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Bodo Nation: The Fight for Democratic Justice

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Abstract:

The Bodo tribe or the nation, considered as autochthon of the land Assam are making its space for democratic justice through different means of memorandum and revolutions. Their grievances got exposed in the second decades of the 20th century itself. They in the contemporary period justified their struggle meant for justice, equality and above all discrimination free society. Even the fight for democratic principles to root out injustice, exploitations from their brethrens reached to the height of distinct homeland demand as Bodoland. They could, however, gain the Autonomous Administrative area called BTAD under the 6th Scheduled of the Constitution. The Constitutional creation, however is not protected from different quarters of allegations which often claimed as faulty and undemocratic foundation. While the pointed tribe could smell discrimination uninterruptedly and also from the governmental apparatuses-police, army infringing their rights for which they stick for democratic rights, justice for self determination.

Keywords: Bodo, democracy, discrimination, justice, homeland

1. Introduction

The global world has been running for the democratic space beyond the theory.ⁱ The term democracy which originated in the ancient but civilized Greek world has been defined in one or the other way. Democracy stands justified with varied nature and multi understanding in concept. In fact it runs with diffracted rays having its wide effect and impact in every spheres of human lives and social settings. This is where, democracy should not be taken just for conceptual understanding rather should go beyond for justifying and investigating its extent of sound functioning, deepening in its spirit. In human society everyone is born free and wanted to live with dignity and respect, above all as being. Therefore it is only the democratic settings or the system where people can rest their hopes and aspirations for live movement. However, the working of democracy in a country like India, if look beyond theory can be stated deepening only in the procedural.ⁱⁱ Now the success of Democracy has not to be justified mere on the conventional traits like success in holding elections, voting participation, strong opposition, success in county's security etc. Democracy rather has to be in materializing its core principles like liberty, equality and justice and also for the environment of dignity.ⁱⁱⁱ We are proud to say India the largest democracy sometime reminds us the same place where millions of the billions are crying for just a hand of bread. Even worse to speak is from the lense of Human rights, which it reflects the dysfunctional functioning of the country for the dignity in humanity. In the genre, so, I tried to share the days where traditional oriented Bodo society or the nation trying to survive democratic lives through its revolutions. It is to understand the real deepening of Democracy or to what extent succeeded in providing justice and justness to specified community.

2. Democracy in India: An Overview

The century long freedom struggle could liberate finally India in 1947 and then occupied the historic role model for other, projecting her as successful democratic country. The British provinces liberated and joined hundreds Princely states to constitute free, unified and independent India. The win over exploitative colonizer is the win of the common Indians, and therefore the forefront fighters had a dream to erect India as the holy land of respect for all and government of the people. The 1950 witnessed the novel constitution into force with best principles of the best world constitutions. Such arrangement has had the promises to deliver just, justice, rights and equality and equal treatment in/before the law. In fact, such constitutional pledge has been the well thought in addressing the diversity, tribal society and the traditional varna based society.^{iv} The developed and developing countries had a gratitude for its being the largest democracy with billions exercising the voting franchise .However, this is just the acceptance of price in disguise as the crisis in addressing the grievances of the millions of the billions by democratic Indian governance has remained embroiled. It is not the democracy, but the 'Netas' with immoral characters led tarnish the image of Indian democracy and as a failed state.^v

In this context, the Indian civilization with distinct history, tradition and culture of acceptance in diversity, where proud to be democratic Indians today turned equally the land of threats , gross violations of right, crime against women, ethnic violence, displacement rendering lakhs of crores homeless. There has been the far and wide cry for human right, and the dignity of the standard

of living. Episodic instance of human right crisis in North East India certainly not deserve as a new phenomenon. The problem of refugees, demographic change, question of land alienation, immigrant issues, conflict between autochthon and the illegal intruders, identity crisis, vote bank politics has taken the ugly turn in Indian democratic settings. The thought for a solution has even reached to the height of fight for homeland, state within a state, supra state and even to the extent of sovereign. In the genre, we may have

3. The Great Bodo Nation: Their Struggle within Indian Democracy for Self Determination

The great branch of Sino-Tibetan family, the Bodo historically recognized aboriginal race of Assam which they with distinct culture, tradition has found to be scattered in nook and corners of NE and near abroad countries. They, the nature and peace loving and candid race^{vi} struggled to survive with their animist religion 'Bathouism' with some gone converting to other religions. The Bodo language (of Mongolian group) which now being recognised in 8th Schedule of the Constitution originated in the plains of Yang-tsze-Kiang and Huang-ho rivers in China.^{vii} However, historical analysis could be made for current understanding the Community through the lenses of deprivation, suppression under the steering of so called 'elite Assamese ruling class.' The term 'injustice' which needs be applied remains diversified in the scattered areas like socio-economic, cultural, education and political. In addition, the contemporary Bodo society is running amidst newly emerged crisis of identity and survival. The fake and unquestionable encounter of Bodo youths, students in the name of launching operation against the Bodo militants seems implanting a kind of fear psychosis in the normal minds and lives of the innocents. However, the paper is not intended to investigate the aforesaid. They accept not because of their guilt rather due to their innocence of ignorance, truthfulness. Such meted injustice invites the community intellectuals to think and revisit to their past glory and to fight for constitutional and political solution under the heads of Assam-India politics. Therefore seeking even reached to the height of fighting for Self rule by curving separate state to be named 'Bodoland'.^{viii} History reveals, the tribals in Assam, besides establishing powerful dynasties didn't failed to contribute building the so called greater Assam 'Assamese society' and founding sovereign India. However, the clock running, made them think about their survival amidst negligence being carried by the caste hindu Assamese speaking people (non tribal) who always wish to have the steering of the socio-cultural, politico- economy of the state. Therefore within democratic space those tribals are pondering to have demarcated boundaries for self rule. In this light, the Bodo tribe accepts the justification for revolution after revolution to have socio-political change or simply to access the minimum basic rights. There is saying 'History itself repeats' this is where a race or a group keeping future in the forefront looks back the past glory and latter sufferings and attempt to shape the present –future exploitation free. From the point, the tribe Bodos and their 'nationalism' cannot be considered out of mere patronaged political interest of the section within.^{ix} Rather has been the offshoot or from the dawn the Bodos started experiencing the aforesaid. Therefore, the movement for them and the brethren oppressed tribals or the tribes cannot be unjustified since it is the means for democratic realization. Therefore, it is not the Bodos to advocate the movement or the revolution rather, is the pages of history that literate them to arm with such to clear the way for freedom, to govern themselves under the framework of Indian Constitution. From the above stand, the community throughout the decades has been heading to materialize their aspirations of homeland. The movement in Bodo traditional oriented society has since been 20s of the 20th century. It remarkably began with the social reformer Gurudev Kalicharan Brahma, who heartedly put his effort to reform and counter challenge the then rays of evil threats to Bodo society. His well assessment for socio-cultural impact cum relinquish sense through reform got exposed and materialized in the Memorandum, placed before the Simon Commission of 1928. The policy striking demand, for instance, the ask for ST seats reserved in State Assembly linked constituencies, and also the 1947 amended Assam Land and Revenue Regulation 1886 for the codification of Tribal Belts and Blocks has remained the best gift to Bodo society in particular and brethren tribals, in general.^x As subsequently, independent India witnessed series of violent and non violent struggle in asserting their identity amidst multifactorial crisis.

3.1. The Cry for Script

Brief event-chronology shows the Literature or the Script movement for the Bodos. The linguistic consciousness amongst the community came with the advent of Bodo Literary body, called Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) of 1950s. The pre Independent Bodo society since not knowing where about their Deodhai scripts had to undergo with alien but neighbor language 'Assamese scripts. In no time, the said literary body shouldered the medium crisis. The 1963 uphold Boro education which however, instructed under modified medium of Assamese scripts. In no time again the decade experienced the rigorous script movement with two faceted contested central efforts i.e. the Roman, and Devanagari on the side. The Sabha headed the Roman script movement also known as the Great Bodo National Script Revolution (GBNSR). However the internal collision i.e. for 'either-or' stated script had ceased with the then controversial Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's logistic offer to accept Devanagiri script in lieu of Roman. The government's temporary orientation meant to look the convenient in greater use of acceptance has however in the long run accepted by the Sabha. In fact the tangible for free hand say with regard to the development of Language and in the literary field for the Community as a whole has been the granted Constitutional recognition to Bodo Language under Eight Schedule. The relentless impetus of the student body – ABSU (All Bodo Students' Union) since 60s with regard to the fight for Bodo language and literature can never be dichotomized to that of Sabha. Constitutional recognition has not ceased the crisis for the fact the Community could make a sense of the disguised-predatory policy of every subsequent government. The democratic educational right which is fundamental needs the governments' devotion, funding so as to make all access without any sorts of injustice. However no 'substantive grounded' arrangement depicts the absence of enough student-subjects ratio teachers, infrastructure, irregularities in the supply of texts, materials, lack of proper inspection on the performance and quality education. For instance in 2011, ABSU had the report where more than 1.25 lakh Bodo medium students were being deprived from the 'Right to Education' under 2009 Act. Therefore, the new educational rights movement has deepened in the democratic Bodo society.

3.2. Socio-Political Struggle

The political movement which is for socio-cultural and economic space for the Bodo and tribals in general got exposed in the mid 20th century. It was through the demand for separate Union territory called Udayachal. In no time the imbroglia in leadership bought the halt. Rechristened as Bodoland which since the advent of Bodofa Upendranath Brahma in ABSU gained the momentum for realization. Bodofa could well realize the imposed injustice meted to the community.^{xi} His self leadership efficacy could well organize and disciplined the organization to march for greater interest. Under his voice, meant for social justice, numerous social and political agendas were being carried out. Certain sporadic layers of the homeland drive even went to the height of accepting the path of violence. Insurgent group NDFB (National Democratic Front of Bodoland) emerged in the scene. They, under the leadership of Ranjan Daimari (now undertrial) ought to fight for sovereign Bodoland (which beyond constitutional framework) but altered to look for state within the Union. The organization, which now under SoP (Suspension of Operation) is accused of 2008 serial Assam blast where lives of many innocent were taken. No denying the fact, during the pick for Bodoland the organization involved in taking lives of many Bodo leaders of ideological difference and who got killed needs no mention. When Ranjan Daimari's whereabouts was not known to Indian Intelligence, a section determined for peaceful negotiations with the Indian government. The faction NDFB (P) is now in progress however with no sign of reunion for one and all settlement.

The community in the 90s of the 20th century achieved the political outcome in the form BAC (Bodoland Autonomous Council), signing the '1993-Bodo Accord'. The signatory to the MoS (Memorandum of Settlement) were the Union, the State government and the representatives of ABSU-BPAC. Bodo think tanks and well-wishers to the homeland took it to be stupendous policy and described it as border or the boundaryless administrative arrangement or the Council. The eventual panorama of administration could show nothing goal oriented or to meet the aspirations, issues. So resumption of the movement became inevitable. The regional pages 1996 witnessed where the former BVC (Bodo Volunteer Force-violent youth wing of ABSU) had organized a new arms group designated as BLTF (Bodo Liberation Tiger Force). The Bodo society again became the prey of arms conflict, proposed land as fratricidal land. After series of violent acts the organization in 2003 came to an understanding signing the Accord with the Union of India, and the State government of Assam. Unlike the past Accord, the present is marked by the allocation of four districts with sound developmental packages. The administrative area is to be known as BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts). New political party BPPF emerged but in no time the imbroglia led BPF faction emerged. The former being of Rabiram Narzary, and the other being the Hagrama Mahilary. Since 2005 Council election Hangrama led BPF is managing to retain the maximum seat to govern. ABSU is not the signatory to such outcome since it solely for Bodoland. The Organization realizing the loopholes in the repeated signing of the Accord has revived the paused the movement for separate state. The movement for Bodoland, thus continued to be the decades long agenda. The justification behind lies in the very spirit of the Constitution. The very Article 2, 3, 4 of the Constitution is solely for the formation or establishment of state within the Union^{xii}. The community justified the demand of their being the aboriginal where they have to undergo socio-cultural, political and economic crisis. Justification also lies where the State government has failed to protect the granted tribal land rights (Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, 1947). Almost two third tribal land and protected forest land went to illegal encroachers and in own land they were turned to minority. The community can well predict the days to come where they have to become like their brethren tribals in Tripura losing almost their territory, administration to encroachers. This led the sense of cultural and identity threat and gross violation to the rights of the autochthon Bodos. As alternative to the 'failed state' they armed their mind to fight for the right to Self determination, which to establish justice, peace and equality, and development. Therefore, it may not be considered as patronized political demand rather deliberately the legal, constitutional and fight for democratic rights within democracy.

4. Contemporary Issues

4.1. Contemporary Allegations

The founded Bodoland Administrative Districts and the community, tried by contingent of the non tribal, spearheaded by claimed intellectuals recurred to project the land as Valley of death and community the sole responsible. Ironically, every single happening without a thought and investigation like murder, kidnap, ransom and loot is pointed to the handiwork of the community. The media in the captive of the non tribal, intelligently and most of the time the broadcast-show covering issue of the land and crisis tried seemingly to tarnish the image of Bodos. The allegations are like attempt to outnumber the non Bodos through ethnic cleansing, apprehension of losing their land, threatening to the Survival of Assamese language. However the ethnic clash, which they see as ethnic cleansing method never spare the alleged community to escape the same. Therefore, to wind-up with such ideas will just be derogatory remarks upon their brethren. For instance with regard to the CBI report on 2012 clash where starting cause was submitted contrary to the imposed blame on the Bodos^{xiii}. However, charged the report as biased on government side. With regard the allegation to ousted non Bodos from holding land right a top Assam police Officer said, "All the clashes are of similar nature. This so high that just a small spark is enough to create an inferno" and he, added, saying, "Dozens of people are rendered homeless in every such clash, but we have seen that these people return to their land even after living for 10 years in relief camps"^{xiv}. Most often questions air up, "why the Bodo community involves in such heinous crime?" and the like. In fact, many seminars based articles- national and international, journal on Bodo issue wind up intentionally tarnishing the images of the community. For instance an article with theme 'Massacre in Assam' has blindly began the article stating the minority Bodos rule over the majority non-Bodos and termed BTAD as faulty.^{xv} Such views are nothing new for the community. However, being the research scholar, research ethics should follow his act and knowing the ground reality so as to have a substantive argument stands inevitable. There is no point of saying a minority community cannot rule the

majority (however contrary be applied only in the parliamentary politico-institutional governing), and such nuanced could have been said when the so called non Bodos/Onna Boro leaders were/are sole in the state politics and took/takes every opportunity to exploit the community and downtrodden tribals, which subsequently made the nation submit repeated reminders to the Govt. of India seeking justice. Therefore, what I tried to view democracy is from justice, equality and discrimination free in every societal aspects. Samarjit Kachari, has exposed in his writing the biased publishing of the communal say by undisclosed speaker. Kachari said that even the article tried to exhort all the non- Bodo people in BTAD region to fight against the Bodos together by warning them that 'now it is the Bengali Muslims; the next could be any one of you'.^{xvi} The media being considered democratic pillar could have reviewed the statement. The newly floated organization called Onna-Boro questions the very legitimacy of the rule of Bodo dominated politics.^{xvii} In fact, the internal crisis out of mistrusts between the Bodos and claimed Onna Boro (native) encouraged illegal immigrants to enter Assam and making way for permanent stay which in turn stood as threat to the very survival of the traditionally oriented tribals. In the genre, question of identity assertion and land alienation in the long run led tribals take up democratic revolutions.

4.2. Militarization and Problem of Militancy: The Threat to Generation

The contemporary threat to the Bodo society has been the frequent chaos created by the militants. The underground militants who still holding their base somewhere in the near abroad countries lay the community to reply every queries of blame on the society. Faulty arguments in the air showing the society members being equipped with illegal weapons become the norms. The democratic state apparatus meant for the internal security often runs contrary to functions assigned to it. For instance police, military intervention, operation against the militants goes beyond to create fear psycho in the form of open harassment, arresting innocent students, peasants from the field. Records of fake encounter, extra judicial killings are in addition to the pages of Bodo history. Therefore R.N. Ravi, the retired IB Chief of the NE region rightly remarked, "since year 2000, over 10,000 people have been killed and over 30,000 arrested by the Army and yet Assam does not talk about it..." In 2013, Dec.11 the district Chirang-Assam experienced the mysterious killings of the two innocent students of class 6 and class 10, and the other being seriously injured. The police and army countered the allegations by saying those killed childrens as trained NDFB cadres with AK 47 rifles so did the encounter.^{xviii} However the case was moved to the Court for justice. There are ample of such cases, but aggrieved with no justice. Thus the land is running with gross violation of human rights where not only the anti elements, but the state/centre through their repressive institutions like police, army, paramilitary forces who are meant to protect the lives goes for the contrary acts. Hence, Marx rightly says 'a state is an agency that has the monopoly of violence.' Infact, it becomes the norms for every encounter to claim success by the military and great blow to the militants. Common people know it but to accept as are permitted by the Indian parliamentary laws and so can go free hand with impunity. There, the democratic laws which are supposed for public security in turn stands degrading the right values of the people and extent of saying the gross violation of human rights by the state in covert way. In the genre of violation, Babloo Loitangbam, the director of Mizoram based Human rights Alert says,-If one's blood does not curdle when one hear the atrocities in North East India under the cover of AFSPA, one is moron, not a human.' Even the US Department of State, '2008 Human Right Reports: India' observed and reported which showed high rate of encounter killings occurred in the northeast, particularly in the states of Assam and Manipur.^{xix}

5. Conclusion

Thus the fight for justice in the society not only confined to societal discrimination, but also remained a cry against injustice being inflicted by the governmental institutions like police, army forces. Therefore the government of India should make every possible arrangement within the jurisdiction of Indian Constitution and to address the series of grievances so as to uphold the spirit of 'Ahimsa.' In the context, the people's allegation on the demand for Bodoland should also be addressed so that everyone can have the democratic space for progress and prosperity. The homeland demand is however the exposition of the cry for democratic rights, to safeguard themselves from the injustice meted to them ever since independence. The concept 'son of the soil' needs implementation to address the question of right to self determination. It is rightly recognized by the UN charter; where there is the abuse of human rights the conflict is inevitable. The decade long exploitation, discrimination in every sphere of social lives, the denial of rights to live with dignity, identity and respect has shown the path for state oriented revolution. Keeping the spirit of the Constitution, freedom, justice, peace and development the new state can alternatively be arranged.

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ⁱ Here democratic space is sought to mean those government system which in the contemporary world countries experienced with the conventional autocratic regimes, military coup extending from Europe to middle east Asia has seen the hope for rule of justice.

ⁱⁱ Every government having the subsequent chance to serve the country boast of having multifactor developmental policies. However, the real democracy where lies in the rural progress remains a myth in success.

ⁱⁱⁱ Also see B.M., Pratap. (2003). *The Burden of Democracy*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

^{iv} Varna based society goes in the line advocating section of brethrens as untouchable, prey to injustice to lead a normal lives. But the Indian Constitution makers thought provokingly tried to address such through reserved provisions invalidating 'untouchability' like occurrence.

^v The 'Netas' represents those who politically tries to serve the country. In the party dominated country like India where the expectation lies in the representation in the parliamentary floor has remained the matter of grave concern. They seems rather motivated by their lust for power and resources.

^{vi} Rev. Sidney Endle., noted British missionary had a deep love for the Bodos which he, in his later work 'The Kacharis' led describe as nature loving, peace and candid race.

^{vii} Choudhury, Sujit,(2007).*The Bodos: Emergence and Assertion of an Ethnic Minority*.Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study

^{viii} The proposed ethnic homeland for the Bodos, in greater term of the meaning.

^{ix} The deep national feelings for the community nourished by the historical exploitations they had, extent to the height of seeking separate homeland.

^x The provision was advocated by the colonial jurisdiction with the hope keeping traditionally oriented tribals preserve their distinct cultures within the demarcated areas.

^{xi} Upendra nath Brahma, for his relentless service to the community and brethren tribals, more in a right and democratic way to stand against meted injustice placed him the honor of 'Father of the Bodo.'

^{xii} Laxmikanth, M.(2010).*Indian Polity*.New Delhi:Tata McGraw Hill Education Private Ltd.

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^{xv} The Administrative District BTAD was created in 2003 under 6th scheduled of the Constitution

^{xvi} Kachari, Samarjit. (2014,February).Discourse on Bodoland movement among mainstream Assamese intellectuals. *A Mouthpiece: Somni Thandwi*,111-114.

^{xvii} Onna Bodos represents conglomeration of groups excluding Bodos. Emerged out of allegations of mis-governance, minority rule over the majority in Btad.

^{xviii} Assam Encounter: Cold Blooded murder, alleged Locals; Cops, Army disagree.<http://ndtv.com/article/india/assam-encounter-cold-blooded-cops-disagree-460239/>

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