

PREFACE

The politics of Assam is highly conditioned by ethnic diversity, linguistic pluralism and land alienation problem. The present states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland were hill districts of Assam dominated by Scheduled Tribes. Even after re-organization of Assam in 1972 it has a plural society and the major tribes of the state are Barmans of Cachar, Hmars, Kukis, Rengma Nagas, Hajong, Mech, Bodos, Tiwas, Rabhas, Misings, Karbis etc. From the time of the sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly under the Chairmanship of Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi till date STs are constituting an important factor in the politics of Assam, specially in the decision making process. The recent experience in Assam shows that STs are playing an important role in the political process of the state.

The end of freedom movement in India from foreign bondage ushered in a new era to the country but it could not put an end to the process of ethnic assertion in North East India particularly in Assam. In the Constituent Assembly series of debates took place amongst the members for identifying the best way to solve the problem of hill people of the state. Beginning with the creation of Autonomous District Councils for administration of hill areas of North East India under Sixth Schedule to the constitution till date, Assam politics is conditioned by this problem of autonomy for ethnic groups. Today it has come down from hills to the plains districts of the state.

While framing the Constitution of India a sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly under the Chairmanship of Lokapriya Gopinath Bordoloi was formed to examine the position of the hill areas of Assam. The sub-committee recommended the Constitution of District Councils in all hill districts of the state. The recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee were incorporated in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. The philosophy behind the Sixth Schedule was to safeguard and conserve their way of life and to make it possible for them to participate in the political life and administration of the state.

The Autonomous District Councils started functioning in the erstwhile United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Mizo Hills, the Garo Hills and the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills except Naga Hills. The Naga leaders boycotted not only the election to the District Councils under the Sixth Schedule but also the general elections of 1952 to Assam Legislative Assembly and Parliament. This was the burning point of the political history of the state and sowed the seed of ethnic assertion creating the chain of dissensions amongst different ethnic groups affecting the state and violating mercilessly the Human Rights in the state. However the factors like the process of development, world socio-political scenario, dysfunctioning of the socialising agencies, impact of science and technology etc. can never be denied for such a situation in the state.

The contemporary Assam is experiencing the serious problem of assertion for autonomy by different ethnic groups and the Government of Assam has already signed Bodo, Karbi, Rabha, Hasong, Mising and Tiwa Accord to grant autonomy to them.

On August 1, 1960 the Prime Minister of India announced in parliament that the Government had decided to make Nagaland a state- the 16th State of India. In that year the Government of Assam also passed the Assam Official Languages Act announcing Assamese as the Official Language. In 1962 the State of Nagaland Act was passed by parliament and the state was inaugurated by the President on 1st December, 1963.

The people of other hills districts continued their agitation for autonomy and ultimately the state of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh have been created by dismantling Assam.

After the creation of Nagaland as a state, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi made an announcement on 13 January 1967 that Assam would be re-organized on the basis of federal structure. It helped even the plain Tribals of Assam like Bodo to conceive the idea of a separate state for them. The other ethnic groups also started the movement for self-development and autonomy.

I had the privilege of visiting almost all the corners of the state of Assam, first as a member and then as General Secretary of All Assam Students' Union (AASU). I am still enjoying this privilege as the Advisor to AASU. The close and regular contact with the members of different Scheduled Tribe Communities as sufferers of problems like land alienation, flood, unemployment, economic backwardness, influx of illegal foreigners helped me to appreciate and analyse their problems and the Legislators of Assam as well as the India. I developed the interest of viewing the STs participators' role in the political process of the State with a searching look. With this idea in my mind I approached Professor Dhruvajyoti Bhowmik, Ex-Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of North Bengal, who was kind enough to guide me to translate my dream into reality. This is how I formulated my

research proposal on “Role of STs in Assam Legislative Assembly since 1972”.

The thesis has been prepared on the basis of data available in the Assam Record Room, Assam Legislative Assembly Library, Assam Tribal Institute, Guwahati, District Library, Guwahati and the offices of the political parties situated in different parts of the state, State Election Commission Offices, Census Office, personal libraries of political leaders of Assam.

I took the help of interview schedule for field survey which I administered on the ST MLAs of Assam.

The objectives of the study are,

- 1) To highlight the status of ST members of the Assembly.
- 2) To identify the issues raised by the ST members in the Assembly.
- 3) To evaluate the service rendered by ST MLAs towards the self-development of their communities in particular and development of the state of Assam in general.
- 4) To explore the cause for failure of ST members to take developmental policies for the tribal communities.

With a sketchy description of Assam, its population, economy, political history, elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly in the chapter I of the thesis as introduction, I have begun my work.

Chapter II contains socio-political background of the ST MLAs. This chapter has been prepared on the basis of data collected through Interview

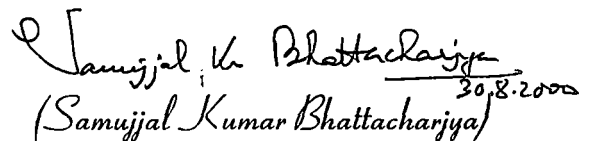
Schedule. In this chapter the socio- political profile of the MLAs has been analysed under six heads as Introduction, Education, Family Background, Political Life, Awareness about the tribal problems and Role in Implementation of Developmental Programmes.

Chapter III is on Planning, Programming and Budgeting in which I have analysed in detail about the Tribal sub-plan referring to its coverage in terms of population and area, problems having priority in planning budget allocation and administrative authority highlighting the scope for participation by the ST MLAs.

Chapter IV contains the nature of questions and issues raised by the ST MLAs on the floor of the House since 1972.

Chapters V and VI have been devoted to significant issues and ST MLAs. Chapter V contains the general issues and under this head I have discussed major three issues, viz. Foreigners', Unemployment and Language and in Chapter VI, I have highlighted specific issues, viz. Self Development and Ethnic Autonomy and Land. The basis for classification of the issues into two categories is the nature and coverage of these issues.

The last chapter is epilogue in which I have depicted an outline of the whole problem of study, findings of my research and suggestions forwarded to enhance the scope and strength of participation in the legislative process of the state of Assam by the STs in the greater interest of the nation as a whole.


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