

# Viability of Bodo Movement for a Separate State in Assam: A Politico –Geographic Analysis

UttamKalita

Research Scholar, Centre for Studies in Geography, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Assam

**Abstract-** The Union of India has been experiencing different movements or separatist tendencies since independence. This was seen to be developed for the first time among the Naga people during 1960s which resulted in the creation of Nagaland as a separate state in 1963. In the same way, the state of Meghalaya (1972), Mizoram (1986) and Arunachal Pradesh in 1987 had been created out of Assam. Telengana is the latest state created in India in 2009. The Bodos who are one of the major Plains Tribal communities predominantly inhabiting in the north western part along the foothills of the Himalayas had been struggling for a separate state. The Bodos have been contributing significantly towards the growth and development of the composite Assamese culture and society. But with the passage of time it was being felt by these people that they are being neglected, deprived, and exploited both by the government and the upper caste people. Besides, they have realized their identity with distinct socio-cultural attributes is being threatened and if not protected, their identity would be extinct from the soil of Assam. Considering their identity crisis they had started movement for a separate state adopting both democratic and violent means since 1986.

**Index Terms-** separatist tendencies, neglected, deprived, exploited, identity

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Bodos who are distributed in different parts of the states belong to Mongoloid group of Human Race. On the basis of their features and general appearance Sidney Endle remarked that the Bodos approximate very closely to the Mongolian type; and this would seem to point Tibet and China as the original home of the race<sup>1</sup>. They are considered as the early inhabitants of Assam and are basically agricultural and very skilled in some activities namely weaving, rearing of poultry, sericulture, community fishing etc. Land is the basic source of livelihood of the people as well as they have close relation with the other elements of the physical environment namely forests, rivers, beels, swamps, etc. As per the census of 2011, tribal people constitute 12.24 percent and among the Scheduled Tribes (S.T.) Bodos possess 40.9 percent ranking top in the state. This group of people remains economically, educationally and politically backward and this backwardness leads them to be neglected, exploited and deprived of different rights. Thus, the concept of deprivation of different rights gave birth the idea of separate existence in which their distinct socio-cultural attributes along with different rights could be preserved. This identity crisis has compelled the Bodos to demand for a separate state for the Bodos in the north bank of

the Brahmaputra river dividing the state into fifty fifty. This is their political right. The area demanded by the Bodos for a separate state has been inhabited by different groups of people as well as Bodos are not in majority in the area. Hence, the question arises whether the demand of a separate state as 'Bodoland' is viable or not.

## II. OBJECTIVES

Following are the main objectives of this paper.

1. To study the genesis of the Bodoland movement.
2. To study the causes of the Bodo Movement.
3. To study the viability of Bodoland as a separate state.

## III. LITERATURE SURVEY

For preparing this research paper some related books, articles, reports, news papers etc. have been studied. Due to limitation of space all the literatures are not discussed, instead the important ones are shown as follows.

Regarding the preservation of Ethnic Identity, GirinPhukan in his book 'Politics of Regionalism in North East India' mentioned that the urges of different identities have been a living phenomenon in the politics of the region in particular and of the country in general. Narayan Kowar in his book 'Society and Politics in Assam' has discussed the factors of autonomy movements by the tribals and said that the autonomy movement is the product of long days deprivation and backwardness of the tribal people in the fields of economy, education, culture and politics. The book 'Bodoland Movement 1986-2001, A Dream and Reality' published by All Bodo Students Union, Kokrajhar is a historical record of different stages of the Bodoland movement. Prof. CharanNarzary in his book 'Drean for Udayachal and the History of Plains Tribal Council of Assam, 1967-1993' has discussed the history of the Plains tribal politics in Assam for separate homeland. The monograph 'The Bodos – Emergence and Assertion of an Ethnic Minority' is an attempt to trace different phases of history through which the Bodos emerged as the most dominant ethnic minority in Assam. SanjibBaruah's book "India Against Itself – Assam and the politics of Nationality" has revealed the nation building process in a multi-ethnic polity as well as the sub national conflicts that are going on in North East India. Another very important book entitled 'Political Identity Crisis of the Bodos and their Bodoland Movement' written by Dr. PremanandaMosahary is an analytical and historical book on the political identity crisis of the Bodos and their struggle for revival of political identity and

Racial Solidarity. Dr. Sivanath Barman in his book ‘AsomorJanajatiyaSamasya’ writes on the tribal problems along with their autonomy movements for self rule. Another book written by Hira CharanNarjinari entitled ‘The Saga of the Bodos’ clearly analysed the historical, linguistic and political history of the Bodo people with their struggle for geopolitical power and demand for a separate state of Bodoland.

#### IV. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The tribal people including the Bodos living in the Plains of Assam remain backward in every sphere of life. The tribal people had been neglected and exploited by non-tribal people. Though the tribal belt and blocks had been created for the protection of the tribal people, the large scale encroachment of the tribal land by non-tribal people primarily the immigrant Muslims from Bangladesh had created pressure over land which results in ethnic and communal conflicts in the area killing hundreds of innocent people. Hence, the Bodos under the leadership of All Bodo Students’ Union (ABSU) had been struggling vigorously for a separate state since 1986 so that their distinct Socio-cultural identity could be preserved. The Bodos were already given a separate territorial arrangement i.e. Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) In 2003 consisting of four new districts. But now they are not satisfied with the autonomy assigned to them and stated to struggle for a separate state as ‘Bodoland’ on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River. As the area is inhabited by different ethnic groups, so giving separate state to one group will certainly dissatisfy the other groups and has been a matter critical concern.

#### V. METHODOLOGY

The study has been carried out with the help of both primary and secondary data sources. For collecting primary data field study has been conducted in the districts of Udalguri and Baska of BTAD. From the two districts two Revenue Circles have been selected for data collection i.e. Khoirabari Revenue Circle and GoreswarRevenue Circle in Udalguri and Baska districts respectively. For collecting primary data 23 revenue villages have been randomly selected from both the revenue circles. In addition to the primary data, secondary data are collected from different books, statistical Handbook, Census book, reports and news papers etc.

#### VI. DISCUSSION

##### **ABSU’S Demand for a Separate State i.e. Union Territory:**

The total geographical area of Assam is 78,438 km<sup>2</sup>. The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) has been demanding that Assam should be divided fifty fifty between the tribal and non-tribal people<sup>2</sup>. They have demanded the entire north bank of the Brahmaputra River to be included in the proposed Union Territory which is shown district wise and sub-division wise in the following Table No. 1. The table shows that the whole area of

Kokrajhar district, northern part of Dhubri, Goalpara, Barpeta, Kamrup, Darrang, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts have been included in the Proposed Union Territory (UT). The area of the proposed union territory extends from the Sonkosh River near Srirampur on the West to Sadia on the East covering the major areas in the north bank of the Brahmaputra River of Assam. The east-west length of the proposed UT is about 700 km and north-south average width is about 36 km<sup>3</sup>. The following table reveals the administrative units of 1987 but thereafter a lot of changes are seen in respect of creation of new District, Sub-division, Revenue Circles etc. According to the 2011 census the proposed separate state includes the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Bongaigaon, Baska, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup (R) Udalguri, Darrang, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji.

**Table 1 :Area of Proposed Union Territory demanded by ABSU**

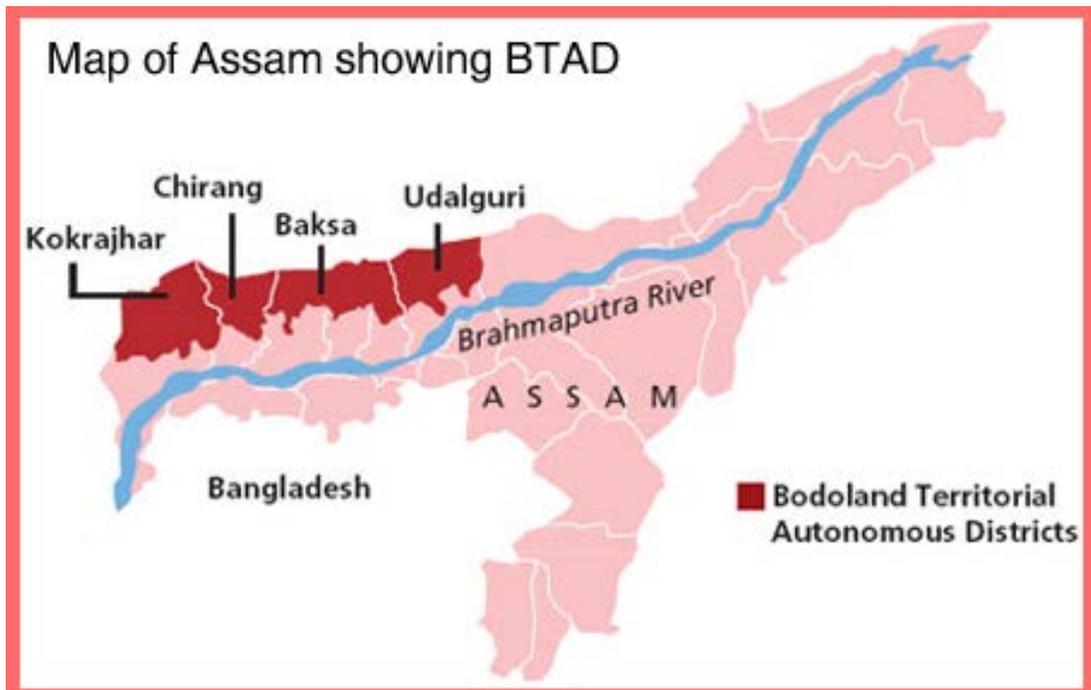
District/ sub-division	Area in Sq. km	Area to be included in the Proposed UT (Sq. km.)
Kokrajhar	4716.5	4716.5
Dhubri	2745.5	1372.5
Goalpara	2843.8	710.8
Barpeta	3307.3	1653.6
Nalbari	2022.8	1111.4
Kamrup	4625.9	1155.2
Darrang	3465.3	2752.3
Sonitpur	5255.2	4204.2
Lakhimpur	5646.4	5646.4
Majuli	1241.0	1241.0
Sadia	914.0	914.0
	Total=	25478.1

Source: Why separate state? P. 22

In the proposed separate state the Bodos are predominant in the western part namely in the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baska, Udalguri, northern part of Darrang and western part of Sonitpur districts. On the other hand, the Moshing people are inhabited in the eastern part namely in the districts of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji. They were accorded Mising Autonomous Council in 1995 covering an area of 250 villages from Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Majuli, Golaghat and Sibsagar districts. Besides, the Koch Rajbongshis are predominant in the districts of Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Barpeta and Dhubri districts.

##### **Creation of BTAD: A turning point:**

Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) is a spatial unit which is run by a council i.e. Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was created in 2003 by curving out some areas of eight districts of Assam namely, Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur. Map no.1



It is an Autonomous administrative unit extending from 26°7' 12" North latitude to 26° 47'50" North latitude and from 89°47' 49" East longitude to 92°18'30" East longitude constituted under the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India. It is in the western part of Assam covering an area of 8970 km<sup>2</sup> consisting of four districts namely Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baska and Udalguri.

Though the state of Assam has been inhabited by different tribal groups, among Scheduled Tribes (ST) Boro represents nearly half of the total S.T. population of the state i.e. 40.9 percent. The following table no.2.shows the percentage of Tribal population to total population, 2001<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 2: population of Major Scheduled Tribes (ST), 2001**

Name of the S.T. community	Total population	Proportion to total S.T. population In percentage
All S.T.	3,308,570	100
Boro	13, 52,771	40.9
Miri	5,87,310	17.8
Mikir	3,53,513	10.7
Rabha	2,77,517	8.4
Kachari (sonowal)	2,35,881	7.1
Lalung	1,70,622	5.2
Dimasa	1,10,976	3.4
Deori	41,161	1.2

From the above table it is seen that The Bodos with 40.9 percent represent as the largest tribal group in the state followed by the Miri (17.8 percent), Mikir (10.7 percent), Lalung (5.2 percent), Dimasa (3.4 percent) and Deori (1.2 percent). The rest of the scheduled tribes are very small in their population size.

The important point to analyze is that the All Assam Koch Rajbongshi Students Union (AAKRSU) has also demanding for a separate 'Kamatapur State' in Assam. This organization demands that the proposed 'Kamatapur' would be created including 11 (eleven) districts from Assam namely Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Darrang, Morigaon, Kamrup, Nalbari, Barpeta, Goalpara, Dhubri, Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar and 5 (five) districts from West Bengal namely north Dinajpur, south Dinajpur, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and Koch-bihar. There are two extremist groups namely Koch Rajbongshi Liberation Organisation (KRLO) and Kamatapur Liberation Organisation (KLO) who have been also struggling for the separate state of 'Kamatapur'.

It is observed from the above discussion that almost the same area demanded by AAKRSU as 'Kamatapur' has also been demanded by ABSU for a separate state of Bodoland in Assam. Thus, giving separate state to one group of people may be a cause of conflict for other groups. The BTAD is a multi-cultural and Multi-ethnic area. The government should consider the rights of other ethnic groups living in the area. The following table shows the ethnic composition of the area<sup>5</sup>.

**Table 3: Ethnic composition of BTAD area**

Ethnic Groups	Percentage to total population
Bodo	32
Bengali speaking Muslims	19
Adivasi communities including Santhals	17
Koch Rajbonghi	16
Other communities including Bengali Hindus, Nepalis, Caste	16

Assamese, SaraniaKachari and Rabhas	
Total=	100

Source: <http://en.m.wikipedia.org/>

From the above table it is observed that in the BTAD area the percentage of non-Bodo population is more and hence the government must have to take into consideration the legitimate demands and interest of the other communities living in the area during the formulation of any policies or decision relating to the creation of separate state for the Bodos.

#### Causes of the Movement:

For this purpose field study has been conducted in 23 revenue villages covering 595 random sampled households in two districts of BTAD. The respondents were given four probable causes of the Bodoland Movement as -- (1) Lack of economic development (2) Loss of land (3) Lack of political power and (4) Superiority complex mindset of the main stream Assamese people. Out of 595 sampled households 300 (50.42%) have responded that lack of economic development is the major cause of the movement while only 28 ( 4.70%) household remarked that loss of land is the cause of the movement. It is found that 98 (16.47%) of the households have responded that lack of political power is the cause of the movement while only 46 (7.73%) households have replied that superiority complex mindset of the main stream Assamese people is responsible for the Bodo movement.

Thus, the data reveals that the major cause of Bodo movement is lack of economic development. Loss of land, lack of political power and superiority complex mindset of the main stream Assamese people have also been responsible to some extent for promoting the movement.

#### Ethnic conflicts:

The following discussion reveals the conflicting scenario between the Bodos and non-Bodos in BTAD area.

#### Ethnic conflict of 2008:

In the month of October,2008, a violent ethnic clash had taken place between the Bodos and Immigrant Muslims in the districts of Udalguri and Darrang. In this clash 55 people were killed with a displacement of 2,12,000 people and 54 villages were directly affected<sup>6</sup>.

#### Ethnic conflict of 2012:

It has been observed that after a gap of almost four years ethnic conflict broke out in BTAD area in 2012. About 90 people had been killed and displaced over 4,00,000 people in the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baska and Udfalguri as on 31 August<sup>7</sup>, 2012. It was the conflict between the Bodos and Immigrant Muslims due to encroachment of forestland in Fakiragram by Muslim and put up a signboard identifying it as an 'Idgah'.

#### Violence in Baska District in 2014:

Violence again broke out on May 1&2 , 2014 in Baska District under BTAD. Narayanguri and Khagrabari are the two poor villages inhabited by Immigrant Muslims and 45 innocent people mostly women and children had been killed brutally and attackers set the village on fire <sup>8</sup>. This was done by the Bodo miscreants.

#### NDFB(S) attack on Adivasi people on 23 rd December, 2014:

The December 23, 2014 just before the Christmas Day was one of the saddest days in the History of Assam. Bodo militants belonging to the Sangbijit Faction of NDFB killed 72 innocent Adivasi people, while 4 people were killed in retaliatory action and 3 in police firing, bringing death toll in the violence to 79.<sup>9</sup>

Regarding the violence noted political scientist and former Dibrugarh University and IIT Guwahati professor ANS Ahmed viewed the above incidence as a result of the ethnic cleansing Programme. With this programme, the militant section of the Bodo society wants to make the Bodos the majority in the BTC area so as to secure a separate Bodoland state.<sup>10</sup>

### VII. FINDINGS

1. Immigration of Bangladeshi Muslims to the Bodo inhabited areas has created pressure over land which results in conflicts in different times.
2. The Bodos are not in majority where the demand for a separate state has been raised by them.
3. The same area demanded by Bodos for a separate state has also been demanded by the Koch Rajbongshis for Kamatapur State. Thus, there is every possibility of ethnic conflicts in the area.
4. It can be assumed from the violence and conflicts that a process of ethnic cleansing has been started so that the Bodo community would become majority in the area.
5. Their demand for a separate state is not viable because conflicts can't bring peace and prosperity. In a democratic country like India everyone should get the equal opportunity and rights.

### VIII. CONCLUSION

Bodoland movement for a separate state is a problem of Regional Geopolitics. Giving autonomy or separate state to any group of people is a constitutional provision. Creation of a separate state may be a matter of satisfaction for a particular community while it would be a cause of utter dissatisfaction to other group of people. The immigration of Bangladeshi Muslims has been a major problem in the area and majority of the conflicts are due to encroachment of land. Instead of creating separate state the government should take developmental measures for all the communities and the tribal blocks and blocks created for the protection of the tribal people should be safeguarded. The area is economically backward and thus, initiatives regarding economic development should be properly addressed.

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#### AUTHORS

**First Author** – UttamKalita, Research Scholar, Centre for Studies in Geography, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Assam, Email: [uttamkalita73@gmail.com](mailto:uttamkalita73@gmail.com)