

## **Telengana and Afterwards**

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**Abstract:** Demand for statehood is a common factor of regional aspiration in Indian political system. Just after the declaration of Telengana as the 29<sup>th</sup> state of India, the people of different parts of India started to raise voices for separate state. In Assam, four communities, Bodos, Koch-Rajbangshis, Karbis and Dimasas started to show their anger for not fulfilling their long standing demands of separate statehood. This paper makes an attempt to find out the causes of their demands for statehood and suggest few measures that may solve the problems of these communities without bifurcating the state of Assam and within the purview of Indian Constitution.

**Keywords:** Bodo, Dimasa, Karbi, Koch-Rajbangshi, regionalism, statehood, Telengana,

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### **I. Introduction**

On July 30, 2013 the congress working committee pronounced in a unanimous resolution that Telengana would be a reality and it will be India's 29<sup>th</sup> state. The UPA Government's decision to create Telengana carving out from Andhrapradesh has brought long standing demands by four ethnic groups of Assam to the fore with large scale violence and agitation erupting in the state. The Bodos and Koch Rajbangshis in the plains of lower and Northern Assam and the Karbis and Dimasa tribes in the hills of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao have been agitating for decades demanding separate state on the basis of their linguistic and ethnic identities.

The demand for separate state in India is not a new one. It started from 50's decade with the formation of state reorganization commission. The supporters of linguistic reorganization argue that in a federation, the federating units should have minimum similarities. The linguistic differences create problems in administration as well as create political rivalry among the people of a particular territory. So, language should be the basis of state reorganization. Thus, Nagaland was carved out from Assam in 1963, Punjab and Haryana divided in 1966, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura in 1971, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh in 1987, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh in 2000. It has been argued that centre's willingness to create new states by helping to accommodate regional aspirations has been quite healthy for Indian polity. Sometimes the new states do better than their parents. In NE Region Mizoram and Tripura are much ahead of Assam. Uttarakhand leapfrogged ahead of its parent state Uttarapradesh particularly because of its special category status of its industry. Jharkhand is doing worse than Bihar because of unstable political platform. But economically they are far behind than the parents state. Usually, the smaller states do not have better governance or greater prosperity.

Present paper is a study of recent violence erupted in different parts of Assam in protest against not fulfilling the demands (long standing) of four tribal communities. Number of news items and articles published in various local news papers helped to analyse the reasons of grievances of these four tribes of Assam. If the Govt. fulfils the demand of these tribes, the other communities also be encouraged to raise their demands for separate statehood. But that's not the solution. Mere statehood cannot improve the condition of these people living in this remote part of India. Hence, this paper makes an attempt to suggest few measures that may improve these areas and the standard of living of the people of these areas within the existing status.

### **II. Sixth Schedule And Tribal Development**

The idea behind the sixth schedule was to provide the tribal people with administration or power to safeguard their customs and way of life. The provisions of the sixth schedule assure the people of the Tribal area regarding the autonomy in the management of their own affairs. The tribal people are sensitive about their land, forest, their customs and system of justice. Under the sixth schedule of Indian constitution district councils were constituted in the hill districts of Assam except the Naga Hills. The district councils have to exercise their powers and functions in matters pertaining to their customs and institutions without affecting the unity and general responsibilities of the state and the union government. The district council under the sixth schedule may be regarded as important local bodies for direct participation of the people in administration of their own affairs. The district council can not be created by the state govt. The provisions of the district council can be amended by the union parliament only. The autonomous district council is a body corporate and it appears that the council may act independently of the state legislature. But the position in actual practice is different. The governor of

the state is the head of the district council. He has the power to suspend any act or resolution of the district council which is contrary to the provision of the sixth schedule or likely to endanger the safety of the country or prejudicial to public order. The governor may also suspend the council or may assume all or some of the powers and functions of the council for a period of six months. He may also dissolve the council on the recommendation of the inquiry commission to be appointed under para 14 of sixth schedule regarding mismanagement of the council. The inquiry commission is set up on the recommendation of the state council of ministers and the order must be approved by the legislature of the state concerned. Thus, it can be said that the district council is not an independent autonomous institution. In many cases it has failed to evoke local initiatives and people's participation in the development activities to the desired extent. The council failed to protect the socio-economic interests and customs and traditions of the tribal people because of political interference or lack of leadership. Many times, the members of the council fight among themselves as well as misuse the fund. As a result, the aspiration of the people remains same as before. If the district councils like to function in a proper way its autonomy should be restored by scrapping the overriding powers of the state govt. over the district councils. Adequate grants –in aid must be given to them and political corruption must be stopped at any cost.

Formation of district council in Assam: It was under the Govt. of India Act 1935 that the hill areas of Assam were classified into three categories: a) Excluded areas, b) Partially excluded areas, c) Frontier areas. The excluded areas were the Naga Hills, the Lusai hills, and the North Cachar hills, the Garo hills and the Mikir hills and the British portions of the Khasi and Jaintia hills other than the Shillong municipality and cantonment areas were partially excluded areas. The frontier areas were Balipara, Sadiya, Lakhimpur tracts. The political status of the excluded and partially excluded areas was discussed in the cabinet mission of the British Govt. in 1946. It suggested that an advisory committee on the rights of the citizens, minorities and tribals should be formed to make proposals for the administration of tribal areas. The constituent assembly set up an advisory committee under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi. After the implementation of new constitution following tribal areas of Assam were included under the sixth schedule as per Article 244(2) and 275(1): The North Cachar hill district, The Khasi hill district, The Karbi Anglong hill district, Jaintia hill district, Garo hill district, Chakma, Lakher and Pawi hill district. After the creation of separate state of Meghalaya and Mizoram the North Cachar hill district and Karbi Anglong hill district remained with Assam. After the amendment of the constitution in 1995, the district councils of Assam renamed as North Cachar hills autonomous council and Karbi Anglong autonomous council. The district council of Bodoland renamed as Bodoland territorial council in 2003.

The Bodos currently enjoy autonomy in the form of Bodoland territorial council under the provision of the sixth schedule to the constitution. The BTC comprises of four districts of Assam namely, Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri. The Karbis and Dimasas also enjoy autonomy under the sixth schedule, ruling over the Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao hill districts respectively. The three autonomous councils have legislative, administrative, and financial and judiciary powers within the jurisdictional territories of the councils in respect of the subjects concerned to them by the state government. Apart from these three autonomous councils there are six other autonomous councils for six ethnic groups of Assam. They are the Rabhas, the Tiwas, the Deoris, the Misings, the Thengal Kocharis and the Sonowal Kocharis. Moreover there are 18 development bodies for 18 smaller communities. On the other hand, the Koch Rajbanshis do not have an autonomous council and the community's long standing demand for inclusion in the list of scheduled tribe has not yet been met by the government. Besides the Koch Rajbanshis there are five more communities in Assam as the Morans, the Motoks, the Chutias, the Tea tribes and the Tai-Ahoms are demanding for the inclusion in the list of scheduled tribes.

### **III. Demand For Separate State**

Demand for separate state is a kind of regionalism in India which began after the formation of state reorganization commission in 1956. The union parliament had to fulfill the aspiration of the people by creating new states from the parent one. In this way, the number of states increased upto 29 in 2013 from 14 in 1956. The demand for separate state is fuelled not only due to linguistic differences but also due to some other reasons like economic exploitation, political deprivation, fear of losing own cultural identity as well as political ambition of the local politicians. Thus, immediately after the cabinet's decision to create separate Telengana state, the situation in Karbi Anglong autonomous council area took a violent turn. In Karbi Anglong, a number of organizations including ruling congress is for the creation of an autonomous state within Assam under the provision of Article 244(A) of the constitution of India that would include the two hill districts Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao. On the other hand, some groups demand for a separate state with twin hill districts. Some Dimasa organizations demand for a separate Dimasa state comprising the lands of Dima Hasao district, the Dimasa inhabited land of Karbi Anglong, some parts of Nagaon district and Dimapur of Nagaland, which was the capital of Dimasa kingdom in the ancient time. The violent unrest in Karbi Anglong compelled the Govt. of

Assam to impose curfew and staged flag march by the army to control the situation. In the same way, the Bodos of BTS area started a non-violent agitation under the leadership of ABSU and BPF. The agitation for a separate Bodoland state has triggered a counter agitation and strong resistance from non-Bodo communities living in BTAD areas. They alleged that the Bodos who comprised only 28 percent of the total population in BTC are not eligible for a separate state. The Koch Rajbanshis under the leadership of AKRASU has demanded for a separate Kamtapur state comprising of 5 districts of Assam and six from West Bengal. The demands for separate states by these four communities have paralyzed the normal life in the state. The chief minister of Assam and other opposition parties ruled out any further division of Assam and organized a number of talks with the agitating leaders to bring back normalcy in the state. Though the normal situation restored in the state but no govt. or political party can be overlooked the aspiration and demand of any tribe/community for a long time.

It has been observed that the people of the tribal areas are unhappy with the autonomy they have been provided by the sixth schedule of the constitution. The tribal autonomy, administrative councils and the territorial councils have failed to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the people. It has been alleged that the spirit of tribal autonomy began to be diluted almost immediately after the creation of these autonomous councils as real powers rested with the state government. For example, in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao councils only six minor departments were transferred to the councils and the chairman of these department had to take prior approval from the DC to raise any matter in the council's meetings. Moreover, the corruptions, misuse of fund, failure to devolve power to common people have completely jeopardized these unique institutions to empower the tribal people and safeguard their political, economic, social, cultural and linguistic identities. The promises of both the state and central govt. to give more powers and fund for the development of the tribal people are in vain. Autonomous areas are still considered to be among the most backward areas due to the lack of basic infrastructure human development indices. The condition of the mass people remain same as before the creation of autonomous councils excluding a few privileged group of people or leaders who are enjoying the powers and money. Thus, a majority of these tribal people believe that a separate state of their own can fulfill their aspiration and may change their conditions. Whereas experience shows that separate state is not the only solution of this problem. The development of tribal communities may be possible if the leaders devote themselves for the welfare of the community in the true sense, if they can overcome the selfish motive, if the grass root people realize the value of participation in political affairs. If there is equal share of each and every benefit among the people. The schemes of development must reach to the mass and needy people instead of few privileged one. There should be the direct funding system from the centre to the autonomous regions and transfer of more subjects and departments to the councils. Some people suggest for an autonomous state within the state under the Article 244(A).

The territorial area of the separate states demanded by the four tribal communities is quite confusing. There are some common areas which are demanded by both Karbis and Dimasas. The Karbis have a dormant demand for Bokajan district by upgrading the Bokajan sub-division where the non-Karbis are majority comprising 60 percent population. In Karbi Anglong hill district also there is Karbi- Kuki conflict regarding territory which is not yet solved. Thus, if their demand for a separate state be accepted, peace may not be restored there and if there is no peace – prosperity and welfare remain a dream only. Same thing may happen for Bodoland and Kamtapur. The proposed Bodoland state includes more areas than the present BTAD. Apart from Kokrajhar, the Bodoland agitators demand areas including Dhubri, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darang and Sonitpur. This promises a confrontation with the Koch Rajbanshis as their proposed Kamtapur state belongs to six districts of West Bengal and four from Assam including Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Goalpara. Thus, demanding for a same territory by two separate state demand committees may lead to the misery of mass people. Above all, there is a third force non-Bodos. Thus, Bodoland, as separate state cannot be a reality where they are minority.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Whether a separate state curbing from Assam can improve the condition of the tribal people or they can improve their standard of living within the present framework. The debate is going on. Experience shows that development is a continuous and gradual process. Development is possible by the joint and sincere effort of both people and Govt. This can be done by strengthening the autonomous and administrative division in Assam established on the basis of sixth schedule. The experience of Tripura, a neighboring state of Assam over the past decades and more has shown that the implementation of appropriate autonomy package could prove to be an effective step and an aid to development. As in Tripura, the functioning of democratic process at grass roots level ought to be ensured in Assam. The sensitive handling of grievances over funding, and protection that needs to be extended over issues of language, culture, land is essential. Powers and functions consistent with local customs, traditions and needs have to be conferred on tribal autonomous systems. Proper execution of all the developmental schemes should be in a true spirit and intent. The work culture should be inculcated among the

officers through proper training; Governor's discretionary powers need to be insulated from undue influences of the state government and political parties. Above all, people should be aware of their rights and duties. Corruption free system, strict vigilance by the people, sincere effort of the people and hard work of the people may combinely brings peace and prosperity in the tribal areas. Decentralization of maximum power at the lower level and less interference by the Govt. in the tribal affairs may be a viable solution or creation of an autonomous state as per Article 244(A) within the state of Assam may be an alternative solution.

### **References**

- [1]. Based on daily news papers published in Assamese and English from Assam during the period of July-August, 2013 as The Assam Tribune, The Sentinel, Dainik Janambhumi, Amar Asom etc.