

Ethnic Assertion and Electoral Politics of the Bodo Tribe in Assam

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Abstract: Ethnic assertion in North East India is widely known political phenomenon. Bodos are one of the largest ethnic groups in North East India, who have asserted for Bodo homeland in Assam for a long time. This paper is an attempt to make a critical analysis of various stages of the Bodo assertion, the rise of Bodo identity consciousness, sub-nationalism, evolution of the Bodo politics and simultaneous participation in electoral politics since Colonial era under different organizations and leadership of the time. Beginning from the first generation Bodo leaders in the first half of the 20th century to the post Independence era and beyond. The study is limited and emphasis only the Bodo assertion and their electoral participation within the limited political and territorial framework of BTC/BTR. BTC/BTR comprises of four districts of Assam i.e. Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri. It is administered under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. It enjoys limited jurisdiction of legislative and executive power under the constitutional framework. This study is analytical in nature includes an observation and critical analysis of the secondary sources. The study has also referred the primary sources for electoral data and statistic from various official sources and records.

Key Words: Assertion, Bodo, Ethnic, Election, Politics

1. Introduction:

‘Ethnicity’ or ‘ethnic’ is a fuzzy concept as there appears no consensus in the bulk of literatures (Jayaraman, 2012). Manning writes that ethnicity is the most complicated, volatile and emotionally charged term in the lexicon of social science (Nash, 1989). D.L Horowitz’ used the term ethnicity to mean a common consciousness of shared origins and traditions (Horowitz, 1985). According to Hunter and Phillip Whitten, Ethnicity is a group of people within a large cultural part who recognize themselves as a different organism, that is detached from the rest (Pakem B. , 1990). In that sense, ethnicity is a sense of identity consciousness developed among group of people who shares uniqueness and common origin. In simple words, it is a sense of belongingness among the group that is born out of their social and cultural background.

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North East India is a home of diverse ethnic groups. More than 220 ethnic groups of different dialects live in the region. All these ethnic groups have their own distinct traditions, customs, culture, religion and unique ways of living (Sengupta S. , 2012). The region has diverse ethnic characteristics with multiple numbers of tribal communities. The region is a mosaic of cultural diversity based on ethnicity (Mahanta, 2019).Ethnically the native North-Eastern tribes belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race. They speak languages of different divisions and sub-divisions of the Sino-Tibetan family (Sengupta S. , 2012).

Historically, ethnic assertion in the North East is more than a century year old. Beginning from the Naga assertion which began after the formation of Naga club in 1918 and assertion of all other ethnic groups in the North East to that of Bodo assertions, all are characterized by similar issues of land, political and identity crisis. Theoretical overview of the ethnic assertion in North East can be situated in the “Relative Deprivation” and “Majority Vs Minority” marked by a relationship of domination and subordination among different ethnic tribes. In this context, Kikhi writes that, at the time of independence the pluralism and feeling of integration had not taken a root in the North East. After independence, democracy became a system of dominance by the larger groups, leading to a sense of deprivation among the smaller groups due to economic deprivation, discrimination in employment and political marginalization. Further, the systemic oppression of ethnic-groups caused an existential threat as a distinct socio-cultural community which became a worst form of deprivation (Kikhi, 2020). Dr. U. Bathari also locates the ethnic assertion and conflict in Assam in the exclusion of a history of indigenous people in Assam history. Being marginalized in history, in politics, in social life etc. they start identity struggles. Furthermore, he writes’ History-writing is a state project in India and our past is being deliberately denied (Goswami S. , 2016). Such claim by many scholars whether or not is a debatable. But, the matter of fact remains that many elite non-Tribal academicians are unwilling to acknowledge this aspect of discourse. Tracing the origin of the Bodo assertion, majority of the scholars have located in their ostensible feeling of discrimination, deprivation and injustice experienced by the community (Das B. , 2014). Nevertheless, these ethnic assertions in North East took different forms in time and space from secessionist or sovereign state to that of separate states and Autonomous District Council under the Sixth Schedule (Pakem B. , 1993). These assertions are characterized by both the violent and non-violent methods having enormous impact on socio-economic and political life of the people living in the region.

Among many ethnic groups, the Bodos are the largest. Like other ethnic assertions of North East India, the Bodo assertion and their participation in electoral politics is embedded deep in political aspiration for separate state “Bodoland” which primarily is originated from the underlying issues of land, ethno-cultural identity, political insecurity and socio-economic discrimination by the chauvinist Assamese and lobby of Assam government (Basumatary B. C., 2014). Jogendra K. Das also writes that the Bodo assertion is the product of socio-economic and historical milieu of Assam. His view that the Bodos are the victim of apprehension of high caste Hindu Asamiya nationality of a smaller non-*Asamiya* nationalities living in the State (Das J. K., 1994) is indeed largely and generally shared and acclaimed by the tribal communities in various folklore, oral traditions and literatures also. This paper attempts to make a critical analysis of the Bodo assertion, the rise of Bodo identity consciousness and sub-nationalism, evolution of the Bodo politics and simultaneous participation in electoral politics since Colonial era under different organizations and leadership of the time. Beginning from the first generation Bodo leaders’ in the first half of the 20th century to the post Independence era and beyond. The study emphasis mainly on various stages of Bodo assertion and development in the Bodo politics under different organizations and leaders of the time’ beginning from the Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, the Tribal League (AAPT), PTCA to the emergence of separate state

Bodoland movement under the leadership of ABSU' and the Bodo politics after the BTC Accord.

2. The Bodos

The Bodos are the earliest known settler of Assam. Gaits believed that they had migrated and inhabited in the Brahmaputra valley during the pre-historic era (Gait, 1967). The Bodos are the original descendents of the Mongoloid race. Grierson, an eminent scholar has recognized the Bodos as a sub-section of the Bodo-Naga group, a group of Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family (Grierson, 1967). Ethnographers have identified them anthropologically a Tibeto-Burman in origin. Sonowal has observed that the Bodo tribes comprises of the Bodo linguistic groups which include Koches, Lalung, Rabhas and Sonowals of Brahmaputra Valley, the Dimasas and Barmans of Cachar Hills, the Tripuris of Tripura, the Garos and Hajongs of Meghalaya and Bangladesh, the Meches/Boro of lower Assam, North Bengal and South-East of Nepal (Sonowal, 2013). Today, they are also known as the *Kacharis*. The word *Kachari* as described by S. Endle was designated as a racial connotation for the Bodo linguistic group. The Britishers and the Christian Missionaries, who were the first pioneer of Bodo literatures, used the term *Kachari* as a racial name (Mochari, 1997). However, it was an eminent linguist Brain Hodgson, who was the first to confer the name Bodo to the *Kachari* race. Since then, the Bodo has been used both as a generic and nationality name by the authors of the later period. Many authors therefore are seen in synonymous use of the term Bodo, *Kachari*, Bodo-*Kachari* and so on. The *Bodo* or *Boro* was originally applied only in linguistic context but later on it acquired the ethnic connotation also.

3. Material and Methods

The study covers Bodo assertion and their electoral participation within the limited political and territorial framework of BTC. BTC comprises of four districts of Assam i.e. Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri. It is administered under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. It enjoys limited jurisdiction of legislative and executive power under the constitutional framework. The study is analytical in nature. The study has referred primary sources from various official sources and records. Observation and critical analysis of the secondary data has been the main basis and sources of this study. The sources considered are published books, magazines, journals, news paper etc.

4. Historical Overview of Bodo Identity Politics during Colonial Era

As per documented history of the Bodo politics known today' the genesis date back to the colonial era. Historically, the evolution of Bodo politics has a manifestation in the British colonization when several sovereign rulers of the Eastern *Duars* or *Kachari Duars* along the foothills of Bhutan resisted the British invasion. However, this resistance failed to transform into political revolution due to absence of strong political mobilization and organized public support. As such, these *duars* subverted one after another to the British invasion. Such political events of the time are remnant source of the lost history of political legacy of the Bodos. Nevertheless, in later years, these became the reasons for the birth of political movement among the Bodos.

4.1. Rise of Bodo Identity and Political Renaissance under Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma

Beginning of the 20th century saw a nationwide freedom struggle against the British rule. Under this wave a new dawn began with the growing socio-political consciousness among a handful of enlighten Bodos. This came at a time, when formidable size of the Bodos had already renounced their ancestral traditions and ethnicity by adopting Assamese identity to avoid social discrimination (Narzary B. , 2007). Furthermore, the British policy to open the doors of Assam for outsiders to fill the needs of colonial administration have allowed free flow of people from rest of India and neighboring countries. Such policy was seen as a serious threat to the indigenous Bodo community. Besides, all the high positions in administration were occupied by the outsiders and Assamese elites of non-tribal origin. Like other tribals, the Bodos were denied and deprived of position due to lack of education. This feeling of deprivation among the Tribals fostered the growth of many local organizations (Roy, 1995). Against this backdrop, a handful of Bodos formed several Bodo organizations like Kochari Satra Sanmilani (1919), Kochari Yubo Sanmilani, Boro Satra Sanmilan, Boro Maha Sanmilani in different localities to protect their distinct traditions and identity from external forces (Narzary B. , 2007). Meanwhile, in the first half of the 20th century Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma also launched a socio-religious movement called “Brahma Dharma” movement to reform the Bodo society. Soon this movement took political overtone with simultaneous preaching of political activities. His movement encompassed socio-economic and political emancipation of the Bodos (Swargiary, 1992). These Bodo organizations and leaders worked mainly to arouse identity consciousness among the Bodos through their literary activities, socio- religious reformation and political activities of the time. As a result, the Bodo identity steadily began to articulate with the formation of many Bodo organizations and reached a peak under the zeal leadership of Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma.

By the end of 1920s, the Bodo identity took a definite shape. Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma and his associates in 1927, then submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission demanding a separate electorate for the Bodos, reservation of one seat for the Bodos in the State Assembly, separate census for the Bodos, creation of Bodo regiment, creation of Second Chamber in the Local Board, non-transfer of Goalpara district to Bengal etc. (Memorandum, 1928). Though, not all but some of these demands were conceded. This socio-religious movement of the visionary leader Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma and other Bodo organizations of the time brought about not only a significant political renaissance among the Bodos but also contributed towards the birth of identity assertion in years later.

4.2. Political Development of Bodos Under AAPTL (1933-1947)

Under the compulsion of political needs of the time, the educated Plain Tribals under the leadership of Rupnath Brahma and Bhimbor Deuri founded ‘All Assam Plain Tribal League’ (AAPTL) on 17th April, 1933. It came as a landmark political development in the Bodo history. Birth of this organization gave a significant political platform to the multi-dimensional problems of the Bodos and Plain Tribals of Assam in general. The tribal politics also by and large began to take off and steadily got a momentum towards proper direction (Sonowal, 2013).

In 1937, the AAPTL participated in the first ever General Election of the British Provincial Legislature of Assam. This period also marked a series of political events of instable government during Sadullah Ministry in 1938 and Bordoloi Ministry in 1939. Simultaneously, a powerful uprising across the nation for independence and involvement of several Bodo leaders of the Tribal League gave the Bodo leaders a significant political platform (Narzary C. , 2011). Some prominent leaders of the Plain Tribals submitted a memorandum to the British Cabinet Mission in April 1946 demanding for reservation of 4 (four) seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly, reservation of 16 (Sixteen) seats in the Assam Legislative Council, one representative in the Viceroy’s Executive Council, three

seats in the Central Legislative Assembly, one seat in the Central Legislative Council, separate seats with separate electorate for the tribals, non-inclusion of Assam in Pakistan Zone, provision of safeguarding the Tribals interest and Minority Communities in the post-colonial India and incorporation of at least one or more Tribal member in the proposed Constituent Assembly to the Drafting Committee of Indian Constitution (Karjie B. , 2019). In another political development, the tribal leader Mr. Bhimbor Deori of the AAPTL got a political space in the Congress led Assam government in 1946. Under his leadership and effort, the Assam provincial government amended the Bill '*Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, 1886*' and also successfully enacted the "Tribal Belts and Blocks" in 1947 by incorporating it in Chapter X (Barpujari, 1998). Likewise, in March 1947, another memorandum was submitted by the Tribal League demanding for the creation of Schedule Areas in the plain regions of Assam under the 5th schedule of the Indian Constitution. This demand was rejected by the Congress government. Despite of rejection, the Tribal League in subsequent year was dissolved and merged with the Congress. Followed by this event, the political marginalization of plain tribal also began as they were left at the mercy of the Congress government. Instead of giving a special attention to the tribal problems, the government has started generalizing their grievances with the Assamese mainstream. Such political blunders in later years have caused a serious political detriment to the tribals (Karjie B. , 2019). These events were the remarkable political development in the history of Plain Tribal politics.

5. Bodo Assertion through Electoral Politics in the Post-Colonial Era

The post colonial era witnessed the rise of political consciousness among a handful of Bodo educated. This political consciousness came in the wake of socio-economic and political exploitation of the Bodos by the chauvinist Assamese (Ghosh, 2014). By the time, the Bodos had already developed the feeling of seclusion from the composite Assamese society arousing an idea of political struggle for their survival. In no time, the Bodos also began to ponder around the questions of their survival with distinct ethnic identity. Meanwhile, the separate state movement in the neighboring hills districts began to echoed the entire hills region which was also felt along the plain tribal region (Karjie B. , 2019). Later, the success of Naga and other Hill tribals movement inspired the plain tribals to assert for separate homeland (Sonowal, 2013). The natural urge for separate homeland drive the plain tribals to unite into common political platform.

5.1. Bodo Assertion and Electoral Politics: From 1967-1987

In a historic event, the former Prime Minister' Indira Gandhi declared for reorganization of Assam on 13th January 1967. This declaration gave a hope and zeal to their dream for homeland. In this backdrop, a group of enlighten Bodos founded the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) on 15th February 1967 (Sengupta S. , 2010). The birth of ABSU was landmark development in the history of Bodos. During initial years, the ABSU primarily took the cause for the development of socio-economic, cultural and language of the Bodos (Sonowal, 2013). Nevertheless, the birth of ABSU gave the strength and direction to the Bodo movement. Since, its inception, the political aspiration for separate homeland for the Bodos became their supreme goal.

5.2. Situating ABSU and PTCA in Bodo Assertion and Electoral Politics

In the wake of a declaration for reorganization of Assam, the Bodos and other plain tribals of Assam also founded the "Plain Tribal Council of Assam" (PTCA) on 27th February 1967 under the leadership of Samar Brahma Choudhury, Bir Lachan Doley and Charan Narzary. The birth of PTCA was a cornerstone for plain tribals towards political unification under

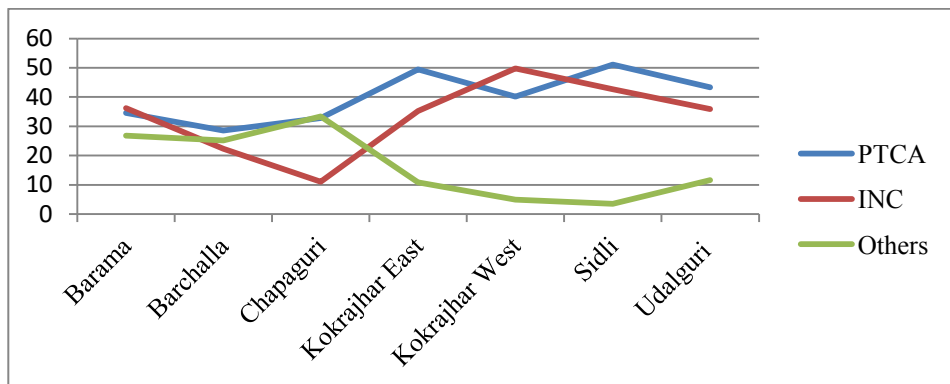
the common political platform (Narzary C. , 2011). It was created to give a strong political base to the plain tribal of Assam.

On 20 May 1967, the PTCA submitted a memorandum to the then President of India, Dr. Zakir Hussain demanding for the creation of ‘Autonomous Region’ for the plain tribals of Assam (Narzary C. , 2011). However, the stubborn of State government to fix the tribal political issues have caused violence in the plain tribal region of Assam. Amid, violence and election, the ABSU and PTCA together boycotted the Parliamentary election of 1968 in protest against stubbornness of State government to draw the attention of the Union Government. By the time, the tribal leaders are already convinced that their political struggle is meaningless unless they do not share adequate power in the State. In this wake, the PTCA participated in the Assembly election of 1972 State Assembly and Mr. Charan Narzary triumph the Kokrajhar West Constituency (Moshshary, 1993). This victory gave a tremendous zeal among the PTCA members and the Bodo community at large. By January 1973, the PTCA switched their political demand to ‘*Udayachal*’ the movement for “Union Territory” from “Autonomous Region”. At the same time, the Roman script movement of the *Bodo Sahitya Sabha* (BSS) also began to float in the region. This also brawl the political climate in the Bodo dominated regions. This movement took a violent route when the government tried to suppress their demand (Pegu, 2004). Later, the Roman script movement of the Bodos ended with an agreement accepting Devanagri script. But, the question is “why the Bodos, a largest ethnic group in North East were denied and why they had to assert and sacrifices life in a country where a mother tongue is considered entitlement for every citizen”? Part of the reason could be traced in non-inclusion of the tribal languages in the Schedule of the Constitution. In addition, the policies of the State government remained largely discriminatory and coercive of non-tribal Assamese language upon tribals. Moreover, the state government’s brutal suppression of the Roman Script movement with the help of police, tactical support of the AASU and *Asamiya* press were a design to decimate the Bodo language. Again, when Bodo language was accepted at primary and secondary schools, these schools were ill-equipped, under-staffed, the government’s stubborn attitude and a discrimination face by these schools from bureaucratic red tape have crippled them educationally. Because of discriminatory State policies and a little opportunity for the Bodos without *Asamiya* knowledge, a large number of them have embrace *Asamiya* identity by giving up their original language and identity. A sizeable numbers of them have already become completely *Assamised* (Hussain, 1993). In this connection, Sonwalkar writes that the AGP government, a party that was born from Assamese Nationalism invariably insisted on compulsory *Asamiya* knowledge as an essential qualification for government services was strongly resented by the Bodo leaders. (Sonwalkar, 1989). These led the educated Tribals felt left out in the cold and they looked it as a design to deprive the tribals from administrative services in order to monopolized administrative power (Gohain, 1988). Hussain observes that “the Bodos started reviving their dormant language from slumber and advancing it as their ethnic symbol to assert their rights in their historical homeland through political mobilization (Hussain, 1993). The Assamese nationalist stubbornness to learn a lesson from the past blunders that have lost them hill tribes due to their chauvinistic attitude and coercive policies was adamantly and arrogantly repeated against the will of plain tribals. These tribals have been conscious about their sub-nationality and are vocally assertive whenever policies threatening to their interest and existence are forced upon them. As a result, when a relatively powerful and advanced *Asamiyas* started to assert their group identity, it has also given birth to the new social movements among the weaker national minorities.

In 1975, the political turmoil at national disturbed the political environment across the nation. Under the situation of National Emergency the *Udayachal* demand of PTCA apparently began to shrink. As soon as the National Emergency ceased the Lok Sabha Election was also held in 1977. This election gave a landmark victory to Mr. Charan

Narzary of PTCA from Kokrajhar (ST) Constituency (Chaube, 1985). This win gave a new hope and zeal among the Bodos amid political instability across the country after National Emergency.

Figure 5.2: Performances of PTCA in ALA- 1978 (Constituency Wise)



Source: Election Commission of India

In a year later, the State Assembly election was also held in 1978. The victory of PTCA in the Parliamentary Election raised a high expectation and good result in the Assembly Election also. But, in a not so impressive result, the party stood with a modest victory in just four seats (Election Commission of India, 1978). In a surprising event, the Janata Party formed a coalition government with the PTCA on certain agreements like formation of autonomous administrative region in the North Bank of Brahmaputra and enforcement of a provision of Chapter-X “Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act” for the South Bank of tribals. But unfortunately, this government also dissolved very soon before these agreements could be implemented. This political instability in the state also dismantled their separate state movement (Narzary B. B., 2004). Moreover, immediately after pairing with the government in State an internal rift also began to simmer within and outside the PTCA on the ground that it has substituted the Union Territory demand with the earlier demand for Autonomous Region without the consent of their ally organizations’ ABSU in particular. This political demotion did not go well among several well wishers of the PTCA. Amid, criticism and counter-criticism within and outside PTCA for its double standard policy, the ABSU withdrew support from the PTCA (Sonowal, 2013). Further, a dismay also began to grew within the party for its alliances with the Janata and Congress-I government between 1978 and 1982 due to overlooking a genuine political aspirations of the Plains Tribes (Choudhury, 2015).

Consequently, the resented section of young tribal supporters of the PTCA parted away and formed a new political party called PTCA (P) on 22nd May, 1979 under the leadership of Binoy Khungur Basumatary. On 8th July 1980, the PTCA (P) submitted a memorandum to the then PM Indira Gandhi demanding a Union Territory called ‘Mishing-Bodoland’ (Roy, 1995). In response, a tripartite talk was held on 28th August 1980 between the delegates of the Central government, the State government and the Tribal leaders without any fruitful result. Rather, a sharp contrast simmered between the PTCA and PTCA (P) over the issue of separate state. These internal differences within the party and between the tribal leaders sharply affected the political scenario of the plain tribals (Memorandum, 1985). These internal rifts pushed the PTCA towards political eroding. This became quite visible in the elections as they began to lose popularity and ground among the plain tribals. As a matter of fact, in 1983 elections, the PTCA manage to grab only 3 seats in 21 seats contested (Election Commission of India, 1983). In a notable event, the ABSU made a serious attempt to reunify the PTCA and PTCA (P) before a new party called UNLFT was formed

under the leadership of Binoy Kungur Basumatary in 1984 by dissolving the PTCA (P) in the ABSU convention held at Harisinga (Brahma N. , 2008). Meanwhile, in 1985 elections also' the Udayachal remained as main election manifesto of PTCA in which they retained only 3 seats in 28 seats contested in State Assembly with one MP in Lok Sabha (Election Commission of India, 1985). On the other end, like PTCA' the newly formed UNLFT also suffered a split into factions UTNLF and UBNLF soon after its creation under certain circumstances. The Bodo assertion of the time couldn't bear any fruit due to disunity, personal interest, adamant and arrogant nature of the Bodo leaders to put aside political rivalry for community interest.

Till 1967, the Bodo politics remained more or less dormant. Neither the BSS nor the ABSU were very active politically though demand for political autonomy was first voiced by the ABSU in 1967. It was against this backdrop, the PTCA was created to assume a pioneering role in their political struggles. However, due to internal conflicts within the party, the government also bothered least to solve the Bodo issues. Gradually, this party subsided and reduced to extinct towards the 1990s due to its political blunders and opportunist politics. Nevertheless, the PTCA in its couple of decade long span in politics was able to leave a significant footprint in the political history of the plain tribals and Bodos in particular.

6. Bodo Assertion and Electoral Politics: Unrest to Accords (1987-2003)

Onwards 1987, the Bodo movement ushered the beginning of new era in Bodo politics. After the failure of PTCA and other organizations to achieve their dream for Union Territory, the ABSU began to pioneer the legacy of their demand. Under the young visionary leader Bodofa UN Brahma, the Bodo assertion got intensive strength. Under ABSU, the Bodos became a strong political force. In course of time, their assertion also percolated into the realm of state politics. This event took the history of Bodo politics and their statehood movement to a new paradigm (Basumatary B. , 2006). Under the stalwart and dynamic leadership of Bodofa UN Brahma, the ABSU began a massive political mobilization among the Bodos to aware about their existence with dignity, liberty and political rights. These campaigns by and large fascinated common Bodos and awaken them politically (Narzary B. , 2007). This movement has a far-reaching implication in the electoral politics of the state.

In a historic event of 1991 State Assembly election, the Bodo politics took off by leap and bound when under the leadership of ABSU as many as 10 Boro MLAs from BPAC were elected from the Bodo Belts (Basumatary B. , 2006). In the mean time, the Congress party formed the government under the leadership of Hiteswar Saikia. After election, the Bodo MLAs formed a legislative party under the leadership of Parameswar Brahma (Phukon, 1993). While, the PTCA was reduced to dust as it suffered a humiliating defeat. By the time, the ABSU had already garnered sympathy of common Bodos and became a dominant force having wide-spread support base in the Bodo belts. In contrast, the PTCA alienated itself from the Bodos due to its blunders.

On the other end, the ABSU-BPAC' was holding several rounds of tripartite talks with the Union & State government to address the long standing Bodo problems. Amid this political development, the Bodos leaned towards ABSU-BPAC because they saw a ray of hope under their leadership. Towards, the end of a series of dialogue the historic BAC agreement was signed between the ABSU-BPAC and the State government on 20th February 1993 (Basumatary B. , 2006). This became a benchmark in the history of Bodo politics. This landmark development was the first major political break-through in their quest for separate state Bodoland. It was the result of growing self-consciousness among the Bodos who were pondering around the questions of identity crisis and quest for political security. These political issues of the Bodos assumed not only the centre-stage of Bodo politics but under

the patronization of ABSU it came as a unifying force among the Bodos in their political endeavor.

6.1 Post BAC: Bodo Assertion and Turbulent Phase in Bodo Politics

After the BAC Accord, the ABSU-BPAC leaders formed the Bodo Peoples' Party (BPP) to administer the BAC. The creation of BAC was anticipated with high expectation to bring a development in the socio-cultural, political and economic life of the Bodos. It was also assumed to halt the prevalence of violent movement of ABSU in the Bodo belts (Basumatary B. , 2006). Immediately, after the Bodo Accord, the Executive Council was formed comprising of 18 members under the leadership of SK Bwiswmutiary and from amongst the leaders of the Bodo movement. As per agreement, the Council was entrusted with autonomy over 38 subjects without demarcation of boundary. Meanwhile, by notification the Assam government declared the inclusion of 2570 villages excluding some 515 villages and 10 Kms belt border of Bhutan in BAC area. This met a sharp criticism for allegedly non-fulfillment of MoS. This policy of government compelled the Bodo leaders to think otherwise of hatching conspiracy to dismantle their unity through divisive politics (Sonowal, 2013). Amid this political tussle, SK Bwiswmutiary and his associates resigned from the Chief Executive Councilor in protest against non-fulfillment of Accord. But, Mr. Premshing Brahma exploited this opportunity and assumed the new Chief Executive Councilor of BAC. This led the polarization of Bodoland Peoples Party (BPP) – into BPP (Sansuma wing) and BPP (Premshing wing) (Basumatary B. , 2006). While, the former wing vowed towards ABSU and the later wing towards ruling Congress.

In the mean time, the AGP led coalition government came to power in 1996. The new course also began to manifest not only in the scenario of state politics but in the Bodo politics also. Amid violent movement and pervading political tussle over ideological differences among the Bodo leaders, several political parties under different name and leadership of the time also came into force. In particular, the People's Democratic Front (PDF) was founded by Garla Batha Basumatary on 24th March 1996. Simultaneously, S.K Bwiswmutiary also formed Bodoland Statehood Movement Council (BSMC) on 28th March 1996. The former was backed by NDFB and ABSU supported the later (Assam Tribune, 1996). Interestingly, these two rival parties fought in 1996 election with similar election manifesto "*Separate Homeland (Bodoland)*". But, their political rivalry turned sore, when the two parties engaged in propaganda war which later escalated into group confrontation. In a major political development, the PDF emerged a front runner Bodo political party with 8 MLAs and 1 MP in this election; while, BSMC managed to retain only 2 Assembly seats. Following the pre-poll alliance with AGP, the PDF became a ruling partner in Mahanta led state government. After the death of Chief Premshing Brahma, Mr. Kanakeswar Narzary of PDF took the Chief Executive Councilor of BAC in June 1996. The AGP-PDF coalition government in the state gave a new hope among the Bodos towards solution of the boundary and other issues of BAC. In contrast, the party in spite of a ruling partner kept the BAC problem unaddressed. Over and above, the non-satisfactory also engulf among ABSU over the working of BAC. Consequently, the ABSU took a bold decision under the leadership of Mr. Swmbla Basumatary to denounce the Accord itself and declared to retreat the Bodoland movement (Sonowal, 2013). By the time, a section of Bodos had already cultivated the radical ideas due to indifferent attitude of the government towards Bodo problem which later took a violent movement.

The period of 1996 is well known for the political turbulent. In significant development the Bodoland Liberation Tiger (BLT) was formed in 1996 under the leadership of Chilagang Basumatary. This militant outfit was formed by some Bodo youths to assist the ABSU in their movement (Brahma B. K., 2008). The ABSU and BLT started afresh Bodoland assertion together in the wake of an announcement of the reorganization of three new states viz. Uttaranchal, Vananchal and Chattisgarh during the BJP led coalition government at the Centre. This declaration motivated the Bodos to intensify their agitation for the Bodoland.

In this backdrop, the ABSU in their annual conference of 1998 declared the revival of BPAC. ABSU urged all other Bodo organizations and political parties for the political unification during 12th Lok Sabha election of 1998 for the greater interest of the Bodos. However, this call by the ABSU failed to fascinate the Bodo political parties due to their party interest and individual interest (Narzary M. , 2019). As such many Bodo political parties of the time in tune of their party interest over and above contested the Lok Sabha election by different party name but with same manifesto- '*Separate State of Bodoland*'. In this election, the ABSU backed candidate SK Bwiswmutiary emerged victor from the Kokrajhar Constituency (Sonowal, 2013).

By the mid 1990s, both the ABSU and BLT were fully convinced that using only soft techniques alone wouldn't help them to achieve their supreme political aspiration for separate state Bodoland. So, they resorted to aggressive path to make a movement more assertive. To this view, the former engaged in over-ground movement; while, the later resorted to underground movement engaging in violent activities. This violent movement and political unrest across the Bodo belts have created havocs and engulfed the region with predominantly chaotic environment (Brahma B. K., 2008). The government in view to suppress the rebellion group also dealt with an iron fist policy. This took the situation to boil the region when the 'action and counter-action' between the rebel group and state machinery became an order of the everyday. During this period, the state machinery was given free hand to counter-suppress the rebellion. In the name of raid many innocent Bodo youths suffered brutal torture, fake encounter, secret killing, rape, destruction of properties and other forms of human rights violation in the hand of state machinery (Swargiary, 1992). Notably, the Bodo assertion till late 1980s was moderate and non-violent. The Gohpur genocide of the Bodos in 1989 that was perpetrated by the Chauvinist Assamese with the help of Assam Police Force left more than 500 Bodos killed and lakhs displaced (Brahma R.). A sinister committed by the Assam police at Bhumka village of Kokrajhar Districts in 1988, where nine (9) Bodo girls and women were gang-raped (India Today, 1989). Again, the uses of coercive and brutal repression over democratic protesters in the name of raid to derail the movement have also turned the Bodos violent.

Another, awful fratricidal war triggered between the BLT and NDFB' took an unprecedented tragic in the Bodo politics. During the course of Bodoland assertion, amid political struggles to establish supremacy over the others in the Bodo belts, an ideological dichotomy took the centre-stage of their clash (Basumatary B. , 2007). Precisely, the former stood for the formation of a separate state Bodoland within the Union, while the later stood for the creation of a sovereign state out of Indian Territory. This ideological conflict polarized the Bodos not only in the line of party basis- the ABSU and NDFB supporters' but it also split the Bodos in the line of geo-psychological war between the North-South divisive politics. The engaged in fratricidal killings for several years broke their social and political bonding. During their arms struggle the region continued to burn and the commoners had to suffer the brutality of an arm struggle. The prominent Bodo leaders like Mr. Swmbla Basumatary, the President of ABSU (Basumatary J. , 2014), Mr. Bineswar Brahma, the President of Bodo Sathya Sabha (BSS) (Gogoi, 2001), and Mr. Daoharu Garlabata Basumatary, the former ABSU President (Narzary H. , 2014) are some of the victims of fratricidal killing who were assassinated by the suspected NDFB militant.

In the late 1990s, amid fratricidal war and assertion, the PDF in a significant move withdrew their support from AGP government and extended support to the Bodoland movement (Sonowal, 2013). Far from state, the BJP led NDA government came to power at the Centre in 1998 amid the situation of uncertainty and instability. However, this government again collapsed in the first quarter of 1999 but managed to regain power in the 13th General Election convened in the last quarter of the same year (Election Commission of Assam, 1999). While the demand for holding tripartite talks at the highest political level by several Bodo organizations by the time had already began to echo in the entire region. In

wake of such political development, the State government by an ordinance issued a fresh notification on April 1999 ordering the inclusion of additional villages in the BAC to appease the Bodo leaders. This offer however was turned down by the Bodo organizations. Instead, the ABSU-BPAC demanded to scrap the BAC Accord. Meanwhile, SK Bwiswmutiary' a lone Bodo MP extended support to NDA government at the Centre. In subsequent years, the NDA government opened the floor for peace process with the BLT (Sonowal, 2013). The peace process culminated in the historic tripartite agreement called BTC Accord on 10 February 2003 after several rounds of talks.

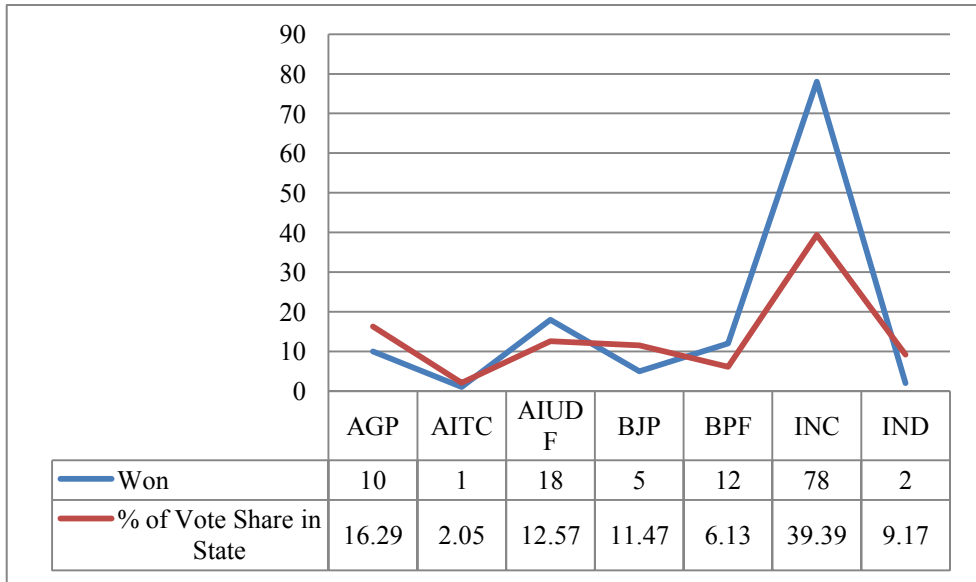
6.2 Post BTC Accord: Trend and Twist in Bodo Assertion and Electoral Politics

The creation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in 2003 comprising of four districts viz. Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri came as a landmark political development in the history of Bodo movement. It was created in the wake of Bodoland movement to give political autonomy to the Bodos through a system of self-governing administration with limited executive and legislative power under the provision of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India (MoS, BTC Accord, 2003). This marked the end of an arm struggle of BLT and paved the way for restoring peace and normalcy in the region.

Soon, the former BLT Chief Hagrama Mohilary led 12 members interim Executive Council was constituted to administer the BTC in 2003. In the wake of a declaration of the first Council election on 2005, the members of Ex- BLT cadres and ABSU together formed a new political party- the Bodoland Peoples' Progressive Front (BPPF) on 12th April 2005 (Daimary, 2015). The pre-poll period soon caught in a dilemma of disagreement within the BPPF over the leadership. This resulted into massive violence between the Hagrama supporters and the Rabiram supporters. After the election, amid violence and disagreement the former BLT Chief Hagrama Mohilary led BPPF formed the Council government. The internal differences and confrontation during election ripped the BPPF into BPPF (H) which later was renamed as Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF) while the BPPF (R) faction retained the erstwhile name BPPF (Brahma N. , 2008). The post election saw the rise of BPF in BTAD region as a dominant regional political party under the leadership of Chief Hagrama Mahilary. In a mean time, the 2006 Assam Legislative Assembly election ended with none of the party succeeding to secure majority to form a government. In this election, the BPF stood with overwhelming figures of 11 MLAs. The failure of the major political parties to secure majority led to prevail a state of hung Assembly. In such a state, the BPF extended its support to Congress and vitally played a King maker in a Congress led coalition government (Goswami S. , 2012). This ensured the BPF with three important Cabinet Ministerial berth in the Tarun Gogoi led Congress government.

After a promising start in the first Council election, the BPF continued their political dominance in the region. After the first Council election victory, the BPF emerged a leading political force in the Bodo belt. By and large, this party continued to inherit public sympathy originating from the Bodo movement. The second Council Election of 2010 tempted more number of participation of political parties including national and regional parties (Basumatary S. , 2018). The session campaigner BPF and its rival BPPF set the political atmosphere tensed with a moderate violence. In this election, the BPF contested in all the constituencies. Out of all, the party won 31 seats and convincingly formed the government in BTC. However, the BPPF failed to draw a mass support as it was assumed during pre-poll. In this election, the INC also contested in 23 seats of which it managed to win just 3 seats. (Karjie B. K., 2020). This election marked the victory of Independent Candidates as many as four seats and UDPF one seat.

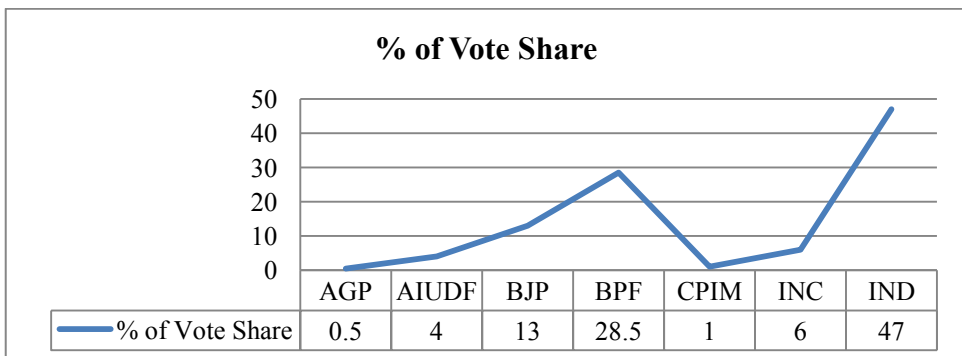
Figure 6.2 (a): Assam Assembly Election- 2011 (Performance of each Party)



Source: Election Commission of India

In 2011 Assembly election the Congress again came to power but this time with an absolute majority. The party formed a coalition Government in the state with BPF as per pre-poll agreement despite being majority. In this election, the Congress won overwhelming 78 seats; while its ally BPF bagged 12 seats and given one Cabinet berth in the Ministry (Brahma K. K., 2019). However, in the later part of their terms the internal differences sparked within the Congress which led to split into factions- one led by Chief Minister Turun Gogoi and other led by the Cabinet Minister Hemanta Biswa Sharma. Amid this political war within Congress, the BPF got sidelined and broke away from the Congress government in later year. Following this fallout within the Congress, the Hemanta led Congress joined BJP. Seemingly, this event broke the backbone of the Congress as it began to doom in Assam (Basumatary S. , 2018). As a manifestation, the BJP got a landslide victory in the 2014 Lok Sabha in Assam. This landmark political development took the entire nation by surprise. It changed the course of political scenario of entire nation including Assam. In the political history of Assam, the BJP for the first time triumph 7 seats of 14 Parliamentary seats. The BJP rode to power at the Centre under the Modi wave also made their presence felt for the first time in the State (Saikia S. , 2015). Though, BJP in the state politics had already made its presence felt by 7 seats triumph yet its social base and influence in BTAD region was quite little.

Figure 6.2 (b): BTAD Election 2015 (% of vote share)

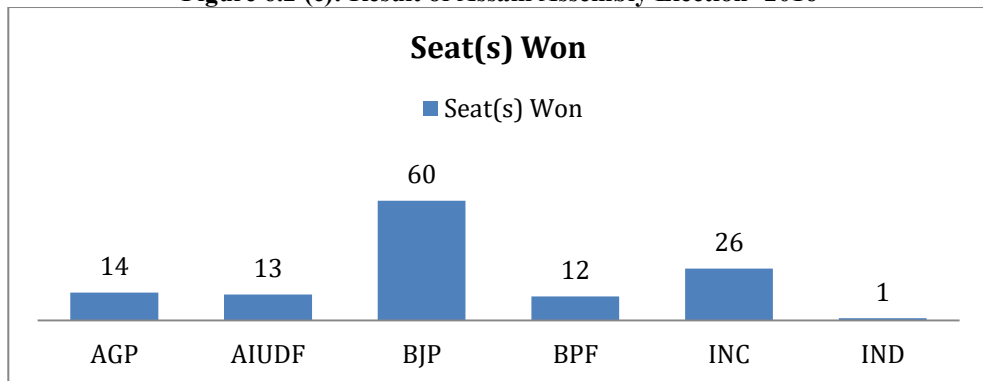


Source: Election Commission of India

ABSU in contrast has been an influential student organisation. It has been quite active in politics of BTAD region over the years now through an indirect involvement. It enjoys a support of large social base among Bodo voters in particular. Notably, the course of electoral politics in BTAD has seen changes in recent times with the growing influences of the ABSU over the sizeable Bodo population. ABSU played a pioneering role in the emergence of strong political opponent “PCDR” in the 2015 Council Election. This Council Election brought almost a political earth quake in BPF camp. In this Council Election, the ruling BPF was caught in a dilemma of political dwindling. Its winning figure in this election has fallen to 20 seats, fell one short of magic figures. However, the party managed to form the government for the third consecutive terms with the supports of Independent candidates (Karjie B. K., 2020). In particular, the PCDR’ an umbrella organisation backed by the ABSU and NDFB (P) emerged a strong force in the region. This party advanced its political venture by mobilizing the Bodo people against the mis-governance of ruling BPF and through Bodoland Movement. This party successfully mobilized the Bodos by and large in Baksa and Chirang districts. The party won as many as 7 seats from these districts (Bodoland Territorial Council Election 2015). But, more or less the party’s social base remained limited to the Bodo voters.

On the other end, the politics of Bodo and non-Bodo already had culminated towards fragmentation in the socio-politics of the region into ethnic line. To this end, the non-Boro organization like Sanmilita Jangosthiya Aikya Mancha, (SJAM) Ana-Boro Suraksha Samiti was originated against the Bodos in the region. While the support base of AIUDF remain confined to the pocket areas dominated by the Muslims population. On the other hand, the divisive politics of SJAM and Ana- Boro Suraksa Samiti turned the non-Boro voters against the BPF. Remarkably, SJAM and AIUDF fairly do well in this election with 3 seats and 4 seats winning respectively; while Ana-Boro Suraksha Samiti and BJP won 1 seat each (Zahan, 2015).

Figure 6.2 (c): Result of Assam Assembly Election- 2016



Source: Election Commission of India

A remarkable change that took place in the politics of Assam after the 2014 Lok Sabha Election’ seemingly has set a solid foundation for the BJP to materialize their political ambition of expansion in the state. In view to realize their political ambition the BJP forged a pre-poll alliance with the influential regional party’ the AGP and BPF in 2016 State Assembly election. This ally trio came out with landslide victory and formed a coalition government in the State. It may be mentioned that the political earthquake occurred within the Congress, when the Himanta Biswa Sharma walked out of the Congress and merged with BJP. This political event not only broke the party internally within but also alienated the Congress from its traditional social bases. Amid, this political chaos and leadership crisis within, the party also met with serious public allegations like anti-incumbency and mis-governance. Altogether, these have created an anti-Congress political atmosphere in

the State. Cashing in for Gujarat model of development, promised to address the ongoing issue of illegal immigration and protections of “Jati (Community), Mati (Home) and Bheti (Hearth)” the BJP came to power (Saikia S. , 2015). This event took the Congress almost a total collapse in Assam. The BJP in their historic win bagged 60 seats while their alliance partner’ the BPF and AGP won 12 and 14 seats respectively. The three senior BPF MLAs got the Cabinet Ministers in C.M Sarbananda Sonowal led alliance government (Brahma K. K., 2019).

6.3 Ethnic Conflicts and Contentious Politics: Bodo Vs Others and Electoral Impacts

BTR is fragile to ethnic conflicts. Over the years, recurring ethnic conflicts in the region has been the most contentious social and political issues. Sanjay Hazarika observes that almost all the ethnic groups have active insurgent groups and they assert their aspirations through insurgencies. Both legal and illegal arms dominate the lives in the region. The politicians, administrators, students’ organizations and the State police are also complicit with the armed groups. Ethnic relation between competing groups has been fragile with clashes over space and identity (Hazarika, 2014). Misra further observes that “when insurgent groups of the Bodo was at its peak, efforts by non-Bodos to organize themselves did not meet with much success. But, once the insurgency started ebbing with ceasefire, the non-Bodo groups become courage to organize themselves under various non-Bodo organizations. In particular, the All Bodoland Minority Students Union (ABMSU) representing the Muslim settlers has an influential presence (Misra, 2014). Clashes and contest between the Bodos and non-Bodos for political space in the region mainly originates from the land.

Land rights and control has been a central for survival of tribals. Tribal politics is indeed largely motivated by the legitimate rights of ownership of Land and Resources. Historically, the tribals are rightfully the heritor of this land and no tribals were landless. But, today lakhs of tribals have become landless because of the government’s failure to protect the tribal land. As a matter of fact, the Kokrajhar district which is the Bodo dominated area has witnessed the highest decadal growth rate of 76.75% against 53.25% in Assam during 1971- 1991. Irrespective of whether it was a result of migration or illegal immigration, its impact was clear: it results a land alienation of the Bodos in clear violation of Chapter-X (Asian Centre for Human Rights , 2012). The Chapter- X of Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, 1886 though guarantees the protection of tribal land, but it was never enforced by the government ever since it was enacted. Section 164 B of Chapter-X, the provision of punishment for both the transferor and transferee of tribal land was never been imposed against defaulters by the government (Das J. N., 2007). Leading experts on Tribals consider the land as most valuable asset for Tribals in their life. Verrier Elwin in his “A Philosophy for NEFA (1949) observed” the first cause of tribals depression was the loss of their land and forests. Ergo also argue that the attitude of any government towards tribal development can best be accessed through its attitude towards tribal land (Sharma, 2001). In contrary, the illegal settlement, land grabbing and illegal land transfer of Tribal to non-Tribal continued under the nose of administration with the nexus of corrupt officials (Bhattacharya, 2001). The recent findings of **Brahma Committee** (Former Chief Election Commissioner of India) report also reveals that lakhs of acres of Tribal lands has been encroached by the doubtful citizens. The Committee has recommended strict implementation of the land laws in letter and spirit (Baruah, Bhattacharyya, Dutta, & Borpatragohain, 2017). Over and above, the non-implementation of constitutional provisions, continuing illegal migration and encroachment of protected tribal land, absence of concrete policies and stubborn attitudes of the State government to implement the existing constitutional provisions and land laws have already pushed the tribals into

periphery in their own ancestral land. Land has been the centre of Bodo assertion, conflict and contentious politics. The origin of conflict in BTR could be understand through the lens of two fold narratives-

Firstly, the Tribal group argues that they have already become marginalized in their own land. They are already outnumbered by the non-Tribals due to continuous migrations and non-implementation of Chapter-X. Therefore, the Bodos justifying “Chapter-X” has been demanding for its implementation in letter and spirit and to expel all the illegal settlers. A study report on Bodo- Muslim conflict of 2012 also claims that the violence spurt, when the forest officials who happen to be former BLT cadre from Bodo tribe removed the signboard illegally setup by Muslim in the forest land for building Mosque in Bedlangmari area (Asian Centre for Human Rights , 2012).

However, before this incident the communal tendencies had already taken a shape when Adivashi militants shot two Muslims labourers on 30th June 2012. On 6th July 2012, another incident of indiscriminate firing was perpetrated by the KLO terrorist group in Muslimpara killing two Muslims youth. Despite of a clearance from the Union Home Minister’s in Rajya Sabha, the Muslims blamed the Bodos. On 7th July 2012, the ABMSU blamed the Bodos for dispute over *Idgah* (signboard) in forest land along with spreading a rumor of eviction drive and killing of Muslims youth. The ABMSU took out protest and indulged in violent activities. On 19th July 2012, two student leaders of ABMSU and AAMSU, Mahibul Haque Ratul and Md. Abu Siddique were shot by unidentified miscreants in Kokrajhar (Asian Centre for Human Rights , 2012). As per, the CBI investigation report, Mohibul Islam alias Ratul, a suspended police constable was behind this conspiracy (TheTimesofIndia, 2014). On 20th July 2012, four Bodo youths returning from Batipara village towards Kokrajhar, confronted with Muslims mob were snatched from police custody and lynched. Thereafter, the conflict turned into full-fledge riots (Asian Centre for Human Rights , 2012).

Secondly, the counter narrative of non-tribal is built upon the question of constitutionality of the “Chapter-X” that stand against the spirit of *Right to Equality* of the Constitution and discriminatory towards non-tribal. In addition, the creation of BTC under Sixth Schedule also became the reason for resentment among the non-Bodos and continuous demand for scraping it. The reservation policy of 30 seats for tribals, 5 seats for non-tribals and 5 seats for open category comprising most parts of Tribal Belt and Block area have become a source of apprehension and resentment among various ethnic groups.

Asian Centre for Human Rights, 2012 report suggest that “the recurring conflicts between the Bodos and other communities are the results of a creation of particular ethnic homeland without ensuring sufficient Constitutional rights to other communities living in the region. All ethnic groups virtually live on edges. Even a small clash between individuals of different ethnic groups has a potential to turn into communal riot (Asian Centre for Human Rights , 2012). Such opposing narratives are the result of conflicting interest between the Bodos and Non-Bodos. Also, it is the reason for ethnic cleavage and recurring ethnic conflict in the region. The endless cycle of ethnic conflicts has affected the electoral politics of the region greatly. Beginning from the Bodo-Muslims conflicts of 1993 and 1994, Bodo-Adivashi conflicts of 1996 and 1998 to that of 2008 and 2012 Bodo-Muslim conflicts; the political scenario of the region has been dominated mostly by an uncertainty and tensed situation (TheTribune, 2014). However, the major affect of conflicts in the elections manifested after the 2012 Bodo-Muslims clash and the 2014 Bodo-Adivashi massacre, when the Bodo candidate lost the 2014 Lok Sabha elections from the Kokrajhar ST Constituency to the non-Bodo supported candidate. Onwards, the 2015 BTC elections have also witnessed the rise of several non-Bodo parties and candidates in the elections. In particular, the AIUDF and Ona-Boro Suraksa Samiti were success in mobilizing the non-Bodo voters against the Bodos in communal lines. As a result, the elections outcome in the region has began to see changing trend towards Bodo and non-Bodo contest.

Summary and Conclusion

From the above discussions, it can be summarized that the Bodos are one of the dominant social groups. Historically, they owned political space and control over this region for several centuries. But later, due to constant external invasion and war they become scattered and reduced to political marginalization. Further, the British invasion in Assam diminished the political significance of the Bodos. In addition, the un-ceased migration since colonial era which continued even after several decades of Independence have compelled the Bodos to struggle for their land and political rights for safeguarding their distinct ethnic identity, culture and language.

The first generation Bodo leaders of colonial era, who began a movement for social reform also aided in political awakening. This social renaissance in the Bodo society steadily transitioned into political renaissance under the leadership of the first generation Bodo leaders like Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, Rupnath Brahma and Bhimbor Deuri. The creation of 'All Assam Plain Tribal League' (AAPTLL) was the first of a kind that was directed to give the issues of the Bodos a political platform. Under their effort, the Bodos got political representation in the British India Government. Another, landmark achievement of the time was the creation of "Tribal Belt and Blocks" in the plain region of Assam. These achievements of the time were the fruits of electoral participation of the plain tribals.

Similarly, during post-independence era, the PTCA was created to pioneer the political interest of the plain tribals. This Tribal political party asserted for creation of Union Territory' called *Udayachal*. This party dominated the tribal politics in elections for long years. But later, the party lost its political base among tribals due to its opportunist politics. The Bodo politics, during this period remained fractured and dormant due to turbulent and instability in national and state politics. This party carried the legacy of Bodo politics until the ABSU steered the Bodo assertion. However, the Bodo assertion and electoral politics continued its simultaneous operation in space and time under different organizations and leaderships.

In 1987, the Bodo assertion and politics took a new direction under the leadership of Bodofa UN Brahma, when ABSU pioneered the assertion for Bodoland. At the same time, the Bodo politics also peak a new height with the victory of many Bodo candidates. As a result, the first Bodo Accord, BAC was created in 1993. However, this administrative model failed to fulfill the aspiration of the Bodos. Soon, the unsatisfactory working of the Council led to renounce the BAC Accord and the assertion for homeland started afresh. The ABSU continued their over-ground movement but when the arms group BLT spearheaded the movement, it took a violent course. The movement took violent when the arms group "BLT and NDFB" engaged in ugly fratricidal killings due to their competition for hegemony over the region and ideological differences.

By the first quarter of 2003, the BLT rebel groups came into tripartite agreement with the State and Central Government. As a result, the BTC was created by amending the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. Under the MoS, the BTC was entrusted with certain amount of executive and legislative power. With that a new hope for peace and development among the Bodos and to overall region also fostered. Thus, the creation of BTC came as a landmark achievement of Bodo assertion. After the creation of BTC, the Bodo politics have also seen steady moving with the mainstream politics in recent times. The BTC elections have started tempting several national and regional political parties. In its several elections, the BTC has witnessed the increasing numbers of participation of political parties from different contesting social groups. The BPF, once a dominant party is now declined has been facing a stiff competition from the PCDR (now UPPL), BJP, AIUDF, SJAM and Ana- Boro Suraksa Samiti. The electoral politics in BTC is highly motivated and affected by the Bodo assertion. Today, the Bodo politics has become very complex and uncertain with the increasing competition between contested ethnic groups for

political space and power. Nevertheless, the issue of separate state Bodoland had pre-occupied the centre-stage of Bodo politics for many decades which still carries weight and relevance in every election.

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