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Bodoland Territorial Region Election 2020: A Study **Topu Choudhury**

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Abstract:

After achieving India's independence, the Bodos, the largest tribe of Assam, under the banner of All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) launched a movement for separate homeland namely 'Bodoland'. A section of Bodo militant outfits- National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) have raised secessionist demands for the creation of sovereign state of Bodoland. After a series of prolonged bipartite and tripartite talks between of India and Assam and ABSU leaders "Bodoland Autonomous Council" (BAC) was formed in 1993. Further, a Memorandum of Settlement was signed in 2003 between the BLT leaders, Government of India and Assam and consequently, Bodoland Territorial Council was formed. And again, in 27th January 2020, an agreement was between the NDFB leaders, ABSU leaders, Government of India and Government of Assam which resulted the formation of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). The formation of BAC or BTC or BTR have provided an opportunity to the people of this particular region to elect their representatives through direct election for the development of the region. This paper mainly attempts to study the election of newly formed BTR and its consequences.

Keywords: *Independence, Sovereign, Bodoland, Militants, Election*

Introduction: In the 1980s', the people of Assam has witnessed a series of popular movements on the issue of eco-political and cultural harmony. One of such popular movement was launched by the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) and Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) (joined later on) demanding for the creation of a separate Bodo state in the north bank of the mighty Brahmaputra River. This movement continued for a period of six years and came to a temporary solution with the signing of the Memorandum of Settlement (MOS) popularly known as "Bodoland Accord" on 20th February 1993 in Kokrajhar, Assam. The following signatories S.K. Bwismuthiary, The then President of ABSU, Subhas Basumatary, Chairman of BPAC, K.S. Rao, the Additional Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, Hiteswar Saikia, the then Chief Minister of Assam and Rajesh Pilot, the then Union Minister of the State for Home Affairs signed the accord as witness and

central observer respectively (The Assam Tribune, 21st February 1993). Consequently, the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) was formed with the villages having 50 percent and above tribal population.

However, the formation of BAC failed to cope up with the expectations of all sections of the Bodos. Meanwhile, the militant organization Bodoland Liberation Tiger (BLT) reached a ceasefire agreement with the Govt. of India on March 29, 2000. After a series of tripartite talks held between the BLT leaders, Govt. of India and Govt. of Assam, on February 10, 2003 a MOS was signed in New Delhi by the following signatories Hagrama Mahilary, the BLT Chairman, R.C. Jain, Secretary to the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Govt. of India, P.K. Dutta, Chief Secretary to the Govt. of Assam, Tarun Gogoi, Chief Minister of Assam and L.K. Advani, Deputy Prime Minister of India. The agreement created an autonomous self-governing body to be known as Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) within the state of Assam administering 3082 villages making four districts namely- Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri under the provisions of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India to fulfill economic, educational and linguistic aspirations and the preservation of land rights, socio-cultural and ethnic identity of the Bodos (MOS, 2003). The formation of BTC abolished the Bodoland Accord of 1993 and a new political party in the name of Bodo Peoples' Front (BPF) was formed, particularly with the leaders and cadres of BLT.

Further, the people of BTC witnessed another Bodoland Accord that was signed on 27th January 2020 in New Delhi. After a long round of talks held between the four factions of NDFB, ABSU, Govt. of India and Govt. of Assam, the third Bodoland Accord was signed by the following signatories- Promod Boro, President of ABSU, the leaders of four NDFB factions- Ranjan Daimary, Govinda Basumatary, B. Saoraigra and Dhiren Boro respectively, Hagrama Mahilary, the BTC Chief, Sarbananda Sonowal, Chief Minister of Assam, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, Finance, Education & PWD Minister to the state of Assam, Sanjay Krishna, Chief Secretary to the State of Assam and Amit Shah, Union Home Minister, as witness to the accord (The Assam Tribune, 28th January, 2020). The signing of the new Bodoland Accord abolished the Bodoland Accord of 2003. The Bodoland is now named as Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) and will have more administrative power. With the signing of this accord, the Bodoland now has free from the clutches of terrorism and a new political party United Peoples' Party Liberal (UPPL) was formed particularly with the leaders and members of ABSU and NDFB.

Conceptual Framework: Election, the war on ballot, are the heart and soul of democracy and whenever held are of momentous significance. The BTR Election 2020 can be considered as a part of a process for democratic education for the regional political parties of Assam. Surely, in case of BTR, it is a reminder to the party in power that even a newly formed political party can form the government. Electorate in BTR has voted for a change in the region and has taken resource to retributive justice. BTR has come out strongly for UPPL and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). What has come as a big surprise in this BTR Election 2020, is that the BJP though in alliance with BPF in the Assam Government,

put a strong fight to the ruling BPF in BTC and come out winning 9 seats in the election. The BJP's emergence as an important electoral force is very significant as its base has also expanded throughout the Bodoland region.

The BTR Election 2020 was particularly significant because it was held for the first without a threat posed by any militant organization. Contextually, this election was completely free from any kind of terrorist activities.

Review of Literature: N.G.Mahanta in the paper "Aspects of Bodoland Movement" argues that if the majority of non-Bodo population have to lose their political rights and social status, in the long run it may be that common interest and motive will unite them all, irrespective of their caste, religion and may be induced to adopt insurgency activities, as the Bodos have done against the government. Dilip Kumar Kundu in his book "The State and the Bodo Movement in Assam" mentioned that the Bodo movement has emerged as a powerful autonomy movement in Assam that has engaged long standing deliberation and negotiation with federal state on the question of autonomy. He further mentioned that the signing of Bodo accord of 1993, the peace accord with BLT in 2002 and the extension of sixth schedule status to the plain tribals of Assam demonstrates the incorporative character of Indian federalism. Khema Sonowal in her book "Why Bodoland Movement" mentioned that the Bodo autonomy movement is a Bodo middle class movement for attaining power with the base of the mass support. However, whatever may be the nature of the leadership, the Bodoland movement has been borne out of the genuine grievances, with their legacy of the past. Dhruva Pratim Sarma in the paper "Ethnic Assertion among the Bodos of Assam: A Contextual Study of the Bodoland Movement" argues that the Bodoland movement was the result of a long drawn process of identity formation among the Bodos starting from the colonial period and gradually becoming much more assertive in the post colonial period. Bodo ethnicity has been a vehicle for significant social reform' as a reactionary force, it is narrow, parochial and chauvinistic.

Objectives of the Study: The central focus of the study lies on the election of BTR, 2020. The following are the objectives of this paper:

1. To study analytically the BTR election result
2. To study the performances of political parties contested in the election.

Methodology: This paper is mainly based on secondary sources. Various books, journals, newspapers, research articles as well as internet sources are consulted to prepare this paper.

Discussion and Result: The BTR Election was very significant because it was held after the signing of the historic Third Bodo Accord with all the four factions of NDFB and the ABSU which had been demanding a separate homeland for the Bodos. It was also significant because the Third Bodo Accord had abolished the BTC which was created in 2003. The BTR election was held in two phases. The polling date for 1st phase was 7th December 2020, constituencies falling under Udalguri and Baksa district. The polling date

for 2nd phase was 10th December, 2020, constituencies falling under Kokrajhar and Chirang district. 79% of voters voted in the election.

Table No.1 Total Seats Constituency Wise of BTC Legislative Assembly

Sl. No	Name of Constituency	No. of Seats	Total Seats
1.	Udalguri	10	40
2.	Baksa	11	
3.	Chirang	7	
4.	Kokrajhar	12	

Source: BTC Legislative Assembly, Bodoland.gov.in

The above table shows the constituency wise number of seats of BTC now BTR Legislative Assembly. Kokrajhar constituency has the highest number of seats followed by Baksa, Udalguri and Chirang. The Governor of Assam nominates six numbers of members to the assembly, thereby making the total seats to 46.

Table No.2 Number of Seats won by the Parties in the Election

Sl. No	Parties	Seats Contested	Seats Won
1.	Bodoland People's Front (BPF)	37	17
2.	United People's Party Liberal (UPPL)	40	12
3.	Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	26	9
4.	All India United Democratic Front(AIUDF)	7	0
5.	Indian National Congress(INC)	13	1
6.	Gana Suraksha Party(GSP)	35	1
7.	Assam Gana Parishad (AGP)	1	0
8.	Independent (IND)	84	0

Source: The Assam Tribune, 13th December, 2020

From the results it appears that BPF contested 37 sets and won 17, while UPPL contested 40 seats and won 12, BJP contested 26 seats and won 9, Congress contested 13 seats and won 1, GSP contested 35 seats and won 1. The AIUDF, AGP and the independent candidates failed to win any of the seats. The result indicates that no party has won the majority seats to form a government. The mandate was against the ruling party BPF.

Table No.3 Performance of the parties Constituency Wise

Sl. No	Parties	Seats Won Constituency Wise				Total Seats Won
		Kokrajhar	Chirang	Baksa	Udalguri	
1.	BPF	9	5	2	1	17
2.	UPPL	1	1	5	5	12
3.	BJP	1	1	3	4	9
4.	AIUDF	0	0	0	0	0
5.	INC	1	0	0	0	1
6.	GSP	0	0	1	0	1
7.	AGP	0	0	0	0	0

Source: The Assam Tribune, 13th December, 2020

The above table shows the constituency wise performance of the political parties. The BPF has won 9 seats in the Kokrajhar constituency, while in Chirang 5 seats, Baksa 2 seats and 1 seat in Udalguri. UPPL has won 1 seat each in Kokrajhar and Chirang, and 5 seats each in Baksa and Udalguri. Whereas the BJP has won 1 seat each in Kokrajhar and Chirang, 3 seats in Baksa and 4 seats in Udalguri. Congress and GSP has somehow managed to win 1 seat each in Kokrajhar and Baksa respectively. The AIUDF and AGP failed to open their account in any of the seats. With 17 seats, the BPF has emerged as the single largest party but short of the majority.

Table No.4 Comparison between 2015 & 2020 Election Result

Sl. No	Parties	2015 Won/Contested	2020 Won/Contested
1.	Bodoland People's Front (BPF)	20/40	17/37
2.	United People's Party Liberal (UPPL)	----	12/40
3.	Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)	1/40	9/26
4.	All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF)	4/8	0/7
5.	Indian National Congress (INC)	0/40	1/13
6.	Gana Suraksha Party (GSP)	-----	1/35
7.	Assam Gana Parishad (AGP)	0/6	0/1
8.	Independent (IND)	15/191	0/84
9.	Communist Party of India	0/7	-----

Source: BTC Legislative Assembly, Bodoland.gov.in

The table 4 clearly indicates the election results of 2015 and 2020. It shows that the BPF has loss 3 seats in the 2020 election, but the BJP has managed to increase its seat from 1 to 9 in 2020 election. The most interesting fact is that in the 2015 election 15 numbers of seats were won by the independent candidates whereas in 2020 election none of the seats were won by the independent candidates.

Findings of the Study:

1. 21 seats are required to form a government in BTR but no single party has been able to win the majority number of seats to form a government.
2. One of the important findings of this election is the emergence of UPPL in Bodoland. The UPPL, though contesting for the first time in the BTR election has been able to give a tough fight to the ruling party BPF.
3. The Bodoland has witnessed the first alliance government between UPPL and BJP in this region since its formation.
4. The BPF, who has ruled the BTC for 3 consecutive terms, have to occupy the opposition seat for the first time.
5. Most of the leaders of the four factions of the NDFB have either contested election from BPF or UPPL. At present, the Bodoland is free from the clutches of terrorism.
6. This study reveals the strong base of BPF in Kokrajhar constituency where BPF has managed to win 9 seats out of 12.
7. The BJP has managed to increase its political base in Bodoland.

Conclusions: The election result to the 4th BTC is pointers to certain emerging trends in the electoral politics in Bodoland. The most significant trend is that the hold of BPF has considerably weakened in the region. That the political balance in Bodoland has shifted a great deal is evident from the fact that UPPL and BJP has emerged as a political force. The factors that contributed to the rise of UPPL and BJP in Bodoland, which in the events turned out to be and acceptable force of regionalism have deep roots in the social, economic and political history of the region. The elections in these areas clearly reflect ethnic polarization as well as ethnic accommodation.

Whatever be the election result or which party forms the government is not the matter of concern, the important point is that the government should thrive for the all inclusive growth and development of the region irrespective of caste, creed, religion, etc.

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