

# **Bodo Movement in Assam: Causes of its Origin and Its impacts**

Nayanjyoti Gogoi

M.Phil Research Scholar,

Department of Political Science,

Assam University, Silchar

**1. Abstract:** *The global politics is marked by the politicization of issues which are of sensitive in nature. In order to gain political benefit, political leaders always try to politicize certain issues that have community values. Identity is one among certain issues which politicians and leaders always use to do vote bank politics. The Bodo Movement in Assam is also a fruit of that kind of act. This paper mainly focuses on the factors contributed in the rise of Bodo Movement in Assam and also gives its focus on the impacts of this movement upon the people of this particular region.*

**2. Key notes:** Bodo Movement, Causes, Impacts and Politics of Identity.

**3. Introduction:** The issues related to identity politics, rights of minorities and groups and multiculturalism have become the part of political discourse all around the world. In the pre-modern period, though identities were given but these identities were remained by and large confined only to the socio-cultural aspects of the society. Different groups with their respective identities used to enjoy autonomy only in socio-cultural matters and they had not felt any threat to their identities from any quarter. But in the modern era, the identities become a topic of political campaign or in other words it can be said that the term identity has been politicized in the modern era. In India, the act of politicizing the term identity is also a burning question of Indian politics. The politicians use this to get certain political benefits. Though India has to some extent successful in establishing national identity at the centre, but at the periphery various ethno-cultural identities are evolving in its public domain. This situation has created an atmosphere of politics of identity in India and also contributed in the rise of different movements demanding autonomy on the basis of their respective identities in India. Bodoland Movement is one among such movements. Identity politics refers to politics in which a group of people which have particular racial, ethnic, religious, social & cultural identity tend to promote particular interest of their own without taking care of the interest of any larger group. Thus, in short politics of identity implies that politics which is driven by the demands and concerns grounded in the identities of the groups. The term autonomy refers to self-governance. In order to fulfill the demands of a particular group, that particular group of people involving themselves into the movement by demanding autonomy for them. This type of movement of any group is considered as autonomy movement. India's Northeast has been the home of number of groups that have their unique social set-up, institutions and cultural heritage. The Northeastern part of India has got prime importance since more than six decades due to the growing assertion of numerous ethnic groups of this region. This has made a serious jolt in the northeastern part and has severe impact upon the people of this region. These ethnic groups instead of trying to adjust or assimilate with other groups, they began to assert their identities. The ethnic groups have started to organize several movements both peaceful and violent and tried to rediscover their original root, culture and identity. This may result the formation of different states such as Nagaland, Mizoram, etc. in North East. The politicians play a very vital role in this regard. People of different communities started to organize movement demanding separate statehood or autonomy as they have the feeling that only after getting autonomy or after the formation of separate state for them they can be able to protect their unique identities. The Bodo Movement in Assam is also a fruit of this politicization of ethno-cultural consciousness and sentiments.

**4. Bodo Movement in Assam:** The Bodos are one among the important plain tribes of Assam. They speak Tibeto-Burman language and the group belongs to the Indo-Mangoloid stock. This group of people is mainly the inhabitants of the North Bank of the river Brahmaputra and some of them are scattered in different parts of Assam. In the late 80s, the Bodos started a mass movement with a demand for separate state for Bodos and also demanded that their Bodo language should be included in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution. There are different causes that have contributed in the rise of Bodo Movement in Assam.

**i) Causes of Bodo Movement:** The Bodo Movement has been one of the most prominent tribal movements in Assam. The root of this movement though found in the colonial past but it has come with the intensification of radical, political, extremist and cultural assertion from the 1980s onwards. The root cause of this movement can be traced back to the feelings of injustice, deprivation and discrimination that have experienced by the Bodo community in Assam. The leaders of Bodo movement have stated that the Bodos are ethnically different from the rest of people of contemporary Assam and therefore they should be given a separate political entitlement by forming a separate statehood for them. The following factors are considered as prime factors for the rise of Bodo movement in Assam-

**I. Economic Factors:** In 1947 census, it was found that the Bodo population constituted 49% of Assam's population. But this percentage has dropped to 29% according to 1971 census because of internal and external migrations and due to several state restructurings. Along with this, the continuous migration of people from neighbouring Bangladesh has also adversely affected these local inhabitants and impacted their structural set up in a greater way. Land is the prime base of Bodo economy and therefore it is common that most of the Bodo people depend on agriculture for their livelihood. The entry of outsiders, poverty and indebtedness etc. has made them landless. Though Government of Assam has taken several initiatives including the setting up of several tribal blocks and belts exclusively for Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes, but these have failed to stop the growing number of non-tribal population in these areas. Besides, the problem of unemployment confronts the tribal population. Only 10% jobs are reserved for plain tribes including Bodos. Apart from this, the requirement of knowing the Assamese language to get a government job also has stood up as a barrier to employment opportunities for Bodo people. These have created a sense of deprivation and a feeling of fear of becoming a marginalized section which is one among the causes of the rise of Bodo movement.

**II. Language and Identity:** Language plays a very prominent role in the alienation of tribal population including Bodos in Assam. The Assamese language was made as official language under an Act of 1960 and there had been showing an effort done by the Assamese people to impose Assamese language over all the communities residing in Assam. This had threatened the existence of Bodo language and therefore, the All Bodo Students' Union and the Bodo Sahitya Sabha have demanded for the inclusion of Bodo language in the Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution in order to protect the interest of the Bodo Community. Hence, the demand to preserve the identities of the Bodos is one of the major causes of the emergence of Bodo unrest.

**III. Political factors:** The spread of education also has contributed in the development of Bodos in the educational sector. The educational upliftment among the Bodo youth raised consciousness about political issues among them. They had aware about the policies pursued by the Indian government during the period of 1960s and 1970s that have led towards the creation of separate tribal state constituting smaller population in comparison to Bodos. Therefore, they thought that their demand for separate entity was also legitimate. Again the use of force by the law enforcement agencies upon the Bodo agitators to suppress the movement after 1987 fueled the movement.

Thus, the degradation of socio-economic condition along with the problem of land alienation had created the ground for Bodo movement. Besides, non-inclusion of Bodos in the Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution and the language policy of Assam government had also geared up the movement.

**ii) Impact of Bodo Movement:** Every autonomy movement has an objective of bringing change in the existing set-up. These movements have left powerful affects in the society and influenced the socio-political life of the inhabitants of that area. The Bodo movement also has an adverse affect on the socio-political life of the people of Assam. Most of the phases of this movement were marked by number of bandhs, disruption of transportation connectivity specially rail and road connectivity within Assam or rest of Northeastern region. Though the leaders claimed that it was a peaceful movement but there are number of data and lots of information about the loss of life due to police action or bomb explosion. This has also resulted the loss of property of worth million of rupees both individual and government property and has also affected the normal life of the local inhabitants. The movement also had led the formation of a rebel insurgent group namely Bodo Security Force which has involved in various violent tactics. Apart from these impacts, the movement had affected seriously the economy of Assam in particular and the entire Northeast at large. Thus, a large number of people suffered due to this movement. This movement not only affected the lives of non-Bodo community but also have negative impact upon the people of Bodo community. The authority considered this movement as threat to law and order situation and as a result several draconian Acts have come into effect that severely violate the human rights. The formation of National Democratic Front of Bodoland and Bodo Liberation Tiger Force are the fruit of this movement. Not only the economic instability took place due to this movement but also took place the instability in the arena of social, political and cultural life. This movement destroyed the sense of harmony and togetherness among the people.

As a consequence of the movement, in the primary schools of Bodo dominated areas the Bodo language was introduced as a medium of instruction. In 1985, Bodo language has got the status of associate official language in the areas where Bodos are the majority and since December 2003 the Bodo language has become the part of Eight Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The movement also paved the way for the creation of an Autonomous unit under Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. This unit is known as Bodoland Territorial Council and here 30 seats are reserved for the tribal population. By doing this it is expected that through reservation they can be able to safeguard their political interests.

**5. Conclusion:** Thus, the above discussion shows that the Bodos have started their movement in order to achieve certain goals. The main reason behind the rise of this movement is the growing feeling among the Bodo people that their identity was threatened due to several reasons. In Assam's socio-political context, the Bodo movement is very much significant due to the fact that it has able to mobilize the masses about tribal question successfully. It cannot be wrong to say that though Bodo movement was not fully successful but in some extent it was successful in ensuring the identities of the Bodos. But the movement has not contributed towards the development of the community as a whole. The community is still lack in terms of education and economy in comparison to other parts of the state of Assam. This movement also has led to a split within the community and emergence of a new Bodo Movement. But the newly emerging movement is not too strong and popular as the earlier one.

## 6. References:

### a) Books:

- [1] B.B. Kumar, *“Problems of Ethnicity in the North East India”*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, (2007).
- [2] Gautam kr. Bera, Birinchin Kr. Medhi & R.P. Athparia, *“Social Unrest and Peace Initiatives: Prsperspective from North East India”*, EBH Publishers, Guwahati, (2011).
- [3] Jaikhlong Basumatary, *“Quest for Peace in Assam: A study of the Bodoland Movement”*, K.W. Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Centre for Land Welfare Studies, (2014).
- [4] P.K. Daimary, *“Pilgrimage to Bodoland”*, The National Voice Publications, Udalguri, (2002).
- [5] Sanjib Baruah, *“Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of North East India”*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi, (2005).

### b) Journal Articles:

- [1] Ditasta Das, *“The Bodo Movement and Situating Identity Assertion in Assam”*, *Journal of Human Sciences*, vol.2, issue 2, (June 2014).
- [2] Oinam Ranjit Singh and Gautam Mushahary, *“Bodo Movement: A Historical Perspective”*, *International Journal in Management and Social Science*, vol. 3, (September, 2015).
- [3] Robert Tuolor, *“Autonomy Movements in North East India: A Study of the Hill Tribal in the State of Assam”*, *IJRES*, vol. 3. Issue 9, (September, 2013).
- [4] Sudhir Jacob George, *“The Bodo Movement in Assam: Unrest to Accord”*, *Asian Survey*, vol.34, no.10, (1994).