this regard and did not take serious step in that matter. Then the Bodos came to the path of violent activities. They started destruction of the public properties, and disrupted the communication and supply of the goods. The Government took the heavy action and used the police action to dominate the movement but failed to dominate the Bodo movement. It may be noted that the Bodo people

successfully made use of historical symbols to mobilize the movement behind their political demand of separate state.

The Bodoland Accord

The ABSU- BPAC led the Bodo movement which lasted for the six years. Finally, the tripartite talks held among the Government of India, the State Government and the leaders of ABSU-BPAC since 1988. They tried to prepare a permanent solution of the Bodo movement. However, the Memorandum of Settlement (MOS), known as 'Bodoland Accord' was signed on 20th February, 1993 in Kokrajhar. Some Bodos personalities like S.K. Basumutary, Subhas Basumutary had played an important role in signing of their accord. The accord provided for the formation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council comprising the proposed area of Bodoland. It may be noted that the Bodoland Autonomous Council Bill (BAC Bill) was introduced on 5th April 1993.

Militant Organization of the Bodo Tribe

The Formation of BAC failed to take up the expectations of all sections of the Bodo people. Then it raised the ideological clash between the two wings of the Bodos. It is found that some militant groups emerged for demanding of the separate state. These were- (1) BSF- Bodo Security Force. This organization now renamed as National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) on 25th November 1994. Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF) was also formed. It aims to achieve separate state for the Bodos in the bank of river Brahmaputra. These militant groups started the Bodoland movement with renewed vigor. At this stage, they started the violent activities to take operations. They attacked the houses of the Santhals living in Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar. These activities resulted in the ethnic riots between the two communities. Then we see that some Adivasi militant groups such as Birsa Commando Force(BCF), Bengali Tiger Force(BTF), Islamic Revolutionary Army(IRA) came to emerge in the Brahmaputra Valley in order to emancipate their respective community from the onslaught of the Bodos. Thus, the Bodo insurgency problem remained even after the formation of BAC.

Creation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)

Moreover, the Bodoland Accord of 1993 failed to satisfy the Bodos. Moreover, it has witnessed large scale of violence during the post BAC accord period. However, after a serious of tripartite discussion finally a Memorandum of Settlement signed on February 10, 2003 in New Delhi. The main aim of the settlement is to create an autonomous self governing body. Finally the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) has been formed. However, the BTC has given the right to run the Bodoland Territorial Area District which includes Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang and Sonitpur. Undoubtedly, the formation of BTC is the outcome of the revolution of political and cultural autonomy by the state under the sixth schedule of the constitution of India.

Conclusion of the paper

With analyzing the different phase of the Bodo movement, it is observed that the Bodo movement for separate state is a serious problem of regional politics in Assam. Moreover, the Bodoland movement is not a single outcome, but a result of genuine age old grievances. In the contemporary period, the Bodoland movement had emerged as a powerful autonomy movement in the North East India. It is also found that the formation of the BTC under the sixth schedule has provided the Bodos wider context towards the advancement and economic development. But the Bodos did not fully satisfy with the formation of the BTC. Therefore, the Bodo organization such as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and All Bodo Student's Union(ABSU) continued to be demand for a separate State. Then, another interesting point is that the BTC area is inhabited not only

by the Bodos .But also inhabited by many tribal and communities like the Koch Rajbangshis, the Muslims ,caste Hindus. Therefore, everyone should get the equal rights.

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