

# STATE POLITICS IN ASSAM

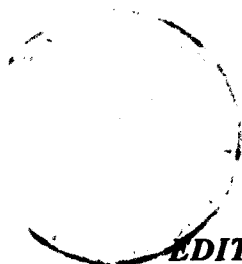
[RECENT TRENDS IN THE GOVERNMENT  
AND POLITICS OF ASSAM]

**EDITED BY**

**Bolin Hazarika  
Arun Kr. Baishya**

# STATE POLITICS IN ASSAM

[Recent Trends in the Government and  
Politics of Assam]



*EDITORS*

**Bolin Hazarika  
Arun Kr. Balshya**

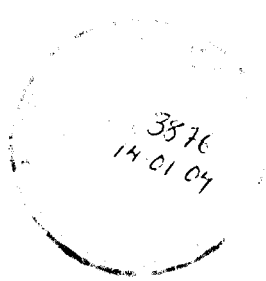


*Published by :*

Department of Political Science  
J. B. College  
Jorhat - 785 001  
Assam

**STATE POLITICS IN ASSAM**  
**Recent Trends in the Govt. and Politics of Assam**

© 2000, Editors  
First Published, January.2000



*Publisher :*

**Department of Political Science**  
**J. B. College, Jorhat - 785 001 (Assam)**

*Printed at :*

**Barkataki and Company (P) Limited**  
**Jorhat - 785 001 (Assam) Ph. : 320794**

*The views expressed in these papers are the personal opinions of the contributors and are in no sense official. Neither the Deptt. of Pol. Science, J.B. College nor the editors is responsible for them.*

# CONTENTS

## PART I

### **ETHNIC PROBLEMS AND MOVEMENTS**

Ethnic politics in Assam	1
- <i>B.Baruah</i>	
Bodo Movement : A preliminary enquiry into the role of the middle class and the state	6
- <i>C.K.Sharma</i>	
Student movements and political trends in Assam	18
- <i>R.C.Kalita</i>	
Impact of terrorism on the politics of Assam	33
- <i>A.K.Baruah</i>	

## PART II

### **MINORITY POLITICS AND IMMIGRATION PROBLEMS**

Recent trends in the minority politics of Karbi Anglong	45
- <i>B.C.Bhuyan</i>	
North-East and Assam : Problems and politics of immigration	54
- <i>M.Pandit</i>	
A critical analysis of the policy perspective of the Congress and the A.G.P. towards Bangladeshi immigrants	60
- <i>J.Bora</i>	
Immigration – A silent invasion to polity and economy of Assam : A case study of Jorhat Municipal Area (JMA)	68
- <i>J.Hazarika</i>	

### **PART III**

#### **RESERVATION AND ELECTORAL POLITICS OF ASSAM**

- Fractured identities politics in a multi-ethnic state 75  
- *A.K.Baruah and Sandhya Goswami*
- Reservation for tribes : A facet of the middle class politics in Assam 103  
- *B.Hazarika*
- Role of minorities in the electoral politics of Assam during last three Assembly Elections 110  
- *K.Goswami*
- The participation of the people of Jorhat District in the last two general elections : An analysis 118  
- *M.Hazarika*

### **PART IV**

#### **POLITICS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

- Economic development and political will with special reference to Assam 127  
- *P.Baishya*
- Socio- Economic impact of Tea Industry on the surrounding localities : A case study 134  
- *B.Barah*
- Development profile of small scale industries in Assam : Challenges for the new Millennium 141  
- *M.K.Dutta*
- Sustainable rural development in Assam 150  
- *Mouchumi K.Borgohain*

## ETHNIC POLITICS IN ASSAM

B. Baruah

The word 'Ethnic' comes from the Greek word 'ethos' which means a tribe. Ethnic groups exist by virtue of longstanding association across generations, complex relations of kinship, common culture and usually religious uniformity and common territorial attachment<sup>1</sup>. Ethnic groups are identified not in terms of political institutions, but in terms of blood-relationship, language and regional attachment. The members of most ethnic groups have a sense of group identity. Sometimes, the feelings of racial and cultural superiority work toward reserving ethnic groups. For every ethnic group one's own group is the centre of everything and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it<sup>2</sup>. Ethnicity takes the form of a distrust of outside groups and a belief in the superiority of one's own people.

The Assamese society is a mosaic of ethnic groups. Assam, which was known as Kamrupa, was the meeting ground of many races and tribes of Dravidian, Aryan and Mongoloid origins. All the races lived and grew in an atmosphere of cordiality for many years and contributed toward the growth of language and culture of the region. The Assamese Society is the result of assimilation of various groups and tribes, it became a united nationality in the region comprising the Brahmaputra Valley. In spite of ethnic diversity there was unity in the Assamese Society.

But during the last three decades the Political situation of Assam has been seriously disturbed by the aggressive assertion of identities by many ethnic minorities. It is interesting to note that many communities, used to consider themselves as integral parts of the greater Assamese Community, are now demanding cultural revivalism, expressing itself in demanding political autonomy. It is also interesting to note that these demands are initiated mainly by the educated elites of the different ethnic groups. Their main demand is to liberate their respective ethnic groups from the domination of the "Asomiya" nationality which is considered to be comparatively advanced. Some of the ethnic groups are demanding separate state while the others are demanding autonomy

within the present state structure. Yet others are demanding for their inclusion in the scheduled list with the expectation of obtaining the benefits of Reservation.

The BODOS constitute an integral part of Assamese mainstream. They have distinct ethnic identity of their own. However, the scenario began to change from 1950 onwards. With the formation of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the Bodo educated elite resisted the Assamese hegemony. The movement for Bodo Script (1974) and language indicated their ethnic consciousness and political aspirations. Their agitation was directed mainly against Assamese middle class and the big brotherly attitude of the Assamese nationality. The formation of the Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) did not satisfy the political aspirations of the Bodo elite and thus, resulted in a movement. The youths took the leadership in the movement. The creation of a separate state of Bodoland, dividing Assam fifty-fifty etc. were the principal demand of the Bodos. Urge for ethnic identity of the Bodos was further inspired by the success of the Assam Movement that was led by All Assam Students' Union during 1979-85. The Assam Accord provided important safeguard for the identity of the people of Assam. The clause 6 of the Assam Accord said - "constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards, as may be appropriate, shall be provided to protect, preserve and promote, the cultural, social and linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people."

The leaders of the Bodo movement were specially attracted by this clause. They were interested to achieve similar "constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards" for the Bodo people.

Like the Assam Movement, the Bodo Movement was also led by the students. The ABSU which was formed in 1967 came into prominence in 1986, with the election of Upendra Nath Brahma as its President. In order to pursue their interest, they started mobilising the lower strata of their own community. In 1988 the Bodo Peoples' Action Committee (BPAC) was formed to mobilise "All the people in the Bodoland Movement." The BPAC can be considered as the armed wing of the ABSU. Violence was committed against the non-tribals of the districts of Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Borpeta, Nalbari, Darrang and Sonitpur. The violence committed was officially acknowledged when on 29th Feb '93, the Bodo Accord was signed<sup>3</sup>. But the most ticklish problem of boundary demarcation remains unsolved up to date. The demarcation controversy has resulted in mounting violence in the BAC areas.

The attitude of the Bodos towards the 'Asomiyas' can be gauged from the terms that they use -- "Bodos are not Assamese", "The Assamese people have no right to rule over the tribals -- the sons of the soil." "The tribals are the original masters of Assam." "The tribals are not Assamese", "Rajbanshis are not Assamese", "The Assam Govt. is dangerously anti-tribal," etc.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, the present situation is one of uncertainty. If measures for an amiable settlement is not taken with earnestness, the situation may further deteriorate.

The Ahoms established their reign in Assam in 1228 and it continued upto 1826 A.D. It was a remarkable dynastic rule in the region. But with the annexation of Assam by the British in 1826, the ruling race had lost not only their power, but also their former social and economic positions of affluence. In April, 1971 the Ujani Assam Rajya Parishad was formed to protect and nourish the identity of the Ahoms. Of course, the UARP is not the first organisation of this type. Even before that the All Assam Ahom Association and Tai Mongolio Rajya Parishad were there, but they had no formal constitutions<sup>5</sup>.

Immediately after its formation the UARP proposed that Assam should be reorganised on Federal basis dividing it into four federating units, each with a separate legislature. They were (i) Hill Districts, (ii) Cachar (iii) Upper Assam and (iv) Lower Assam. Subsequently, it demanded a separate state of Udayasal comprising the districts of Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur. Interestingly, the Parishad has not taken any decision for mass movement and direct action.

The Karbi-Dimasa autonomy movement is another aspect of the ethnic politics of Assam. According to section 20 of the sixth Schedule, the tribal areas of Assam were classified into part A and Part B. The Part A included the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills, the Mikir Hills, the Naga Hills and North Cachar Hills and Part B included the North East Frontier Tract, Abor and Misimi Hills and Naga Tribal areas. Most of these Hill areas were given separate statehood, but Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills are yet to attain that status. The demand for Karbi-Dimasa autonomy was first raised in 1960, when the then Chief Minister of Assam moved the Assam official Language Bill (10th Oct. '60). The Mikir and North Cachar Hill leaders Conference submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister explaining that "Assamese" Junta are determined to "Assamise them by forcing

Assamese upon them, and wiping out their own language and culture which they cherish to develop, such naked imposition the hill people are not going to tolerate." They said, "The only solution to our problem lies in immediate creation of an Autonomous State. Only by this we shall be able to exist unhampered to preserve our own entity, language, culture and traditions ... without remaining confined to the Backwaters of the Brahmaputra<sup>6</sup>".

The case of the KOCH-RAJBANSHIS is another example of ethnic assertion which fit into the ethnic politics of Assam. The Koch-Rajbanshi Sanmilani has submitted a number of memoranda and gave representations to different authorities demanding scheduled status under the Constitutional provisions. In their first memorandum submitted on 23rd June 1967, they demanded their inclusion in the scheduled Caste list, but in August 1980, they revised their earlier demand, and put forward a modified demand for inclusion in the list of scheduled tribes<sup>7</sup>. One peculiar feature of the Koch-Rajbanshi Movement is that unlike the Bodoland, Udayasal and Karbi-Anglong movement, the Koch-Rajbanshi are not demanding separate state. But what is most interesting is that the demand of the Koch-Rajbanshis has been vehemently opposed by the other scheduled tribes of Assam. Under such situation, the possibility of inter-ethnic clashes cannot be altogether ruled out.

In addition to the Bodos, Ahoms, Karbis and the Koch-Rajbanshis, we have in Assam a number of other ethnic groups like the Khamtis, Phakials, Turungs, Naras, Aitons, the Chutias, the Missings, the Deuris, the Kacharis, Morans, Tewas, Jogies, the Kaibortos, the Tea-garden labourers and the so called Caste-Hindus like the Keot, Kalitas, Kayasthas and the Brahmins. The Muslims also constitute an integral part of the population of Assam. All these castes and sub-castes have their own customs and traditions and have contributed to the greater Assamese culture.

Thus, it is evident that ethnic activism has found expression through both peaceful and violent means. The issue of language has played a very important role in this respect. Both the Bodos and the Karbis are opposed to the introduction of Assamese as the official language and the medium of instruction. It is also evident that the ethnic movements are initiated by the elites of the ethnic groups. In certain cases the students also have taken leading role to pursue their communities. The cultural and ethnic issues they raise are closely related with economic

issues. The parochial and communalistic approach is due to their sense of economic deprivation. To improve their economic condition the transfer of political power is a necessary condition. But economic prosperity alone will not fulfill all the nationalistic and cultural aspirations of the ethnic groups. Of course, one thing can be said that once they achieve economic development, it would provide opportunities for the fulfilment of other cultural aspirations.

The problem of ethnicity has disturbed the whole social and political atmosphere of Assam. The need of the hour is, therefore, co-ordinated development of all ethnic groups and a political will to establish peace in the minds of the indigenous population. As the ethnic problem is psychological, psycho-emotional approach is necessary for its solution. Care and understanding of the ethnic aspirations, through honest and sincere negotiations alone can establish unity among different ethnic groups. The demands of different ethnic groups should be viewed as a whole. We must think in terms of development of the whole region. A climate must be created where every citizen feels assured that his or her language, culture and distinct identity are secure. Conditions for community participation at every level through greater decentralisation of power will help in removing the fear of identity crisis. Political parties must enthuse the people in the spirit of unity. They must avoid playing one group against another. The intellectuals, administrators and the medias also can contribute a great deal in creating a congenial atmosphere. Sincere, genuine, concerted and constructive actions will yield rich dividend and make Assam a place of good-will and peace.

## References

1. Scruton, Roges, *Dictionary of Political Thought*. (PP 157)
2. *American Social Encyclopaedia*.
3. *American Social Encyclopaedia*.
4. Datta, P. S., *Autonomy Movement in Assam*, Har Anand Publications (1985) PP. 241, 245, 251.
5. Datta, P.S., *Ethnic Movement in Polycultural Assam*, Har Anand Publications (1990), P, 29.
6. Memorendum submitted to the Prime Minister on Nov. 24, 1980.
7. Datta, P.S., (1990), P.169.