

PTCA IN BODO POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

PTCA (Plains Tribal Council of Assam), is the first political party of the plains tribes of Assam. The party played a vital role in bringing political consciousness amongst the tribal of the northern bank of Brahmaputra in general and Bodos in particular. This party since its inception fought for the protection of the rights of the tribal, for better safeguard, all round development and demanded union territory status and later on downgraded to Autonomous region which evoked good response from the Bodo community. The party played very active role both inside and outside of the Assam Legislative Assembly. The party could not hold last long its faith because of its internal conflict, failure in drawing the attention to the government and support to the government which hurt the Bodo masses and rejected them by embracing the ABSU (U). So the party demised without getting the aspired outcome but sowed the seeds of demand of autonomy. The paper is an attempt to analyse the rise and downfall of the first political party of the Bodos in Assam.

KEYWORDS: PTCA, Bodo, Tribal, ABSU, Autonomy

INTRODUCTION

Bodos are one of the major and indigenous Indo-Mongloid tribes of Assam. The earliest homelands of the Bodos were known as the Hor Bod and Kur Bod which was situated in the river valley of Yang tsekiang and Hoangho of west China. The people of this land were known as the Bodos or Bodofisa (son of the Bod). In that way Bod (Bodo), the corrupted form is established (Nath 1976:64). Hodgson first used the term Bara (Grierson 1967:1). They migrated from the above places and established the earliest kingdom here in Assam. The Bodo speaking people like to introduce themselves as Bara or Bodo instead of Kachari or other terms.

The main objectives of the paper are to know the identity of the Bodos; to know the political aspirations of the Bodos and to know the role of the PTCA.

DATA SOURCES

Data are collected from mainly two sources viz.- primary and secondary. Primary data are firsthand data which are collected from the past records and informant who were the eye witness or follower or actively associated with the activities of the PTCA and the secondary sources basically based on books, magazines, newspaper, articles etc. Both inductive and deductive method is used to come in conclusion.

BIRTH OF THE PTCA

India is a land of composite culture, unity in diversity. Multiculturalism have been recognized and guaranteed by the constitution of India. Gap between theory and practice is a great concern even after the creation of states on the basis of the recommendation of the State Re-organisation Commission. In India, creation new of states still in an ongoing process. North-east of India (NEI) is also no exception of it. Number of states like Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh were created curving out of Assam. Bodo is one of the major tribes of Assam. Autonomy aspirations of the Bodos are one of the major issues in the politics of Assam. Socio-political consciousness amongst the tribal in general and Bodos in particular awoke during the colonial rule but the question of autonomy was not raised, instead memorandums submitted by the Bodos before the Simon Commission or Indian Statutory Commission in 1928 stated, ‘‘Bodos regarded themselves as Assamese and the part and parcel of Assamese society and vehemently opposed the transfer of Goalpara district to Bengal.’’(Basumatary)

Historical injustice, feeling of deprivation, fear of extinction of entity gave birth to a tribal political party in the name style of *Tribal League* in 1933 to safeguard and protection of their rights and as per the Government of India Act 1935 ‘‘ they managed to reserve 4 (four) seats in the Legislative Assembly and 1 (one) seat to the Legislative

Council. All four seats in the Assembly and one seat in the Legislative Council bagged by the Tribal League” (Deori 1998:45) and the elected member promised to protect the rights of the tribal people. The party sometime supported Muslim League lead by Sir Sadullah and sometime to the Congress lead by Gopinath Bordoloi and could manage to create Tribal Belt and Blocks.

After independence, the leaders of the Tribal League either joined in the Congress or remained abstain from active politics and the League converted into the non political organization as *All Assam Tribal Sangha* without raising any question of autonomy because they always thought for greater Assam. There was a political vacuum amongst the tribal after the disintegration of the Tribal League amongst the tribal as their own party to raise their demands and in the floor of the Assembly. On the other hand, the other parties were indifferent towards the rights and grievances of the tribal people. In such a grimed situation Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, announced that Assam would be re-organized on the basis of federal structure before the APHLC on 13 February, 1967. Her announcement stirred the minds of some Bodo youths and intellectuals of Kokrajhar district and convened a meeting in Kokrajhar to discuss the pros and cons of the announcement and possibility of formation of a “political party and after the detailed discussion of the meeting decided to form an Ad hoc committee under the name and style of the *Plains Tribal Council of Assam* (PTCA) and later on formed the Plains Tribal Council of Assam with Biruchan Doley as president Samar Brahma Choudhury as vice Chairman and Charan Narzary as its General Secretary.” (Narzary, 2011:121)

ACTIVITIES OF THE PTCA

The PTCA to fulfill the hope and aspirations of the plains tribal submitted a Memorandum to Dr. Jakir Hussain, President of India and same was submitted personally to Mrs. Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India where it stated “The Plains Tribal Council of Assam considers that it will be a great injustice to the plains tribal of Assam, if their genuine sentiments, grievances and viewpoints on the issue of the proposed reorganization of the State of Assam on federal basis are not given due importance and sympathetic considerationThe Plains Tribal Council of Assam deem that full autonomy within the framework of Indian constitution will alone help the plains tribals grow according to their own genius and tradition. The plains tribal people of Assam have since long been demanding full autonomy comprising the predominantly tribal areas of the plains of

Assam.”(Narzary2011:65) The full autonomy basically confined within the predominantly plains tribal area and Tribal Belts and Blocks starts from river Sonkosh along the foothills of Bhutan and NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh) on the northern tracts of the river valley of Brahmaputra. The PTCA started a vigorous public awareness rally in support of their demand and called a poll boycott to the Kokrajhar (ST) Parliamentary bye election in 1967 and to the second Kokrajhar (ST) Parliamentary bye election in 1968 with a view to register a strong protest against the crafty delimitation of the ST (reserved) constituencies. Most of the people boycott the election responding the boycott called by the PTCA.

The PTCA changed the policy of boycott of election and showed the conviction in the Parliamentary democracy and decided to participate in the elections because party firmly believed that all problems of the people could be solved through peacefully and through the Parliament and in the Legislative Assemblies. Mr. Charan Narzary, for the first time won from the PTCA elected as the member of the legislative Assembly from the East Kokrajhar (ST) constituency in 1972. The PTCA announced the demand of separate Union Territory state of *Udayachal* curving out of northern tracts of Brahmaputra of Assam in a press conference in New Delhi on December 2 in 1972.

The PTCA launched a vigorous mass movement in support of their demand throughout the region covered by the Udayachal. The PTCA degraded its demand of Udayachal in 4th April 1977 into an Autonomous Region after the end of the national emergency. This made a strong reaction amongst the followers and the hard core leaders of the party. The leaders of the PTCA made a two points agreement with the Janata Party (Assam State Unit) which includes the protection of rights and the development of the tribal people and seat sharing in the Assembly election and fought in February 1978 election and managed to elect 4 (four) candidate viz. Samar Brahma Choudhury, Panchanan Brahma, Kamal Chandra Basumatary, Binoy Kumar Basumatary from Kokrajhar East (ST), Sidli (ST), Barchala, Udalguri (ST) constituency elected respectively as MLA in the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1978 and participated in the Janata Government and Mr. Samar Brahma Choudhury inducted as the Minister of Forest and Animal Husbandry. After the end of the President rule, the PTCA decided to support Anowara Taimur government subject to the fulfillment of the conditions laid down by the party and Mr. Samar Brahma Choudhury became the minister again. The Young Plains Tribal Council of Assam, (young unit of the

BARO AND PATHAK : PTCA IN BODO POLITICS

PTCA) was not satisfied with the activities of the senior leaders and opposed the opportunist attitude of the senior leaders and ultimately the YPTCA was dissolved by the senior leaders. The PTCA could manage to elect 3 (three) candidates viz. Alit Chandra Boro, Bimal Brahma Goyari. The YPTCA formed a new party in the name and style of PTCA (P) in 1979 and they stuck on the demand of the Udayachal and later on the PTCA (P) changed the name of the union territory as Missing Bodoland.(Narzary2001:72) Again Binay Kumar Basumatary elected as member of legislative assembly from the Barama (ST), Chapaguri (ST) and Udalguri (ST) Constituency respectively in 1983 and again three MLA's viz-Charan Narzary from Kokrajhar East (ST), Janendra Basumatary from Sidli (ST) and Ganesh Boro from Bijni constituency represented respectively in 1985. Charan Narzary and Samar Brahma Choudhury elected as Member of Parliament in 1977 and 1985 respectively.

The leader of the PTCA like Charan Narzary and Binoy Kumar Basumatary was very vocal in the floor of the Assam Legislative Assembly in the matter of the protection and safeguard of the rights of the tribal, specially the protection of tribal belt and blocks and creation of an Autonomous Tribal Development Authority etc.

The PTCA played an active role in mobilizing the demand and tried to draw attention and support of the masses. So the party took a course of action outside the Assembly also in support of the demand. Few of them are: Submission of memorandums to the Prime Minister and the President of India, discussion with Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India at Jawahar Nagar, Guwahati on 10th March 1983, Demonstration at Boat Club in New Delhi on 24th April in 1983, 24 hour Rail Bandh on 27 April 1987, 24 hour Rail Roko Programme on 27 November 1987, 12 hour National Highway Blockade on 27 April 1987, a six day Mass Demonstration Programme from 9 November to 14 November in front of the offices of the D.C., SDO, SDC, BDOs. More than 249 supporter and followers have been sacrificed their lives in the movement launched by the PTCA. The activities of the PTCA gradually lost its ground due to the rise of popularity of the All Bodo Students Union (U) and ended the PTCA movement without desired outcome.

CONCLUSION

The well wisher of the tribal people in general and Bodos in particular took the pain of the birth of the first

tribal political party after independence in Assam in the name and style of PTCA in 1967.

The PTCA movement could manage to draw support from each and every corner of the Bodo dominated areas which confined mainly northern bank of the river Brahmaputra. The party submitted its first memorandum to the President of India demanding full autonomy of the plains tribes of Assam in the northern bank of Brahmaputra river. The party launched a stormy and vigorous movement with active support of the grass root people and decided to move party voice in the floor of the Assam Assembly as well as Parliament and for the first time in the history of tribal politics in Assam after independence overthrow the domination of the Congress party by defeating the congress (I) party candidate in 1972.

The faith or popularity could not last long because of its some short sighted decision- e.g, support to the various political party to form the coalition government and down gradation of demand from separate state to vague concept Autonomous Region, sacrificing the emotion and feelings of the followers and mass supporter, failure to draw the attention of the government in support of the demand, internal conflict in the party- e, g, birth of PTCA(P), UTNLF and ultimately rise of the ABSU(U) which pushed back the party from front foot to back foot. The Bodo politics divided into two opposite groups with same aspiration which followed the allegation and counter allegation of fratricidal attack and gave birth of suspicion and distrust among the Bodos in the name of party affiliation.

Although the PTCA could not succeed to attain the goal but it is true that this party showed the seeds of political consciousness, question of entity and identity of the Bodos.

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BARO AND PATHAK : PTCA IN BODO POLITICS

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