

CHAPTER – III

THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG THE BODOS AND THEIR PARTICIPATION IN ELECTION OF THE PRESENT DAY BTAD AREAS SINCE 1968 TO 2001

This chapter of the thesis is devoted to trace out the history of growing political awareness of the Bodos and to examine their different dimensions pertaining to various past elections in the study area BTAD. Poll percentage, number of contestants, number of participation of the political parties, etc. of the past elections has been observed in order to extract some understanding of the changes that have taken place in the Bodo society of the study area BTAD.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Ethnic assertion in North East India is not a new political problem. Its origin can be traced to the British Colonial era when ethnic Naga groups, the Hill tribe asserted for independent Naga country on the eve of India's independence. Ethnic assertion for autonomy has direct relation with the political awakening among the ethnic groups is deeply rooted in their distinct identity originating from their language and culture and their apprehension of political subdue and insecurity. Thus, the demand for autonomy has direct relationship with the identity. For Yogendra Singh, the developments do impinge upon the issue of identity. The socio-economic developments augment the societal self-awareness within every society. The larger question of identity is connected with the growth of social, cultural, economic and political self-awareness among groups and communities. Identities have its subjective root in the person but it manifests itself objectively as a social product through the mobilisation of collective self consciousness. This consciousness is formed by several factors such as history, mythology and instrumental rationality. The sense of identity is created by one's realisation of the presence of the others.⁶⁶ Many scholars argues that the ethnic assertion for identity are often the result of absence of due recognition. The deprivation theory also advocates that social movement have their foundation among people who feel deprived of comfort life, some goods and services which are more likely to organise into social movement to

⁶⁶Yogendra Singh (2004): *Ideology and Theory in Indian Sociology*, Rawat Publications: Jaipur, pp-215, 216

improve their condition. The genesis of ethnic assertion in North-East India is generally either to preserve their distinct indigenous identity or lack of economic development and opportunities for its depressed communities. The feeling that they cannot become a part of the government apparatus nor can have equal share in mainstream politics motivates them to have their own autonomy. The groups perceive dominant society as oppressive and feel that achievement of its legitimate aims is impossible within the oppressive system. This feeling of deprivation and segregation among the ethnic minorities become the basis of assertive movement.⁶⁷ Hiren Gohain, a renowned social scientist of Assam argued it as a demand for self determination from a group of socially and culturally distinct people who no longer want to share a particular territory with other groups and who no longer recognise the government of the State as representing their interests and aspiration.⁶⁸ M.S.A Rao (1979) identified three factors relating to the origin of social movements which are relative deprivation-a feeling of being deprived in relation to certain conditions and expectations; structural strain because of the prevailing value system and the normative structure which does not meet the aspiration of the people and thus the society faces strain.⁶⁹ The Bodo movement, one of the most enduring and popular ethnic assertions in the political history of Assam like other ethnic groups of North-East India also share the history of identity based movement. It has been the most stringent tribal movement in contemporary Assam originating from the ostensible feeling of deprivation, discrimination and injustice experienced by the community. Today, many refer it as the politics of identity.

Historically, the development of autonomy aspiration among Bodos can be traced as far back as colonial era. Many called it as the beginning or a nascent stage of political awakening among Bodos. The aspiration for autonomy which is seeded in the Colonial period gradually got its momentum and proper direction in the post-Colonial era in 1960s when the issue took political overtone with the emergence of Tribal political parties which reached its peak in the late 1980s till the formation of Bodoland Territorial Council in 2003 and still continues till date. As stated above that the ethnic

⁶⁷Mamata Narzary (2016): Ethnic assertion of the Bodos of Assam: A contextual study of Autonomous movement of ABSU, Published by JONER (A peer reviewed Interdisciplinary Research Journal) Issue: 004, Vol. 2, p-241

⁶⁸Mamata Narzary (2016): Ibid, p-242

⁶⁹MSA Rao (1979): Social Movement and Social Transformation: A Study of two backward classes movements in India, Macmillan Madras

assertion has direct relation with the political awakening it may not be wrong to discuss the history of the political awakening among the Bodos in the light and context of political activities and Bodo movement under different organisations and political parties in different periods of time.⁷⁰

3.2 THE FIRST PHASE OF POLITICAL AWAKENING: 1933 - 1952

The first phase of political awakening among the Bodo community started towards the end of 1920s. Initially the Bodo elite grew with a reformative zeal but very soon they develop a distinct political mind. The political awakening among the Bodos came in the wake of Tribal politics in Assam. The political awakening among Bodos can be traced and discussed in the light of various reformative activities by different Bodo organisations and political activities of Tribal political party of the time.

3.2.1 BODO POLITICS UNDER DIFFERENT BODO ORGANISATIONS

The Bodos, since colonial period have already developed a sense of identity consciousness through articulated political aspiration under different socio-political organizations such as Assam Bodo Chatra Sanmilan (1918), Bodo Maha Sabha (1924), Assam Kachari Jubak Sanmilani, Boro Jubak Sanmalini of Goalpara. It is noteworthy to mention that the Assam Kochari Jubak Sanmilani in its resolution adopted in the conference held at Titabor, Jorhat on 12th August 1928, submitted a memorandum to the Commission highlighting their grievances reflected their aspiration of an independent ethnic entity. The Sanmilini pointed out that the Kachari were “once the ruling race of Assam and they should be given opportunity to have hands in political matters even now”.⁷¹ Their true aspiration was revealed when Assam Jubak Sanmilini demanded reservation for two seats in Legislative Council of Assam for Kachari community in Surma Valley and Assam Valley and stressed for separate electorate.⁷² In this conference, the representatives drawn from all the Tribal communities of Bodo family also refused to recognise themselves as Hindu and declared themselves independent

⁷⁰Bijan Kundu (2012): Aoutonomy aspiration of the Bodos in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam Viz-a-Viz Globalisation, ed. by Padam Nepal and A. Chakrabarty, in ‘Politics of Culture, identity and Protest in North-East India’ New Delhi: Authors press, pp. 360- 361

⁷¹Charan Narzary (2011): Op.Cit. p-22

⁷²Charan Narzary (2011): Ibid, p-23

from the Hindu community in all respects, social, political and religious. This in fact was a clear indication of growing consciousness among the Bodos.⁷³ Another organisation the Boro Jubak Sanmilini of Goalpara district submitted a memorandum to Simon Commission on 30th December 1928 and demanded for i.) Special representation in the Council ii) Establishment of a military regiment to be known as the Kachary or the Bodo regiment iii) Provision of scholarships for the students of the Bodo Community and reservation of special seats in all grades of the government services for them iv) Creation of Civil sub-division at Kokrajhar or Haltugaon v) Right of trading in timbers of the forest of the district by leasing out the forest Mahals instead of auction vi) Immediate enactment of the Goalpara Tenacy Bill in order to ensure the status of the tenants of the Khas Mahal and vii) Goalpara district should be retained as a part and parcel of Assam.⁷⁴ Growing political consciousness and a sense of distinct ethnic identity among the first generation Bodo leaders motivated them to reclaim its past glory and spread awareness among the community. Under the leadership of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, a young educated Bodos submitted a memorandum to Simon Commission in 1929 and demanded for political and social rights including seats reservation in local board of Legislative Assembly for the tribal community.⁷⁵

3.2.2 POLITICS OF ALL ASSAM PLAIN TRIBAL LEAGUE (AAPTTL) (1933 TO 1952)

Meanwhile, all the plain tribes of Assam felt the need of acquiring political power in order to develop their communities and to maintain their distinct lingo-cultural identity. It appeared to them that without having adequate share of political power they cannot bargain with the ruling elite for legitimate share in the decision making process of the province which they believed was necessary for all round development of their communities.⁷⁶ The young educated plain tribal realised the need for a common political platform to raise their issues and problems to the government. The social awakening among ethnic plain tribes of Assam that manifested through activities of various youth organisations gave birth to the All Assam Plains Tribal League on 17th April 1933 at

⁷³R. Wirsing & E. Ahrari: Fixing Fractured Nations: The Challenge of Ethnic Separatism in the Asia-Pacific, USA, p-119

⁷⁴Charan Narzary (2011): Op. Cit. p-24

⁷⁵Activities Report of ABSU, 2010, 6th Issue

⁷⁶Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-98

Roha under the leadership of Rupnath Brahma and Bhimbor Deuri along with few other educated Bodo leaders. The birth of tribal league was a corner stone of plain tribal politics in Assam. It gave a historic momentum and a new direction to the plain tribal politics in Assam during Colonial period which later became the source of inspiration for autonomy assertion among the plain tribals. It was the first attempt to give purely a political organisation to plain tribals of Assam under the umbrella of an organisation. It may be noted that such idea for a political platform was first articulated by the educated Bodos of the time, who were conscious of their identity, civil and political rights. Protection of identity and interest of plain Tribals was the principal objective of this party.⁷⁷ The formation of Tribal League, a political party clearly shows their political thinking and endeavours. Their political intention came to light when the Tribal League demanded a separate electorate for the plain tribals of Assam before the Simon Commission. The major achievement of the Tribal League came when the British India government considered their demand for separate electorate and reservation of four seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly' while enacting the Government of India Act, 1935. In 1937, the Bodos and the plain tribals for the first time cast their vote as separate electorate in the first general election. In this election the Tribal League won all four seats- Rupnath Brahma from Goalpara, Rabichandra Kachari from Kamrup and Darrang District, Dhirshing Deori from Nowgong and Karka Chandra Doley from Sibsagar District. Mr. Bhimbar Deori, General Secretary' of Tribal League was also nominated as a member of Assam Legislative Council. The presence of Tribal leaders in the Assembly gave them a space and representation in the State politics of Assam.⁷⁸

In the first general election to Assam Assembly none of the political party secured majority to form government of its own. This led to tussle between the Gopinath Bordoloi led Congress and Sir Mohammed Saddullaah led Muslim League to form the government. Taking advantage of the situation, the Tribal League remained non-committal and kept open for either side. The Tribal League first supported Sir. Saaddullaah to form government on certain agreement but this coalition government fell when the Tribal League withdrawn their support and made a pact with Congress on 10 September, 1938, following the proposal for protective system for tribal belts to

⁷⁷Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-72

⁷⁸Charan Narzary (2011): Op. Cit. p-28

safeguard their interest and land from infiltration of outsider. Subsequently, the Congress-Tribal League coalition government was formed on 20th September, 1938 on the following agreement- i) The Tribal party will maintain its independent identity ii) Continuance of separate electorate iii) Tribal representation in the Local Boards as determined by the Tribal League iv) Inclusion of all the tribals irrespective of religion or faith in the Schedule of the tribal people v) Treatment of the Tribal as a separate class for government services and preferential treatment in the matter of appointment vi) Liberal financial grants to the tribals and allocation of maximum amount in the budget of every year for the spread of education among the tribal communities⁷⁹ vii) Settlement of lands to the landless tribals and viii) Induction of one representative of the Tribal League in the Ministry. As agreed, the Government in 1939 approved the recommendation of the “Line System Committee” and decided to constitute protected areas comprising of those areas mouzas or compact parts of the mouzas predominantly inhabited by the tribals and other backward classes. But the Congress-Tribal League coalition government also dissolved in 1940 when the Congress party launched Civil Disobedience Movement against British rule.

Resignation of Congress government brought realignment between Muslim League and Tribal League on 16th March 1940, in a pact signed more or less similar to previous agreements. This agreement was the result of political exigency for both the sides. The Tribal leaders had tangible reason to doubt the sincerity of the Saddullaah government over the implementation of their agreements.⁸⁰ The Tribal leaders were concerned about the problem of infiltration of immigrant Muslims into Tribal areas and were cautiously eying on the policies of Saddullaah government. The inner intention of the Muslim League to import surplus Muslim population from the East Bengal and turn Assam a Muslim majority province was busted when the Saddullaah government introduced the policy of “Grow more food”. Such design to realise in the pretext of “Grow more food” by the Saddullah government through continuous import of Muslim farmers from the East Bengal into the protected Tribal areas did not go well among the Tribals.⁸¹ Saddullaah’s underneath policy to protect the interest of immigrant Muslims and land settlement policy at the cost of Tribal interest was severely criticised by the

⁷⁹Charan Narzary (2011): Ibid, p-29

⁸⁰Charan Narzary (2011): Ibid, p-30

⁸¹Hiranya Kr. Bhattacharya: The Silent Invasion (Assam versus Infiltration), Spectrum publishers, p-126

Tribal leaders. Land alienation became more acute when the “Line System” was abolished. As a result, the Tribal League withdrew their support from Saddullaah government and agreed to co-operate with the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee in 1946.⁸²

The Tribal League and the Bodo leaders also stood opposed against the proposal to merge Assam with Bengal. They were clear on their will to continue as an integral part of Assam rather than Bengal when they vehemently opposed the proposal to transfer Goalpara district to Bengal and asserted that “we, the Bodos, can by no means call ourselves other than Assamese.” With Assam they felt more akin culturally. Later, the Tribal League agreed to co-operate with the Congress in 1946.⁸³ In general election held in the year 1946 the Congress returned to power. The Congress secured majority 58 seats in 108 members House and Gopinath Bordoloi became its Premier. In this election two members from Tribal League were also elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Tribal League aligned with the Congress government and accordingly Bhimbar Deori was inducted in the Bordoloi Ministry in September 1946. The Tribal League also pressurized the Bordoloi Ministry to send a tribal representative to the Constituent Assembly, to induct one Parliamentary Secretary in the Central Ministry and reservation of post for the Tribals in the government services. Accordingly, Assam Assembly elected Abdul Hamid, Sir Saaddullah, Gopinath Bordoloi, Matin Choudhury, Basanta Kumar Das, Rohini Kumar Chaudhury, Amiya Kumar Das, JIM Nichols Roy and Dharanidhar Basumatary as the members of the Constituent Assembly.⁸⁴

In April 1946, when British Cabinet Mission visited India the Plain Tribals leaders submitted a memorandum demanding- i) Reservation of four seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly ii) Reservation of 16 seats in the Assam Legislative Council iii) One representative in the Viceroy’s Executive Council iv) Three seats in the Central Legislative Assembly v) One seat in the Central Legislative Council⁸⁵ vi) Separate seats with separate electorate vii) Not to include Assam in Pakistan Zone viii) To safeguard the interest of the Tribals and Minority Communities in the post-colonial India ix) To incorporate at least one or more Tribal member in the proposed Constituent Assembly

⁸²Dr. Subungcha Mwshahary (2015): Op. Cit. p-144

⁸³Charan Narzary (2011): Op. Cit, p-31

⁸⁴Dr. Subungcha Mwshahary (2015): Op. Cit, p-145

⁸⁵B.K Karjie (2019): The Bodo Movement: Past and Present, JETIR, Vol. 6, Issue 6, p-90

to which the responsibility of drawing future of Constitution of India will be entrusted". Likewise, the Tribal League submitted another memorandum in March 1947 demanding for the creation of Scheduled Areas in the plain regions of Assam under the 5th Schedule of the Constitution. But the demand was rejected by the Congress government.⁸⁶

It is noteworthy to mention that the land settlement vide resolution no. RD.68/44/52 dated 15th January, 1945, adopted by the British Government to protect tribals and other backward class people was clause under the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act 1886 by adding Chapter- X through an amendment and formally the provision of "Tribal Belts and Blocks" was enacted by the government in the year 1947 for the plain tribals of Assam. As per the provision as many as 33 Tribal Belts and Blocks covering 5,704 square miles were created. This Act prohibits the possession and transfer of lands within Tribal Belts and Blocks by the outsiders including the non-tribal people. It may be stated that this provision was adopted in the wake of discontent of the Tribal leaders with the policy to settle immigrants in the sparsely populated districts of Brahmaputra Valley in order to undertake development and cultivation and import of workers to work in tea garden, road construction, coalmines and oilfield. Such policy opened a new floodgate for immigration of landless peasants from East Bengal continued even after independence. In post-independence, the flow of massive immigrants became a menacing land problem particularly among the Bodos.⁸⁷ Later, the provision of Tribal Belts and Blocks became the principal source of political ambition among Bodos for creating future Tribal Autonomous Territorial Land in the State. This opened the hitherto close door for the political establishment and power to the Bodos along with other plain tribal communities. This political space under colonial rule brought total involvement of all the Plain Tribes in the State politics and contributed towards their solidarity.⁸⁸

But, the Tribal League in the later course of time could not bundled themselves into one organisation because of diverse political interest amongst different tribes and different problems faced by different tribal groups. An internal feud began within the Tribal League just few years before Independence over the issue of participation in the nationwide provincial election in 1945. Against the opinion of the League many leaders

⁸⁶B.K Karjie (2019): Ibid, p-91

⁸⁷H.K. Barpujari (1998): North- East India: Problems, Policies & Prospects, p-48

⁸⁸B.K Karjie (2019): Op. Cit. p-91

merged with Congress because of their vested political interest. And, few of them got elected in the Congress ticket.⁸⁹ Later, this blunder caused detriment to the tribal communities of Brahmaputra Valley with socio-economic and political because they were left at the goodwill and mercy of the Congress government of Assam for about two decades after independence. The Congress instead of giving a special attention to their development generalised their problems with mainstream Assamese.⁹⁰ It may be stated that, the Bodos struggled and contested elections under the Tribal League from 1937 to 1952 as they had no separate political organisation. Although, the league during this period was not in a position to form the government but it played a deciding role in many occasions in the formation of the government before its dissolution.⁹¹ Thus, the first phase of Bodo politics that commenced with this formal organization lasted from 1933 to 1952 was later renamed as All Assam Tribal Sangha, now assumes a non-political role.

3.3 THE SECOND PHASE OF POLITICAL AWAKENING: (LANGUAGE MOVEMENT) 1952 - 1967

The measures to protect the interest and identity of the tribal under the provision of Tribal Belts and Blocks soon became inadequate. Confronted with many critical situations since Independence, the Bodos developed a deep sense of resentment against the Hindu Assamese. N.G. Mahanta argues that- the imposition of Assamese language as the official State language led to protests from various non-Assamese speaking linguistic groups. In particular, the Bodos became highly apprehensive about their cultural and political identity. All these factors have made the Bodos feel unsafe and insecurity have threatened their very existence.

3.3.1 POLITICS OF LANGUAGE AND SCRIPT

After independence the Bodos remained backward in all aspects of life- social, economic and political. Soon, the educated Bodos realised that the preservation of their separate identity is impossible without the preservation of language in the wave of Assamization of tribals through assimilation process. In this wake, the educated Bodo

⁸⁹Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-75

⁹⁰B.K Karjie (2019): Op. Cit. p-91

⁹¹Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-74

realised the need to develop the language in order to preserve their distinct culture and identity. Although, the literary activities of the Bodos can be traced to have began side by side since the creation of several Bodo Organisation but it did not took a definite shape due to lack of dedicated organisation. It was only after the creation of Bodo Sahitya Sabha the literary activities of the Bodos took a new direction.

On 27th July 1952, Bodo students and servicemen formed the Bodo Literary Club at Dhubri in which Birendra Brahma Patgiri and Rajendra Nath Brahma were made President and Secretary respectively. In a conference held on 17th September 1952, this organisation decided to expand the jurisdiction of its operation. In this backdrop, a two days literary conference was held at Basugaon on 15th and 16th November, 1952. In this Bodo National Convention the Bodo Sahitya Sabha was formed with an executive body headed by Minister Joy Bhadra Hagjer as President and Sonaram Thaosen as Secretary. This led to the birth of first landmark literary organisation, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) to safeguard the language and culture of the Bodos. The Bodo nationalism since then began to grow and took agitating politics when the chauvinist Assamese tried to impose Assamese language as the sole official language and medium of instruction.⁹² In October, 1960, the Assam Legislative Assembly passed the Assam State Language Bill making Assamese as the only State Language of Assam. This met with bitter reactions throughout undivided Assam comprising of present Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. In particular, these Hill provinces were aggressively vocal in their protest. This Act was a blow to unique sense of unity in Assam as the alienation had already began among these Hill provinces. As a result, the State of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland was curved out of Assam. Among the plain tribals, the Bodos in particular could not accept this Act. This Act made the Bodos felt discriminated and realised that the policy is designed to annihilate their language. As a result, the Bodos began to alienate from the so called mainstream Assamese society. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha opposed the Bill tooth and nail and demanded for the recognition of Bodo language as a medium of instruction at primary level of education in the Bodo dominated areas of Assam. After prolonged agitation the government introduced the Bodo language as medium of instruction. It was introduced at different levels of education in Assam in successive stages- Elementary

⁹² Dr. Subungcha Mwshahary (2015): Op. Cit, p-136

stage in 1963, Secondary stage in 1968 and at college level as an MIL subject in 1977. Even the North East Hill University (NEHU) the Central University in Meghalaya also recognised the language as MIL subject in the year 1984. In 1972, when the Government of Assam introduced a policy to replace English with Assamese as the medium of instruction in College and University, there was a sense of deep language insecurity among the Tribals, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in particular stood opposed and pleaded to retain it along with the Assamese language.⁹³ Hiren Gohain observed that “The Bodos and other tribals who had no indigenous script resented assimilation campaign and felt that their chance of preserving own cultural heritage is not possible in the atmosphere of Assamese hegemony.”⁹⁴ PS Datta quoted that- “The intention is very clear. The Assamese people and the Assam Government want to Assamise and assimilate the non-Assamese through the imposition of Assamese language and culture. The Assamese people and the Assam Government have not yet realised the mistake with Assamisation and assimilation policy. Still they want to force others to read Assamese and accept their policy of Assamization and assimilation.”⁹⁵

It may be mentioned that the Bodos inherit no script of its own. Bishnu Prasad Rabha, a noted singer, writer and revolutionist of Bodo origin, however, claims that there was a kind of Deodhai script among the Bodos in ancient times.⁹⁶ But, in course of time they lost their script with the fall of Kingdom. As a result, the Bodos used their literature and language in various scripts in absence of their own script. Towards the end of 19th century, the Christian Missionaries tried to write a language in Roman script but it remained a limited practice. Later on they adopted Assamese script to write the Bodo language.

It may be noted that the Bodo Sahitya Sabha faced difficulties because of using multiple scripts for writing Bodo literature and language in absence of common script. The script problem became more acute when the Bodo language was introduced in the primary education because the text book had to be produced in one script only. After deliberate discussion upon the recommendation of the Saisingra Sub Committee the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in its 11th session held in West Bengal on February 24th to 26th

⁹³Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-76

⁹⁴Hiren Gohain (1989): Bodo Stir in Perspective, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 24, p-1377

⁹⁵PS Datta (1994): North East As I See It, Omsons Publications, New Delhi-110027, p-283

⁹⁶Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-76

1970 accepted the resolution and decided to use Roman script instead of Assamese, Bengali and Devnagari. The implementation Committee decided to use Roman script with effect from 1974-75 academic sessions. On 22nd April 1974, Roman script was formally inaugurated as the script for writing Bodo language and literature. However, the Government of Assam refused to accept this demand of Bodo Sahitya Sabha. The Asom Sahitya Sabha, Assamese elite and other Assamese Literary Body came out with strong opposition yelling it as anti-Assamese. This unilateral move of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the Bodo Teachers Association to introduced Roman script provoked the government to withhold the salaries of the Bodo teachers.⁹⁷ In response, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha along with ABSU and PTCA also launched a vigorous mass movement demanding for approval of Roman script and withdrawal of Government's action against the Bodo teachers. This led to continuous boycott and shut down of Colleges and Schools for several months in the Bodo dominated areas. The movement took a violent turn when the State government came down with repressive policy against agitators. This movement martyred 15 young Bodo youths. Meanwhile, the National Emergency was proclaimed by Indira Gandhi in 1975. In the wake of National Emergency and under circumstances of coercive threat by Central Government compelled the Bodo leaders to accept the Devnagari as script for Bodo language and literature.⁹⁸ It may be noteworthy to mention that the Roman script was preferred by the Bodo leaders because they felt it amenable and easier for phonetic sounds of Bodo language and convenient for use in type writing and printing which is very fundamental for fast development of any language. By then, the other tribes had already adopted Roman script in and around Assam for their language.⁹⁹ Needless to say that- the language movement had widened the gap between the Bodos and Assamese where on it fuelled Assamese fear to lose dominance in their own State on the other the Bodos fear that the Assamization would extinct their identity and language. It was perhaps natural to be apprehensive among Bodos because the policy of Assamese chauvinism and imposition of Assamese language, AASU's demand to scrap the reservation policy for SC and ST candidates and scholarships during Assam Movement and the clause 6 of

⁹⁷Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-77

⁹⁸Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-78

⁹⁹Jadav Pegu (2004): Reclaiming Identity: A Discourse on Bodo History, Saraighat Offset Press Guwahati, p-88

Assam Accord which mentioned only for safeguarding the cultural identity of Assamese created a doubt and apprehension over the intention of chauvinist Assamese.¹⁰⁰

3.4 THE THIRD PHASE: THE DEMAND FOR POLITICAL AUTONOMY 1967 – 1986

The origin of existing situation in Assam can be traced back to the Colonial policy of the organisation of provinces. Assam was one of the States composed of diverse groups of people spread over Brahmaputra Valley, Garo, Jaintia, Khasi, Mizo, Naga Hills and Sylhet Districts and forms a composite of heterogeneous society. The post-independent period was initially one of calm with speedy amalgamation of the North-Eastern region with the rest of the country. One of the notable features was that the Tribals of Hills Districts were brought under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India were vested with the privilege of political autonomy. But, the Plain Tribals of Assam remained excluded from such privilege since the Fifth Schedule did not cover Assam. The Bodos who form a significant and distinct ethno-linguistic group in plain areas of Assam were left with nothing as no political autonomy was granted to them. This left the Bodos without a District Council of their own.

Politics played a vital role in the Bodo movement for separate State. The idea of self-determination among Bodos had no doubt been rooted as early as Colonial era. But, the Bodo movement for political autonomy and urge for protection of their distinct lingo-cultural identity grew stronger only when the Hills tribes like Nagas, Jaianyias, Khasis and Mizos curved out of Assam during 60s and 70s. One of the significant factors that inspired Bodo movement was the Union Government's policy of reorganisation of States in North East. Other factor was the Assamese hegemony and discriminatory attitudes of Hindu caste Assamese towards tribals. Foremost factor was the negligence of State government in the enforcement of Tribal Belts and Blocks with letter and spirit. As a result, land alienation of Tribals continued unabated under the successive State governments. Besides, many of the Tribal Belts and Blocks were de-constituted by the government from time to time for different purposes.¹⁰¹ In this respect, N.G. Mahanta attributed three main factors for the alienation of the Bodos and

¹⁰⁰Shishir Tiwari and Gitanjali Ghosh (2014): From Conflict to Accord and a decade Thenceforth- The Plight of Internally Displaced Persons in Bodoland and the Law, Elixir International Journal, p- 24151

¹⁰¹B.K Karjie (2019): Op. Cit. p-91

consolidation of Bodo identity- domination of Assamese Hindu caste, continued migration from Bangladesh and the systematic encroachment of non-tribals on Bodo land, primarily immigrant Muslims.¹⁰²

3.4.1 BIRTH OF PTCA AND UDAYACHAL MOVEMENT

The year 1967, marked a corner stone in the history of Bodo politics because two pioneering Bodo organisations- All Bodo Students Union and Plain Tribal Council of Assam came into being. The post-independent period did not bring any constitutional safeguard to the Bodos. But, the educated Bodo felt the need to organize the Bodos politically because they realised the need of adequate share in political power to sustain and develop the community. Meanwhile, the PM Indira Gandhi, on 13th January, 1967, announced reorganization of Assam on federal basis to solve the Mizo problem. This announcement once again gave a hope to their aspiration for political autonomy. The enthusiastic Bodo leaders' whole heartedly welcomed the decision of the Union Government. In this wake, a new political party with the name "Plain Tribal Council of Assam" (PTCA) was formed on 27th February 1967 under the leadership of Mr. Samar Brahma Choudhury, Mr. Charan Narzary, Bir Lachan Doley and others just after the formation of ABSU. The All Bodo Students Union also acknowledged the reorganisation policy of North East by Union Government. Political renaissance among the Bodos began its momentum with the ABSU and PTCA taking initiatives of political mobilisation among the Bodos.

In its initial stage, the PTCA demanded for full autonomy in the tribal predominated areas on the northern tract of Darrang, Goalpara, Kamrup, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts including all the Tribal Belts and Blocks within the region. The area includes bordering river Sankosh in the West to Sadhya in the East along the foothills of Bhutan and NEFA on the northern tracts of river Brahmaputra. The demand was basically intended to- i) adequate protection of tribal land ii) protection from economic exploitation of tribals by the non-tribals iii) preservation of language, custom and culture v) prevention of political domination by non-tribals and vi) grow according to their own genius and traditions. The party also demanded for the extension and

¹⁰²NG Mahanta (2013): Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 48, No. 23, pp-49-58

application of Sixth Schedule in the proposed areas.¹⁰³ The party also pondered that why they should not have autonomy in their own ancestral land and demanded for special administrative arrangement for the protection and development of their language and culture. On 20th May 1967, the five delegate member of PTCA for the first time met the President of India Dr. Zakir Hussain and submitted a memorandum. The party also boycotted the by election for Kokrajhar Parliamentary election of July 1967 and May 1968.¹⁰⁴ Meanwhile, the passage of the Assam Reorganisation Act 1969, under which Meghalaya in 1970 and Mizoram in 1972 was carved out of Assam gave an impetus to intensify the Bodo Movement for a separate Union Territory. In 1972, the party again submitted a memorandum demanding for creation of ‘Udayachal’ a separate Union Territory comprising of the areas dominated by the Bodo and other tribal groups. As stated earlier, the party also resisted the introduction of Assamese language as the only medium of instruction along with the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and ABSU.¹⁰⁵ During the Roman script movement and Emergency period’ the Udayachal movement was dampened as the party halted their political activities. After the Emergency was lifted in 1977, the party suspended the demand for Udayachal virtually angered the tribal people. As a result, the ABSU also withdrew the support to PTCA. Further, the party split in 1979 into PTCA and PTCA-Progressive. The splinter group demanded for the creation of separate State “Mishing-Bodoland” as homeland of two plain tribes. In 1980 and 1983 the PTCA (P) also submitted a memorandum to the PM Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Many tribal leaders including ABSU called for a reunification but the party could not come into consensus due to their vested political interest and arrogant attitudes of the leaders. Later, the PTCA (P) was dissolved and a new political party “United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front” (UTNLF) was formed on 19th April, 1984. The party envisaged to bring all the Scheduled Tribes of Assam into its fold demanded for a Tribal Land. But the party could not sustain for a long period.¹⁰⁶ It is noteworthy to mention that the formation of the AAPTL in 1933, BSS in 1952, PTCA and ABSU in 1967 reflect the Bodo people’s quest for political power and self-determination.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³Charan Narzary (2011): Op. Cit P- 55

¹⁰⁴Charan Narzary (2011): Ibid, p-57

¹⁰⁵Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-79

¹⁰⁶Khema Sonowal (2013): Ibid. p-80

¹⁰⁷Jaikhlong Basumatary (2014): Quest for Peace in Assam: A Study of the Bodoland Movement, p-5

3.4.2 ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION AND PERFORMANCES OF PTCA

The Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) was the only political organisation, a common political platform of plain tribals committed to protect and work for the political interest of the plain tribals of Assam. The party was created in the backdrop of the declaration of Assam State reorganisation Act in 1967. In 1968, when a delegate of Union government visited Assam to study the Tribal Development programme, PTCA along with the Tribal MLAs of Congress including Rupnath Brahma jointly submitted a memorandum explaining the plight of plain tribals and ineffectiveness of the Tribal Belts and Blocks to protect the tribal's interest.¹⁰⁸ It is noteworthy to mention that the party boycotted the Lok Sabha Election in Kokrajhar Constituency held in July, 1967, and May, 1968, in mark of strong demand. Thousands of volunteers of the PTCA picketed polling booths during these elections and many were detained. In subsequent years, the party decided to contest mid-term election of Assam Legislative Assembly in 1971 but none from the party won. However, the party managed to send Mr. Charan Narzary, its General Secretary to the Assam Legislative Assembly held in 1972.¹⁰⁹

In 1977, Lok Sabha Election, the party fielded its lone sitting MLA Mr. Charan Narzary in Kokrajhar Constituency. He defeated the Congress sitting MP Mr. Dharanidhar Basumatary by a huge margin. The high turnout of Bodos in this election in favour of PTCA shows the command of the party over the Bodos. This can be understood from the fact that its candidate won by a huge margin against the opponent.¹¹⁰ The party took a lead in many of the Assembly segment like Barama, Bhavanipur, Bijini, Chapaguri, Kokrajhar East, Kokrajhar West, Sorbhag and Tamulpur except Gossaigaon. This clearly was the indication of alienation of the Bodos from the ruling Congress. It may also be noted that the Janata Party came to the power at the centre was the first non-Congress government had an electoral understanding with the PTCA. This paved the way for the party to work for the tribal's interest. The parties also made an electoral adjustment in the State for the Assam Assembly Election.

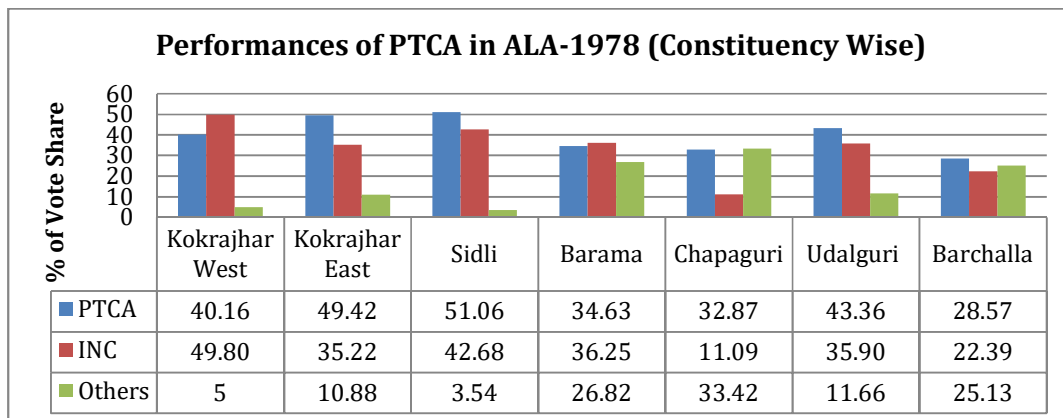
¹⁰⁸Memorandum to the Study team of Tribal Development Programme, Submitted by PTCA and Plain Tribal MLAs- 1968

¹⁰⁹RN Moshshary: "Bodo Sahitya Sabha: A brief Historical Survey" Article presented in the 14th Session of North East India History Association Jorhat, 1993, pp-340

¹¹⁰SK Chaube (1985): Op. Cit. p-61

As per agreement, the party fielded in seven Constituencies- Barama, Barachalla Chapaguri, Kokrajhar East, Kokrajhar West, Sidli and Udalguri and supported Janata Party in the areas of its influence. The mandate to this election gave four seats to the party. The party emerged victorious in four constituencies were Kokrajhar East with 49.42%; Sidli with 51.06%; Udalguri with 43.36% and Barchalla with 28.57% vote share and in the rest three constituencies it emerged second largest polled. The party's vote share in State wide was roughly 0.98%. The Congress was its major opponent as the party seemingly had a sizable social base in the tribals dominated areas. It may also be noted that in seven other Constituencies where the party did not contested, the Independent Bodo Candidates secured either second or third most polled. This clearly shows the growing involvement of the Bodos in electoral politics and their aspiration for political power. Even the Independent Bodo Candidates in Bijini and Chapaguri defeated the affiliated political parties. Other victor Bodo candidates in this election were one each from the Congress and CPM.¹¹¹ The party aligned with Janata Party and formed the first ever non-Congress government in the State. But, the young party workers including ABSU and other tribal organisations, in particular the supporter of 'Udayachal' severely criticised the party alleging of betrayal and compromising with their goals and political aspiration for their narrow personal gain. As a result, the party split into PTCA and PTCA (P) in which the former remained with old party and the latter was formed by the young splinter group which was later renamed as UTNLF.¹¹²

Figure: 3.4.2 (a) Electoral Performance of the PTCA in Assam Assembly Election- 1978



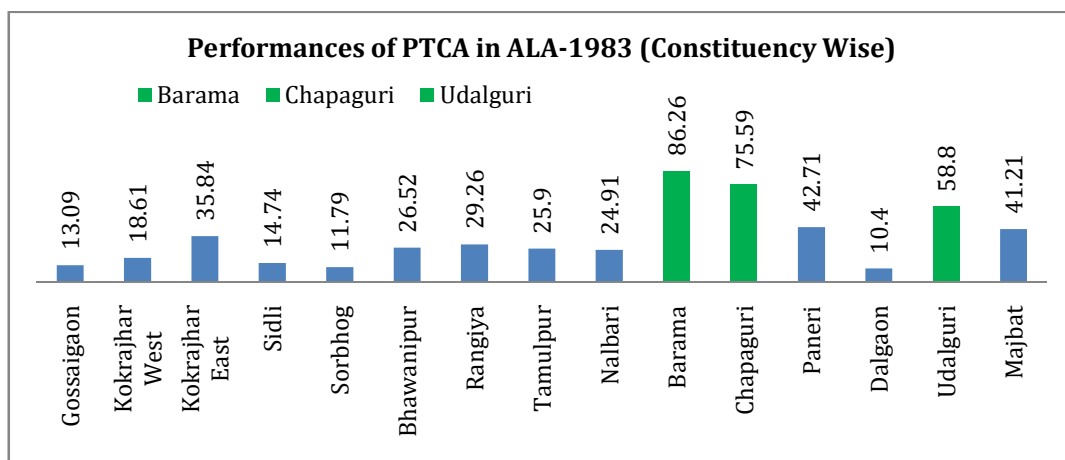
Source: Assam Election Commission

¹¹¹Statistical Report on Assam Legislative Assembly 1978, Election Commission of India

¹¹²Memorandum Submitted by the UTNLF to the PM Indira Gandhi, 1985

The 1983, Assembly Election was held amid election boycott and chaotic situation due to ongoing anti-foreigner movement popularly known as Assam Movement. Many political parties including the National party like BJP and Janata Party did not participate in this election. The PTCA fielded in 15 Constituencies but won three seats only. The party won Barama seat with 86.26%, Chapaguri seat with 75.59% and Udalguri seat with 85.80% vote share. Mr. B.K Basumatary became the leader of PTCA Legislative Party in Legislative Assembly. Notably the call for boycott by the agitation group affected this election as the voter turnout remained very low. The party saw declined in terms of vote share in many seats also suffered one seat lost. Part of the reason was the split within the party and deviation from the Udayachal demand. The party which took the centre stage in Bodo movement was gradually sidelined by the ABSU and the party began to lose its relevance and popularity among the Bodos after the fallout within due to alleged hobnobbing with the national parties in power. This government was soon dissolved following the Assam Accord in 1985.¹¹³

Figure: 3.4.2 (b) Performances of PTCA in ALA- 1983 showing vote share and seats win (Barama, Chapaguri and Udalguri)



Source: Assam Election Commission

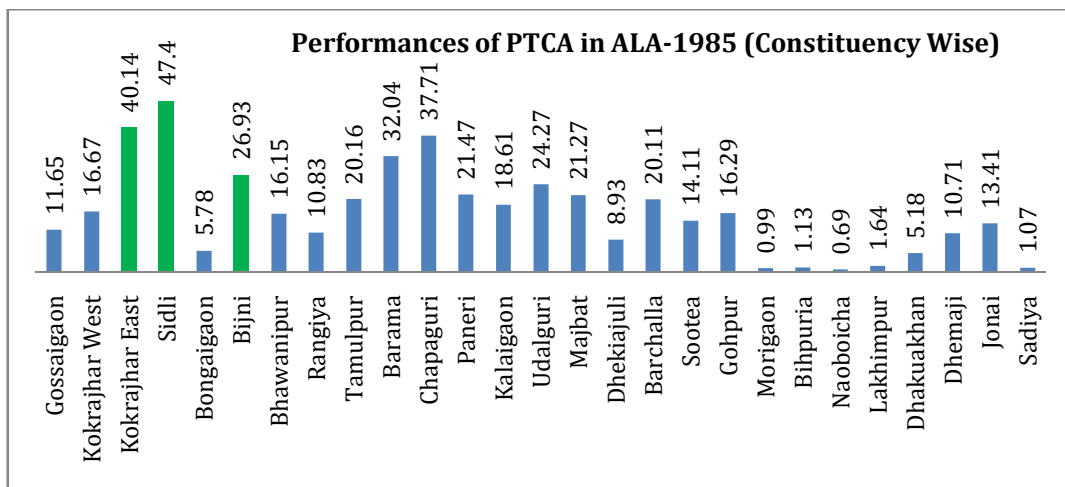
In 1985, the Parliamentary Election and the Assam Assembly Election was held simultaneously. Both the PTCA and its breakaway faction UTNLF also contested the Parliamentary Election. PTCA contested in three Constituencies and its candidate Mr. Samar Brahma Choudhury managed to win from Kokrajhar ST Constituency with 30.03% vote share, while in Mangaldoi and Tezpur Constituencies the party's vote

¹¹³Statistical Report on Assam Legislative Assembly-1983, Election Commission of India

share was 9.88% and 12.86% whereas, UTNLF, a breakaway faction of PTCA could not win any seat.

In Assam Assembly Election, the PTCA fielded as many as 27 Candidates but the party won only three seats. The party won Kokrajhar East with 40.14%, Sidli with 47.4% and Bijni with roughly 26.93% vote share. Although, the party managed to win three seats but the vote share and its traditional areas of influence were apparently subsided. In many seats the vote share of the party remained more or less poor. Its rival UTNLF also fielded in 15 constituencies but won a lone seat. In a notable feature the candidates of UTNLF, UMF and AGP contested as an Independent Candidates because these parties were new and unrecognised party created just before the election. AGP, in particular was the party born out of Assam Accord and Assamese nationalism. The APG and PTCA went into a poll agreement in this election. Part of the reason for better performances of PTCA in compared to UTNLF was its alliance with AGP which garnered them the non-Bodo votes. Also the UTNLF was new and had less organisational strength at the grass root level. In this election, AGP rode to power in a wave of Assamese nationalism won 63 seats and form the government in the State.¹¹⁴

Figure: 3.4.2 (c) Performances of PTCA in ALA- 1985 showing vote share and seats win (Kokrajhar East, Sidli and Bijni)



Source: Assam Election Commission

By mid 1980s, the Bodo movement gradually caught momentum towards new direction when the powerful student organisation ABSU took a pioneering role. In

¹¹⁴Statistical Report on Assam Legislative Assembly-1985, Election Commission of India

1986, Upendra Nath Brahma took the leadership of ABSU and simultaneously a new organisation called Bodo Peoples' Action Committee (BPAC) was also founded under the shadow of ABSU to organise Bodo people irrespective of political affiliation. The ABSU-BPAC launched a joint Bodoland movement on 2nd March 1987. It was a non-violent movement but soon violence and bloodbath took an unprecedented scale when the arm wing of ABSU-BPAC was involved in persecution and even killing of Bodos who were sympathetic towards PTCA. Hardliners dominated the movement and moderates were sidelined. Part of the reason for persecution was perhaps betrayal to the people by compromising the Bodo Autonomy and fight in a bid to control the Bodo politics.¹¹⁵ Amid the violent movement, both the Parliamentary election and Assam Legislative Assembly was held in 1991. The PTCA contested in two Constituencies in Parliamentary election and 15 Constituencies in Assam Assembly Election but the party could win none in both the elections. The result of this election shows the complete alienation of the PTCA from the Bodos and other plain tribals. Part of the reason for humiliating defeat of the PTCA was perhaps- election was held in a peak time of Bodoland Movement; ABSU-BPAC were able to provide leadership to Bodo Autonomy Movement and the Bodos saw a ray of hope in these organisation because the tripartite talk with the Government had already reached its final stage and a pact of agreement could be expected any time soon and above all the failure of PTCA to deliver goods and their compromising stand for the narrow personal gain had frustrated the Bodos.¹¹⁶

3.5 THE FORTH PHASE: BODOLAND MOVEMENT AND ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION: 1987 – 1993

As stated above, the ABSU under the leadership of UN Brahma took the centre stage of the Bodo Movement. The ABSU steered the movement towards the most decisive phase of the Bodo political movement. In 1987, the ABSU under the leadership of UN Brahma, submitted a 92 points Charter of Demands to the Government of Assam on January, 1st 1987 along with the Government of India on January 22nd 1987.¹¹⁷ The ABSU in its 18th Annual Conference held in Bashbari suspended as many as 89 points non-political demands and came with only three major demands. Among the three

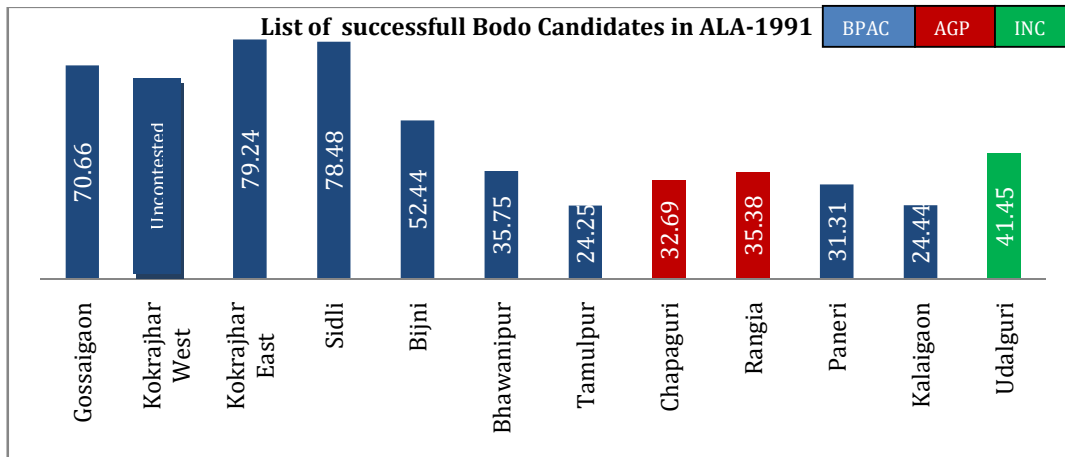
¹¹⁵Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-121

¹¹⁶Khema Sonowal (2013): Ibid. p-122

¹¹⁷Bidyasagar Narzary (2007): Op. Cit. p-66

demands the creation of separate State for the Bodos and other plain tribals of Assam was their principal demand. In a historic conference, the ABSU took a decision to name the proposed separate State as “Bodoland” by consensus of the Bodos. Simultaneously, the Bodo Peoples Action Committee (BPAC) was founded by the ABSU to organise Bodoland movement into mass movement with a view to achieve their supreme goal for separate State Bodoland. Thereafter, the ABSU-BPAC launched a joint movement which took intensive after they mobilised the Bodos in every nook and corner. But, the movement took a violent turned when the hardliner sidelined the moderate groups and started persecuting the non-sympathetic to their demand. Amid, the violence and bloodbath, the Parliamentary election and Assam Assembly election was flooded in 1991.¹¹⁸

Figure: 3.5 List of Successful Bodo Candidates in ALA- 1991 (Constituency Wise)



Source: Assam Election Commission

Many political parties including INC, PTCA, AGP, BPAC and many Independent candidates participated in the Bodo dominated areas. The ABSU-BPAC contested as an Independent as the party was not recognised as a political party. The Bodo people in this election stood solidly behind the ABSU-BPAC backed candidates instead of PTCA. In Assembly election also, the ABSU-BPAC backed candidates won as many as nine in 21 seats contested. The ABSU-BPAC backed candidates won Gossaigaon, Kokrajhar West, Kokrajhar East, Sidli, Bijni, Bhawanipur, Tamulpur, Paneri and Kalaigaon constituencies with overwhelming vote share; while two Bodo Candidates from the AGP and one from the Congress managed to win in this election.

¹¹⁸Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-124

Notably, the Kokrajhar West candidate Paramaswer Brahma was elected uncontested and this election also completely wiped out the PTCA.¹¹⁹

The Congress (I) came to power with majority 66 seats win under the leadership of Hiteswar Saikia. It may be noted that Mr. Saikia maintained a good relation with the ABSU-BPAC leaders had even hinted to form alliance during pre-election campaign if necessary. However, the clear mandate to the Congress did not required them to come into alliance with ABSU-BPAC but it pave the way for the expedition of the negotiation between the Government and the leaders of the Bodo Movement. After the election, the Bodo MLAs formed the Bodoland Legislative Party under the leadership of Parameswar Brahma. Emergence of BrSF (now NDFB) in 1986, a militant organisation caused a serious problem to the movement because of their involvement in serious arson and terror activities. This hardliner group began to dominate the moderate group by the secessionist movement for “Sovereign Bodoland”. Naturally there was an ideological conflict between the leaders of BrSF and ABSU-BPAC which could bring possible sabotage in the separate State Bodoland Movement of ABSU-BPAC. Further, the untimely demise of charismatic President of ABSU, UN Brahma made the leadership weak for the time being. These factors steered the ABSU-BPAC leaders to settle for an immediate solution to the Bodo problem. After a series of negotiations with the Government of Assam and India, a pact called Bodoland Accord was signed on 20th February 1993. The Assam Assembly passed the Bodoland Autonomous Council Bill on April 1993 and it became an Act on May 14, 1993.¹²⁰

The Accord provided for the formation of Administrative Authority in the proposed BAC comprising of contiguous geographical areas dominated by the Bodo population. But the difficulties cropped during the demarcation of boundaries of BAC when the non-tribal population vehemently opposed it and demanded for the exclusion of non-tribal villages. Amid the opposition of non-tribals the Government of Assam, on 10th December, 1993, issued a notification Vide No. TAD/BAC/26/93/18 demarcation of boundary of the BAC and published the list of villages in a Constituency-wise falling within it. As such, the BAC was created comprising of 2570 villages in a vast and

¹¹⁹Statistical Report on Assam Legislative Assembly-1991, Election Commission of India.

¹²⁰G.C. Phukon (1993): The Bodoland Autonomous Council Act 1993, Gauhati Assam Law House

contiguous areas extending from Western border of Kokrajhar to the Western border of Majbat Constituency of Darrang District.

The erstwhile ABSU-BPAC leaders formed the Bodo Peoples' Party (BPP) to administer the BAC. An Interim 18 member BEC was formed on 20th May 1993 comprising of BPP leaders. As per the agreement, as many as thirty eight departments were entrusted to the Council for administration. S.K Bwiswmuthiary, the former President of ABSU took the charge as the Chief Executive Councillor. But the contentious issue of inclusion of more villages within the BAC remained simmering and subsequently soured the relation between the ABSU and the BPAC leaders. Simmering tension within the party led to the fallout among the BPP leaders. The Chief of BAC Mr. S.K Bwiswmuthiary and Co. resigned from the Executive Council and started a protest against the Government's inaction for inclusion of the additional 515 more villages in the BAC area. This led to the constitution of a new BEC and Mr. Premsing Brahma, the former Chief of an arm wing group' a volunteer Force of ABSU was nominated as the new Chief Executive of the Council.¹²¹

Although, the BAC became operational with entrusted powers and functions but it failed to serve the aspirations of the Bodos. While the ABSU-BPAC suffered a rift due to their dissention on the entire arrangement and on the other end the BrSF an armed outfit' out rightly rejected it since their demand was for Sovereign Bodoland. Above all, the election to the BAC was pending and it was alleged that both the Union and State government were delaying the implementation of the Accord in letter and spirit.¹²²

3.6 THE FIFTH PHASE: THE POST ACCORD AND SECESSIONIST MOVEMENT: 1993 – 2003

Failure of BAC to serve the political aspirations of the Bodos led to another wave of Bodoland movement in the post-Accord. The period was marked by one of the darkest phase in the history of Bodoland movement in Assam. Marked by both the intra-violence and counter-violence between the insurgent groups and State machinery the period witnessed heighten of terror and fear of both the outlaw and State in the region. The ABSU also retreat the Bodoland demand afresh; the BrSF continued its radical

¹²¹Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-125

¹²²Khema Sonowal (2013): Ibid. p-126

activities to pressurize the Government and on the other end the dismantled armed group a “Volunteer Force” was revived with the name Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLT) in 1996 was alleged to have been created by the Congress Government with the help of Mr. Premising Brahma to counter the BrSF. The demand of BLT’ a new armed group was the creation of separate State Bodoland within the Indian Union. Emergence of rival armed groups and their bid to outdo the others and control the Bodo politics took a new dimension in the Bodoland Movement. The rivalry soon turned to bitter enmity was engulfed with the civil war and fratricidal killings and sabotage activities unleashed by these two insurgent groups created havoc and lawlessness in the Bodo dominated areas.¹²³

Mention may be made that the separatist ideology of the BrSF (NDFB), contradict the BLT leadership of the movement articulated with a powerful impact was rooted in a deep sense of alienation from the Assamese society of which they had been considered to be a peripheral part. The Bodo leadership propagates the idea of Bodoland through the assumption that political autonomy will remove their deprivation. Indirect involvement of both the arm groups in politics ended up in clash for their political hegemony.¹²⁴ On the other end, the ABSU called for reunification of BPP factions in its 28th Annual Session held on 6th March 1996, yielded as the Mr. Premising Brahma snap the ties with Congress and both the factions of BPP were dissolved. A new non-political organisation called Bodoland Statehood Movement Council (BSMC) was created on 28th March 1996, with Mr. SK Bwiswmutiary as its President, Mr. Premising Brahma and other three as Vice President to spearhead the Bodoland Movement. In another development, a new political party named Peoples Democratic Front (PDF) had already been created on 24th March 1996 at Udalguri by the four districts unit of ABSU prior to the formation of BSMC. Emergence of two organisations under the shadow of ABSU just before the 1996 Parliamentary and Assam Assembly elections gave another trouble in the Bodo Movement. Naturally, the ABSU was supposed to back the PDF candidates but its decision to back the BSMC candidates gave rise to a new political rivalry between BSMC and PDF. Their political rivalry turned into enmity when the two parties involved in asking and counter asking to dissolve and joined the other.¹²⁵

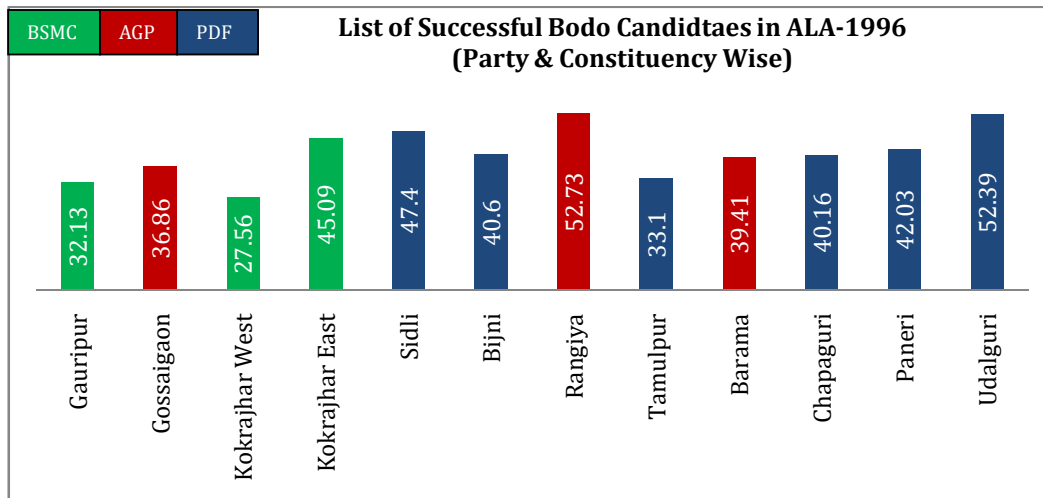
¹²³Khema Sonowal (2013): Ibid. p-127

¹²⁴Jaikhlong Basumatary (2014): Op.Cit. p-7

¹²⁵Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-127

Violence marred the pre-election when the Vice President of BSMC Mr. Baliram Bodo, a Candidate from the Udalguri Constituency was killed. It is to be noted that the manifesto of both the parties was similar- “primarily the creation of separate State Bodoland” but the parties contested election on its own.

Figure: 3.6 (a) List of Successful Bodo Candidates in Assam Assembly Election-1996 (Party and Constituency Wise)



Source: Assam Election Commission

This election saw two major contenders in the Bodo dominated areas. In Parliamentary election, the PDF fielded as many as five candidates and 27 candidates in Assembly election. The ABSU backed BSMC contested one Parliamentary seat and 17 Assembly seats while UTNLF’ another Bodo political party also contested in one Parliamentary seat and some Assembly seats.¹²⁶ It is to be noted that the mainstream political parties such as AGP, BJP and INC also fielded their candidates almost in all the Bodo dominated constituencies however, had no pre-poll understanding with the Bodo political parties. Many anticipated for one sided result to Bodo nationalist party, the ABSU backed BSMC in Bodo dominated Constituencies but to the contrast the people gave surprising edge to PDF over BSMC in terms of seat share as well as vote share. In this election, the PDF won one Parliamentary seat from the Kokrajhar Constituency and six seats in the Assembly election. While the BSMC managed to win just three seats. Interestingly, three Bodo candidates of AGP emerged victorious as the party also managed to perform well State wide and emerged the single largest party. As

¹²⁶Khema Sonowal (2013): Ibid. p-128

part of post-poll strategy, the PDF extended support to the AGP government from outside. This however paved opportunity for PDF to which the party took and formed the new interim BEC under the leadership of Mr. Kanakeswar Narzary when the term of Mr. Premsing Brahma was expired. In a noted political development the number of PDF' MLAs went up to seven when Mr. Binod Goyary was elected from Bhawanipur Constituency in the by-election held in 1998 following the death of AGP MLA. On the other end, the BSMC' MLA was reduced to two following the merger of its MLA Mr. Balendra Kr. Mushahary to AGP. Division of the traditional Bodo voters could also be clearly seen between the PDF and BSMC in this election.¹²⁷

In another notable political development, the Lok Sabha was dissolved in its midterm when the previous coalition government failed the floor test. Following this event a fresh election was held on 16th February 1998. Amid the fresh poll declaration, the ABSU was noted summoning all the Bodo organisations and political parties to unite under one banner for the common interest of the Bodos. In response to this call the BSMC was dissolved but the unification move remained immaterialised as the PDF refused to compromise with their party interest and identity as a political party. The party fielded four candidates but failed to retain. While the ABSU backed IND candidate Mr. SK Bwiswmutiary was elected from the Kokrajhar Constituency. Like yester years the creation of Bodoland was the common poll plank of all the major Bodo political parties and to that ends the result of elections in the Bodo dominated Lower Assam are determined by a great degree.¹²⁸ As such the victory of ABSU backed candidate in the election was no surprise to this light. The ABSU backed candidate decided to give a conditional support to the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led BJP government at the behest of Bodoland.¹²⁹ In a noted political development, the ABSU in its 30th Annual Conference declared revival of Bodoland movement in the wake of BJP government's policy to create three new States- Uttaranchal, Vananchal and Chattisgarh. In this backdrop, the ABSU revived the BPAC to launch the mass movement for the creation of separate State Bodoland. In another development, the PDF also withdrew their support to the AGP led government for the cause of Bodoland in the line of ABSU-BPAC. Part of the reason for withdrew their support to ruling AGP was

¹²⁷ Khema Sonowal (2013): Ibid. p-139

¹²⁸ Report on 12th Parliamentary Election 1998, Election Commission of Assam

¹²⁹ Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-141

perhaps motivated by the fact that the party's alliance partner was no longer in the Centre. Another phase of trouble began to brew in the Bodoland movement when the underground BLT outfit continued its reign with terror activities. Amid the tumultuous phase, the BJP- led government arranged tripartite talk with the representatives of various Bodo organisations. But this government short lived again as it failed the floor test.

In a bid to solve the problem of demarcation of the boundary of BAC the AGP government issued a fresh list of 2941 villages against previous list of 2682 villages. Subsequently, the BAC Amendment Bill was passed on 13th May 1999 to that effect. It is to be noted that the State government expected to have solve the demarcation of boundary by conceding few more villages against the original demand of ABSU's 3031 villages however did not satisfy the Bodo leaders instead it provoked the ABSU-BPAC and PDF leaders for stiff opposition. The ABSU-BPAC and BSS criticised this act as "an insult to the sentiment of the people of Bodoland".¹³⁰ Further, these Bodo organisations also demanded for scraping the BAC Accord and reiterated their resolve to intensify the movement. In a significant event, the PDF attended the 31st Annual Convention of ABSU held at Dotoma and pledge to fight together for achieving the common cause. In the mean time, the fresh election for 13th Parliamentary term was also held in 6th October 1999, after the collapsed of coalition government. The PDF and UTNLF contested one seat each with the former contesting the Kokrajhar and the latter Mangaldoi Constituency; while the ABSU contested in two seats Kokrajhar and Mangaldoi Constituencies. The mandate came in favour of ABSU backed IND candidate Mr. SK Bwiswmutiary from Kokrajhar Constituency. The result of this election also turned out to be the hung Parliament.¹³¹ However, the BJP managed to align with smaller parties and formed the NDA government. This time also the lone Bodo MP extended his support to the government with a hope to solve the Bodo problems. This however paved the way for dialogue between the Union Government and the armed outfit BLT after the cease-fire agreement on 10th January 2000.

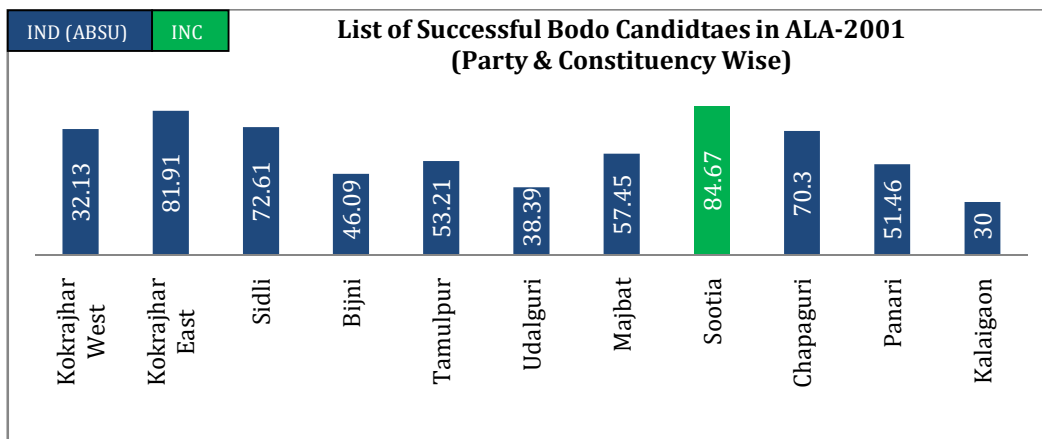
By May 2001, the Assam Assembly election was also held. The AGP-BJP inked pre-poll alliance despite there was a strong opposition within both the parties. The Bodo

¹³⁰Khema Sonowal (2013): Ibid. p-142

¹³¹Report on 13th Parliamentary Election 1999, Election Commission of Assam

organisations ABSU-BPAC also made a poll understanding with the AGP-BJP alliance in view of satisfactory progress of tripartite talk between the Centre-State Government and the BLT. As per poll agreement the AGP-BJP supported the ABSU backed candidates in nine constituencies and in return the ABSU-BPAC also supported these parties in as many as 26 Assemblies with a sizable number of Bodo population. The parties however had a friendly contest in the Gossaigon, Bhawanipur and Kalaigaon constituencies.¹³²

Figure: 3.6 (b) List of Successful Bodo Candidates in Assam Assembly Election-2001 (Party and Constituency Wise)



Source: Assam Election Commission

It is interesting to note that there was no electoral understanding among the Bodo organisations such as PDF and ABSU-BPAC, although they were fighting for the common cause and stand for the unification of the Bodos. Partly the reasons were their confident of winning seats motivated by their narrow interest and to prove their acceptance and leadership among the Bodos. This election saw the total sideline of the PDF, UTNLF and UBNLF as the parties failed to win even a single seat from as many seats as they have contested. The PDF which won as many as six seats in the previous election suffered the most both in terms of vote share and seat share. The failure of AGP-BJP equation in this electoral brought the Congress to power once again. It may be mentioned that the change of power in the State however did not affect the tripartite talk with the BLT as the talk resumed unaffected after the election. After several rounds

¹³²Report on Assam Assembly Election 2001, Election Commission of Assam

of talk the tripartite agreement came into consensus and formally BTC was created on 10th February 2003 by signing MoS between the BLT, Union and State Government.¹³³

3.7 CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it may be stated that the Bodo history of the 19th century was the history of displacement and degradation. The Bodos lost their glory and went into oblivion. Under the alien political-administrative setup, the Bodos suffered systematic land alienation and economic exploitations. Beginning of the 20th century however gave some momentum towards the renaissance in Bodo society. Awareness began to spread among the Bodos about their ethnic identity with the spread of modern education and social reform movement of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma. This further gave a birth to a handful of politically conscious Bodo elite. Emergence of political consciousness gave the Bodos little space though but a significant representation in the politics of colonial Assam. This handful of Bodo elite actively participated in the politics of colonial Assam. Meanwhile, many Bodo organisations were also formed to work for socio-educational development of their society. As such, the Bodo language and literature began to flourish to a considerable extent during that period. By the time the Bodos had already began to articulate the political autonomy when they realised that the preservation of their identity and all round development is not possible without it. In this backdrop, the first generation Bodo leaders formally created the tribal political party to give strength to their demand for separate electorate and reservation of seats in the Assembly as early as 1930s. But, the post-Independence period saw some internal trouble within the tribal political organisation which resulted many tribal leaders to give up their separate political identity and merged with the Congress. But, they did not give up their language and cultural identity and tried to preserve it through the activities of Bodo Sahitya Sabha. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha especially pioneered the growth and development of Bodo language and has a supreme contribution in making the Bodo language as recognised medium of instruction. Chauvinist policy of Assam government and Assamese' designed to impose language over non-Assamese speaking Bodos and other tribes dominated the political scenario of post-Independence Assam. Alienation of ethno-linguistic communities from the mainstream Assamese also came to this wake.

¹³³Khema Sonowal (2013): Op. Cit. p-151

Economic and political developments of Bodos remain periphery. Problems of land alienation, poverty and unemployment and socio-economic deprivation, cultural and political discrimination became increasingly acute.

Emergence of political consciousness among middle-class educated Bodos also resulted to the emergence of several Bodo political parties. Emergence of Tribal League in the early 20th century and the birth of PTCA in 1967 was the example originating from the socio-economic and political deprivation of the tribals. Demand of the Tribal League' one of the oldest socio-political organisation of the Bodos for separate electorate, reservation of jobs and seats in Assam Legislative Council indicate an effort towards socio-economic and political emancipation of the Bodos. Later, in 1970s the development of Bodo politics took a leap under the organisations like PTCA, ABSU and other Tribal organisations. Especially, the PTCA in cooperation with ABSU shouldered the political movement of the Bodos in its initial year. Quest for political autonomy among Bodos manifested loud and clear in 1972 when the Union Government announced the policy of Assam Reorganisation in 1967. As a result, the "Udayachal" a demand for Union Territory' by the PTCA came to dominate the political scenario of Assam. The party mobilised the Bodos and participated in elections with belief that their demand is meaningless without adequate share in political power. But, the party gave up their demand when aligned with the Congress government in the State betraying the sentiments of the Bodos and other tribal groups. Strong resentment within and outside its social base had fragmented the party gradually led towards its political downfall. By the time, many political and social organisations including splinter group of PTCA, the "PTCA- Progressive" came to work in tandem with the influential organisation ABSU and these organisations pioneered the Bodo politics. Autonomy demand continued among the Bodos along with participation in elections. Political participation of Bodos was in fact largely driven around by their autonomy movement. Mention may be made that many political parties like BSMC, UTNLF, UBNLF, PDF were of the same brethren formed for the autonomy movement but had split for the reasons- tussle for leadership, ideological differences, personal political interest and so on. Autonomy movement continued under successive leadership of ABSU got intensified in 1987s culminated with the first Bodo Accord in 1993 popularly known as BAC Accord. It was a model designed to give limited politico-administrative

autonomy to the Bodos within the power of State administration. But this Accord did not operate for long due to many structural-functional strains in the Council setup including the problem of boundary demarcation. Post-Accord saw another round of fresh movement for separate State Bodoland. The succeeding phase was however turned violent with the militant takeover. Emergence of BLT' an arm group in 1996 and NDFB (BrSF) gave a new direction to the Bodo politics. Quest for power and leadership in the Bodo politics and Bodoland movement confronted these rival arm groups. Ideological differences and a bid to outdo the other' these groups involved in the fratricidal killings had turned the political scenario of BTAD region as one of the brutal experience in the political history of Assam.

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