

Identity Politics of the Bodos and the NDFB in Assam

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Abstract: Since its independence, India has been facing the challenges and issues of ethnic identity in its North-eastern part and due to these issues there have been origins of different insurgent groups. Assam being one of the states of Northeast India has been facing many challenges due to the identity politics and insurgency. The Bodos are the native of the Brahmaputra Valley in Assam. National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) being one of the insurgent groups in Assam originated due to the identity politics of the Bodo community which is one of the indigenous tribes of Assam. The demands of the Bodo community started since the colonial times along with the other indigenous tribes of Assam. The demand continued after the independence of India in 1947. In the mid-1980s, due to the discrimination faced by the Bodos in Assam, the intellectuals raised their campaign for the creation of separate Bodo majority land known as Bodoland. While the majority of the Bodos proposed Bodoland as an autonomous territory or state within India, a small section which was formed as a radical group named as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB), formerly known as BSF demanded for complete sovereignty. The paper discusses the issue of ethnic identity of the Bodo indigenous groups which led to the formation of insurgency in Assam. The objective of this paper is to highlight the role of the NDFBs in the politics of Assam.

Key words: Assam, Identity Politics, Bodo, Insurgency, NDFB.

1. Introduction

In the modern form of state formation and maintenance, identity politics are used by the politically weak group to oppose the existing state of affairs as the construction and maintenance of political power are solely in the hands of majority and dominant groups¹. According to the beliefs, ethnic identities are linked by blood ties related to family and kinship, some of which are real and some invented and there is a strong consciousness in areas of the world that were former colonies of Europeans as the colonizers imposed state boundaries without considering much about their ideas and beliefs². According to Mary Bernstein, identity politics describes any mobilization related to politics, culture, and identity³. As a result, insurgent groups are formed in order to challenge the dominant power structure of a particular state or a country due to repression, oppression and alienation of a certain group or a community. The insurgent groups also tries to bring changes based on different ideologies or demands, which results in different insurgents being active simultaneously within a society or a state⁴.

¹ Leach, C. W, Brown, L. M, and Worden, R. E. (2008) "Ethnicity and Identity Politics", In Lester Kurtz (Editor-in-Chief), *Vol. [1] of Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, & Conflict*, Oxford: Elsevier, 3(758-768).

² Mansbach, R. W. and Taylor, K. L. (2012), *Introduction to Global Politics*, Routledge, 2 park square, Milton park, new york, ny.

³ Bernstein, M. (2005), "Identity Politics", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 31, 47-74. Accessed on, 13/03/2020, www.jstor.org/stable/29737711.

⁴ Yurtbay, B. (2018), "Insurgency: Defining Characteristics of Insurgency from Prehistoric to C.A. 1975", Proceedings of 181st The IIER International Conference, Barcelona, Spain, 11th-12th August,

Identity politics in Assam is one of the serious issues since the independence of India in 1947. Assam is one of the eight states of Northeast India, which also acts as a gateway to the other North-eastern states of India. The North-eastern part of India is connected with the mainland India only through a 22 kilometre thin corridor which is also known as the Chicken Neck corridor or the Silliguri Corridor created after the partition of India in 1947. The Chicken Neck Corridor is situated in the state of West-Bengal and is bordered by Nepal and Bhutan on the north and Bangladesh in the south. There are different indigenous tribes in Assam along with the dominant Assamese community. In the case of Assam within one society we can see up to two groups of the same factions which are formed by the insurgent groups due to their ideological differences. India's North-eastern state of Assam which consists of semi-tribal and semi-feudal bases has been experiencing ethnic assertion since a very long period of time. Many insurgent groups and separatists demands for flexible autonomy as linguistic and religious issues are rooted in the failure of the state to fulfill the ethnic aspirations of the competing ethnic communities⁵.

The Bodos, were known as Kiratas, Asuras, Danavas and Mlecchhas in the ancient period of time and are also mentioned in the Mahabharatas, belonging to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family of Mongoloid origin⁶. The Bodos are also considered as the largest and oldest tribe in the plains of Assam with rich culture⁷. They are considered to be the first natives of the Brahmaputra valley and residing mainly in the plains districts of Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Goalpara, Barpeta, Nalbari, Kamrup, Darrang and Sonitpur⁸. The Bodos were among the rulers of Assam till 1825, and were known as the Kacharis⁹. After the defeat of the Burmese by the British in 1826, Assam was annexed by the latter under the treaty of Yandaboo. After occupying Assam, the British encouraged large scale immigration from the other parts of India, particularly from East Bengal to suit their colonial interests and also due to the geographical status of Assam it was treated as the frontier of Bengal¹⁰. Assam was placed under the Bengal Presidency till 1874. The British brought along with them many educated Bengalis to work as clerks, lawyers and other professionals and the Marwaris for commerce and Bengali Muslim peasants. Since the natives were not able to compete with the new immigrants, they began to worry about domination by the new immigrants in all spheres. The insecurity felt by the natives led to the feeling of alienation which made them conscious of their own identity vis-a-vis the Bengalis¹¹.

The main objective of the study is to identify the source of identity politics of the Bodos and the significance of the emergence of National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and their role in the politics of Assam. The paper is descriptive and is based on secondary sources. This study analyses the nature of identity politics of the

2018, Accessed on, 13/03/2020, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328225490_'Insurgency_Defining_characteristics_of_insurgency_from_prehistory_to_ca1975'.

⁵ Goswami, S. (2001), "Ethnic Conflict in Assam", *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 62(1), 123-137, Accessed on 13/03/2020, www.jstor.org/stable/42753657.

⁶ Brahma, K. (2011), "Understanding the history of the Bodos", Accessed on 20/02/2020, <https://kalidashbrahma.blogspot.com/2011/12/understanding-history-of-bodos.html>.

⁷ Dowerah, S. (2012), "Assam Riots: What Leaves Bodos Angry and Frustrated?", *Firstpost*, Accessed on 20/02/2020, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/assam-riots-what-leaves-bodos-angry-and-frustrated-391119.html>.

⁸ Das, J. (1994). The Bodoland Movement in Local and National Perspectives, *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 55(4), 417-426. Accessed on 04/03/2020, www.jstor.org/stable/41855713.

⁹ George, S. (1994). The Bodo Movement in Assam: Unrest to Accord. *Asian Survey*, 34(10), 878-892, Accessed on, 07/03/2020, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2644967.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-5055%2Fcontrol&refreqid=search%3A2e95d24c76d5c88203eedf591c334e2a.

¹⁰ Dutta, N. (2015), "Immigration in Assam: A Historical Perspective", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, 4(1):30-32.

¹¹ H. Srikanth, (2000). Militancy and Identity Politics in Assam. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 35(47), 4117-4124, Accessed on 09/03/2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/4409978.

Bodos and the emergence of the NDFBs in Assam through the use of different literature and available resources related with the topic in order to understand the measures and possibilities in solving the problems.

Identity and political consciousness among the Bodos during the Colonial Period

Since the colonial period, the Bodos have been conscious about their identity along with the other natives of Assam. The important personality who started the identity consciousness among the Bodos was Kalicharan Brahma. During the colonial period, the Bodo people were economically poor, underdeveloped. Kalicharan Brahma believed that the main cause behind it was the division of the Bodos on the basis of religion. So, in order to unite the Bodo people under one religion he started the 'Brahma Religion' and published the first Bodo magazine known as 'Bibar' in 1924. This brought identity consciousness among the Bodos and it focused on the socio-economic conditions of the Bodos¹². In 1929, when the Simon Commission came to India, Kalicharan Brahma submitted a memorandum asking for reservations in the Legislative assembly and a separate political entity for the Bodos. But the demands were not fulfilled¹³. Many of demands were later acknowledged through the Government of India Act 1935¹⁴.

2. Post-Colonial Movement of the Bodos

After the independence of India, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS) and All Assam Tribal Sangha, which were the socio-cultural-literary bodies, came up with the political agenda in 1952. In 1963, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha managed to get Bodo language introduced as a medium of instruction in schools, while the Tribal Sangha went for political demands. In the 1960s, the Bodos hoped for their own separate state as the new states were formed in the other parts of India on the basis of linguistic and ethnic lines. The Bodos were disheartened as their demands were not fulfilled and were once again forced to take up political demands¹⁵. When the process of reorganization of states began in Assam from 1960s onwards, the Bodo leaders formed a political party in 1967, known as the Plains Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), in which they demanded a Union Territory for the Bodos and other Plains tribal of the region called 'Udayachal'¹⁶.

The claims of the Bodos were not only for a greater recognition of their culture and language but also for a separate homeland within India to be carved out of Bodo dominated districts of Assam on the north bank of the river Brahmaputra. After the independence of India, the tribes from the plains of Assam including the Bodos were backward in every sphere of life as they had been neglected and exploited by non-tribal people¹⁷. The Assamese themselves didn't see tribals and non-tribals as having a common future. Back then, the former Chief Minister of Assam Prafulla Mahanta and Home Minister, Bhriгу Phukan, were perceived as upper caste

¹² Baishya, L. Ch. And Dr. Das, K.C. (2017), "Identity Politics and Socio-Economic Change of the Bodos of Assam", *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities*, 5(1): 2321-7065, https://www.academia.edu/34320564/IDENTITY_POLITICS_AND_SOCIO-ECONOMIC_CHANGE_OF_THE_BODOS_OF_ASSAM.

¹³ "A Timeline of the Bodo Conflict", (2016), *The Times of India*, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/A-Timeline-of-the-Bodo-conflict/articleshow/53561499.cms>.

¹⁴ Narzay, R.k. (2020), "History Headline: Bodo accord follows a series of betrayals", *The Indian Express*, Accessed on 01/03/2020, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/history-headline-bodo-accord-agreement-militants-6258189/lite/>.

¹⁵ Narzay, R.k. (2020), "History Headline: Bodo Accord follows a series of Betrayals", *The Indian Express*, <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/history-headline-bodo-accord-agreement-militants-6258189/>.

¹⁶ George, S. (1994), "The Bodo Movement in Assam: Unrest to Accord", *Asian Survey*, 34(10), 878-892, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2644967.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-4946%2Fcontrol&refreqid=search%3A9b5cfebf367a3324dda102c42f9619e.

¹⁷ Uttam, K. (2016), "Viability of Bodo Movement for a Separate State in Assam: A Politico – Geographic Analysis", *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 6(9): 823-827, www.ijsrp.org/research-paper-0916/ijsrp-p57110.pdf.

Assamese Hindu Leaders. Also the late former Chief Minister of Assam, Hiteswar Saikia was regarded as an Ahom and central ministers of state Santosh Mohan Deb, and Biren Singh Engti as Bengali-Kachari and tribal leaders. Late Binoy Basumatari, former MLA, supported the Bodo's cause which PTCA stalwart Shama Brahma Choudhury, rejected. But none of them has proposed a feasible solution to the Bodo problem¹⁸. Since the Bodos remained educationally backward along with other ethnic groups of Assam, in 1974, they launched a major movement for the recognition of Bodo language and the adoption of Roman script for their language. The movement was brutally suppressed by the State Government with the help of the Assam police along with the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and the Asamiya press¹⁹. Since the PTCA could not fulfil their demands, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) was formed in February 1967 with the demand for a separate state for the Bodos. The ABSU withdrew its support with the PTCA in 1979 and the PTCA split in 1984, with one of its leaders, Binai Khungur Basumatary, forming a new party named the United Tribal Nationalists' Liberation Front, Assam (UTNLF)²⁰. After the Assam Accord of 1985²¹, the Bodo leaders felt betrayed by the accord. The ABSU started demanding for separate state within the Indian Union with the slogan of divide Assam 50/50²². The other major problem which led to the identity politics of the Bodos were the unemployment of the tribal people, as only 10 per-cent of jobs were reserved for plains tribal, including the Bodos. The tribals were also required to learn the Assamese language in order to obtain a government job in the state which led to the employment opportunities for Bodo youth. There was also the fear of losing their distinct identity as dominant Assamese tried to Assamize the other tribal communities of Assam²³. The imposition of Assamese language as the sole medium of instruction in the universities of Assam in 1972, led to the demand of for separate union territory of Udyachal to be created by diving Assam²⁴. In 1986, the Bodo Security Force (BSF) was created as the first Bodo militant outfit and in 1987; the Bodo Volunteer Force was created as the wing for maintaining discipline as a part of All Bodo Students Union²⁵. The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) led the mass-movement in 1987 under the leadership of Upendra Nath Brahma who was an influential and charismatic leader. The mass-movement of the ABSU is said to have been inspired by the Assam movement of 1979 led by the All

¹⁸ Jyoti, J. (1989), Jitendra Narayan Dash (1989), "Udayachal Movement in Assam- Case of Socio-Political Identity for the Bodos", *Indian Political Science Association*, 50(3): 335-342, Accessed on 14/04/2021,

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/41855438.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A1df0c544714fa96c63e9003b9ab2fc3a>.

¹⁹ Das, J. (1994), "The Bodoland Movement in Local and National Perspectives", *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 55(4), 417-426, Accessed on 25/02/2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/41855713.

²⁰ George, S. (1994), (Telegraph (Calcutta), 19 February 1989), "The Bodo Movement in Assam: Unrest to Accord", *Asian Survey*, 34(10), 878-892, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2644967.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-4946%2Fcontrol&refreqid=search%3A9b5cfefbc367a3324dda102c42f9619e.

²¹ The Assam Accord was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985. A Six year agitation demanding identification and deportation of illegal immigrants was launched by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) in 1979 concluded with the signing of the Assam Accord.

²² Pathak, S. (2012), "Ethnic Violence in Bodoland", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(34), 19-23. Accessed on 04/03/2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/41720055.

²³ George, S. (1994), "The Bodo Movement in Assam: Unrest to Accord", *Asian Survey*, 34(10), 878-892, Accessed on, 07/03/2020, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2644967.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-5055%2Fcontrol&refreqid=search%3A2e95d24c76d5c88203eedf591c334e2a.

²⁴ Mahanta, N. (2013), "Politics of Space and Violence in Bodoland", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(23), 49-58. Retrieved March 7, 2020, from www.jstor.org/stable/23527211.

²⁵ Narzay, R.k. (2020), "History Headline: Bodo accord follows a series of betrayals", *The Indian Express*, Accessed on 01/03/2020, <https://www.google.com/amp/s/indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/history-headline-bodo-accord-agreement-militants-6258189/lite/>.

Assam Students Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad against the illegal immigrants in Assam. An accord was signed in February 1993, which was the first Bodo Accord signed as a tripartite agreement between the Government of India, Government of Assam and the ABSU which granted the Bodos an Autonomous Council (Bodoland Autonomous Council). But the accord did not fulfil all of their demands. This led to the formation of the Bodo Liberation Tiger Force (BLTF) in 1993 as another militant outfit by the ABSU leaders²⁶. There were differences of ideologies between the Bodo Security Force (BSF) and the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF). The Bodo Security Force wanted a sovereign Bodoland while the BLTF wanted a separate state within the Indian Dominion²⁷. The BSF carried out several attacks especially on non-Bodo civilians and the security forces in Assam. They targeted Adivasis, whose ancestors had been brought to Assam as tea labourers during British Raj and were involved in attacks on Adivasis during Bodo-Adivasi ethnic clash during the 1996 Assam Legislative Assembly elections. This led to the formation of Adivasi Cobra Force, a rival rebel group²⁸.

3. National Democratic Front of Bodoland

The Bodo Security Force (BSF) was formed by Ranjan Daimary in October 1986 at Odal Khasibari village of Darrang district in Assam. The Bodo Security Force was later renamed as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) in 1994²⁹. The NDFB was composed of hard core Bodo youth who followed violent tactics in order to achieve the goals of Bodoland. The hide-outs and training camps of the NDFB were located in the Indo-Bhutan border which they used as a sanctuary for shelter, training, and manufacturing of weapons³⁰. The NDFB also had their camps along the Bangladeshi side of the Indo-Bangladesh border³¹. The NDFB rejected the first Bodo Accord OF 1994³². The main issues of the NDFB are the under-development in the region and the influx of immigrants. So, they aimed to address these issues by seceding from India, and establishing a Sovereign Bodoland³³. Since their aim was for creation of a sovereign state of Bodoland, the ABSU did not support the ideology of the NDFB. The main objectives of the NDFB were to liberate Bodoland from the domination of India, to free Bodo nation from the oppression, colonial exploitation, to establish a democratic socialist society in order to promote equality, liberty and fraternity and to develop integrity and sovereignty in Bodoland³⁴.

²⁶ Dasgupta, A. (2001), "Small Arms Proliferation in India's North-East A Case Study of Assam", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 36(1): 59-65.

²⁷ Interview on 01/03/2020, with Ex- Bodo Volunteer Force Personnel.

²⁸ Deka, B.K. (2019), "Change of Guard in NDFB (P) Ahead of Peace Treaty with Indian Government", *News 18*, <https://www.news18.com/news/india/change-of-guard-in-ndfb-p-ahead-of-peace-treaty-with-indian-government-2176487.html>.

²⁹ "Explained: What is the Bodoland dispute, and who are the NDFB?", 2019, *The Indian Express*, Accessed on 02/03/2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-what-is-the-bodoland-dispute-and-who-are-the-ndfb-6136083/>.

³⁰ George, S. (1994). The Bodo Movement in Assam: Unrest to Accord. *Asian Survey*, 34(10), 878-892, Accessed on, 07/03/2020, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2644967.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-5055%2Fcontrol&refreqid=search%3A2e95d24c76d5c88203eedf591c334e2a.

³¹ Mazumdar, A. (2005), "Bhutan's Military Action against Indian Insurgents", *Asian Survey*, 45(4), 566-580, Accessed on, 07/03/2020, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.1525/as.2005.45.4.566.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-5055%2Fcontrol&refreqid=search%3A5740aba47b912514694f64b7fc0568f1.

³² Kumar, B. K. (2020), "Framework Agreement with All NDFB Factions May Be Signed Ahead of BTC Election", *News 18*, <https://www.news18.com/news/india/framework-agreement-with-all-ndfb-factions-may-be-signed-ahead-of-btc-election-2460979.html>.

³³ (Defence Aviation Post 2020, para- 8).

³⁴ Das, K. H. Ch. And Talukdar, S. (2016), "Leadership of Bodoland Movement From Colonial To Present", *International Journal of Scientific Research and Education*, 4(7):5571-5579.

Like the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the NDFB have been against the Bangladeshi immigrants in the Bodo territories since 2000³⁵. In the 1990s after the 'Operation Rhino' and the 'Operation Bajrang' conducted by the Indian Army against the ULFA and the NDFB, the militant groups fled to the borders of Bhutan. The ULFA and the NDFB set their camps in the southern jungles of Bhutan and conducted their activities from there. This led the Royal Government of Bhutan to conduct 'Operation All Clear' in December 2003 against these insurgent groups. The Indian Army assisted the Royal Bhutan Army by arresting the militants while entering the Indian Territory³⁶. The second Bodo Accord which was signed in 2003, also another tripartite agreement between the Government of India, Government of Assam and the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) led to the formation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). An area was given to the Bodos for jurisdiction known as the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District (BTAD). The BTAD comprised of the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri, which was 11 per-cent of Assam's area and 10 per-cent of its population³⁷. The BTC administered the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Districts and it is also called as 'state-within-a-state'³⁸.

After the Operation All Clear of 2003, the NDFB split into two factions. The majority group remained under the leadership of Dhiren Boro who signed a unilateral ceasefire with the Indian Government and the Assam Government on 25th May 2005. This group was known as the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (Progressive) (NDFB (P)). While the other half who had been opposed to the peace talks remained under the leadership of Ranjan Daimary and was renamed as NDFB (R). The NDFB (R) went on to hide inside Bangladesh from where they conducted their activities and thereafter submitted its charter of demands in May 2008; with the creation of Bodoland as their main demand³⁹. The NDFB changed their ideology to full-fledged separate state and gave up the concept of sovereign Bodo nation after it came to a ceasefire agreement with Government of India in 2005⁴⁰.

On 30th October, 2008, there was a serial blast conducted by the NDFB(R)⁴¹. The serial blasts which was conducted by the NDFB (R) on 30th October 2008 was a series of bomb blast in Guwahati, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Barpeta⁴². In April 2010, Ranjan Daimari was arrested by the Bangladeshi police and was

³⁵ Kumar, B. K. (2020), "Framework Agreement with All NDFB Factions May Be Signed Ahead of BTC Election", *News 18*, <https://www.news18.com/news/india/framework-agreement-with-all-ndfb-factions-may-be-signed-ahead-of-btc-election-2460979.html>.

³⁶ Mazumdar, A. (2005), "Bhutan's Military Action against Indian Insurgents", *Asian Survey*, 45(4), 566-580, Accessed on, 07/03/2020, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/10.1525/as.2005.45.4.566.pdf?ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_SYC-5055%2Fcontrol&refreqid=search%3A5740aba47b912514694f64b7fc0568f1.

³⁷ Saha, A. (2020), "Explained: Takeaways from Bodo Accord", *The Indian Express*, Accessed on 04/03/2020, <https://google.com/amp/s/indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-takeaways-from-bodo-accord-6240082/lite/>.

³⁸ "A Timeline of Bodo Conflict" (2016), *The Times of India*, Accessed on 05/03/2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/A-Timeline-of-the-Bodo-conflict/articleshow/53561499.cms>.

³⁹ Sharma, S.K. (2016), "Operation All Out against Bodo Militants: What Next?", *IDSA Issue Briefs*, Accessed on, 07/03/2020, https://idsa.in/issuebrief/operation-all-out-against-bodo-militants_sushilksharma_020210.

⁴⁰ Narzinary, G. G. (2020), "Bodo Peace Accord, 2020", *The Shillong Times*, Accessed on, 11/03/2020, <https://theshillongtimes.com/2020/01/31/bodo-peace-accord-2020/>.

⁴¹ Kumar, B. K. (2020), "Framework Agreement with All NDFB Factions May Be Signed Ahead of BTC Election", *News 18*, <https://www.news18.com/news/india/framework-agreement-with-all-ndfb-factions-may-be-signed-ahead-of-btc-election-2460979.html>.

⁴² "2008 Guwahati Blast Case: NDFB Chief, 9 Others Get Life Sentence", (2019), *The Quint*, Accessed on 11/03/2020, <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/2008-guwahati-blast-case-judgment>.

handed over to the Government of India⁴³. In 2012, after the arrest of Ranjan Daimary, NDFB (R) split leading to the formation of another faction, led by a non-Bodo IK Songbijit (NDFB-S). This faction continued to indulge in militancy and has been blamed by the government for several other attacks⁴⁴. On 26th of December 2014, the 'Operation All Out' was launched by the Government of India against the NDFB(S), after they killed some Adivasis in the three districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang and Sonitpur and in retaliation; the Adivasis had killed 14 Bodos⁴⁵. I K Songbijit was replaced by Saoraigwra Basumatary as president of the group after it was held responsible for the killing of the Adivasis in December 2014⁴⁶. The Operation was launched again along the India-Bhutan border and Assam-Arunachal border almost similar to Operation All Clear of 2003, but this time only the Indian Army took part and the operation was not conducted inside Bhutan by the Royal Bhutan Army⁴⁷.

After the long struggle and bloodshed, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) of India, the Assam government and the Bodo groups signed an agreement to redraw and rename the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) in Assam. According to the agreement, villages dominated by Bodos which are outside the BTAD will be included and those with non-Bodo population would be excluded and the Bodos living in the hills will be given a status of Scheduled Hill Tribe status⁴⁸. The demand for a separate state or Union Territory for Bodo people since 1972, ended with the signing of the third Bodo Accord on 27th January 2020, which is going to rename BTAD into Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). As per the agreement BTR will have more executive, administrative, legislative and financial powers and that, the Assam government will soon notify Bodo language which is in Devanagari script as an associate official language of the state⁴⁹. The third Bodo peace agreement is the first in Northeast India where all the Bodo insurgent groups signed the agreement with a joint commitment to end violence and strive for progress and development⁵⁰. The BTR council will now have 60 seats, as earlier it was only 40 seats and out of 60 seats, 16 seats would be open seats, where non-tribal can also contest elections. Besides, there will be six nominated members in the BTR Council, including two women members and two from underrepresented communities. Thus the new Bodo Accord is going to address the

⁴³ Sharma, S.K. (2016), "Operation All Out against Bodo Militants: What Next?", *IDSA Issue Briefs*, Accessed on, 07/03/2020, https://idsa.in/issuebrief/operation-all-out-against-bodo-militants_sushilksharma_020210.

⁴⁴ Kumar, B. K. (2020), "Framework Agreement with All NDFB Factions May Be Signed Ahead of BTC Election", *News 18*, <https://www.news18.com/news/india/framework-agreement-with-all-ndfb-factions-may-be-signed-ahead-of-btc-election-2460979.html>.

⁴⁵ Sharma, S.K. (2016), "Operation All Out against Bodo Militants: What Next?", *IDSA Issue Briefs*, Accessed on, 07/03/2020, https://idsa.in/issuebrief/operation-all-out-against-bodo-militants_sushilksharma_020210.

⁴⁶ Karmakar, S. (2020), "Didn't Surrender but Signed a Ceasefire deal to find Solutions says NDFB(S) chief", *Deccan Herald*, Accessed on 11/03/2020, <https://www.deccanherald.com/national/east-and-northeast/didnt-surrender-but-signed-ceasefire-deal-to-find-solution-says-ndfb-s-chief-795402.html>.

⁴⁷ Kashyap, S. G. (2015), "Fresh Operations against NDFB (S) along Bhutan border launched", *The Indian Express*, Accessed on 11/03/2020, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/fresh-operations-against-ndfbs-along-bhutan-border-launched/>.

⁴⁸ Singh, V. (2020), "Govt signs accord with NDFB, ABSU to resolve Bodo issue", *The Hindu*, Accessed on, 11/03/2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/govt-signs-accord-with-ndfb-absu-to-resolve-bodo-issue/article30665589.ece>.

⁴⁹ "Centre signs Bodo Peace Accord, the third since 1993 in bid to bring peace to Assam: All you need to know about the agreement", *Firstpost*, (2020), Accessed on, 11/03/2020, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/centre-signs-bodo-peace-accord-the-third-since-1993-in-bid-to-bring-peace-to-assam-all-you-need-to-know-about-the-agreement-7965411.html>.

⁵⁰ Anand, M. (2020), "Bodo accord aims to establish N-E peace", *The Asian Age*, Accessed on, 11/03/2020, <https://www.asianage.com/india/all-india/110220/bodo-accord-aims-to-establish-n-e-peace.html>.

grievances of non-tribal as well. The accord also mentions about setting up a Bodo-Kachari Welfare Council for 'development' of Bodo villages located outside the Bodo Council area⁵¹.

As per the accord, on 11th January 2020, the three NDFB factions came together and signed a ceasefire agreement. A total of 1615 cadres of the three factions of National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) militants laid down their arms and ammunition as part of the arms laying down ceremony⁵². NDFB(S) led by Saoraigwra Basumatary signed a ceasefire agreement with the Government of India from its base in Myanmar and with their ceasefire agreement the tripartite third Bodo peace accord was signed on 27th January 2020. All the factions of NDFB, ABSU and UBPO (United Bodo People's Organisation) signed this accord with Government of India and Assam Government⁵³. The cadres belonging to NDFB (Progressive), NDFB (Ranjan Daimary) and NDFB (Songbijit) also laid down 178 arms and over 4500 ammunition during the ceremony⁵⁴. The arms laying down ceremony by the three factions of the NDFB was one of the biggest surrender ceremonies of militant outfits in recent times. due to the agreement between these militant outfits and the Government of India, the third Bodo Accord was signed which is said to have brought peace formally on the three decades long militancy in Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD)⁵⁵.

4. Conclusion

The identity politics of the Bodos have been one of the major issues in Assam since the colonial times. With the advent of immigration process during the colonial period and the policies of the Assam Government, the Bodos felt insecure of losing their identity and culture. Since the peaceful movement of the Bodos were not beneficial, they were compelled to take up arms in the name of revolution. Also the policies of the Assam Government during the 1970s and 1980s were of step-motherly treatment towards the tribal communities of Assam of which Bodos were one of them. Also the economic backwardness and the lack of political representation among the Bodos led them to be suppressed by the dominant Assamese community which led the Bodo youths to take up arms. The formation of the NDFB also has similar grievances like the other militant BLTF, although they had different ideologies. The formation of the NDFB also brought major changes in the politics of Assam along with the other countries bordering Assam, like Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar have also been affected through insurgency operations. While the complicated situation of the identity politics of the Bodos can be said to have come to an end with the signing of the third Bodo accord which had been accomplished through the understanding between the different political groups, student Union group and insurgent groups of the Bodos along with the Assam Government and the Central Government. The long struggle of the Bodos might have ended with the hope of ending bloodshed and violence in Assam from the Bodo insurgents.

⁵¹ Anand, M. (2020), "Bodo accord aims to establish N-E peace", *The Asian Age*, Accessed on, 11/03/2020, <https://www.asianage.com/india/all-india/110220/bodo-accord-aims-to-establish-n-e-peace.html>.

⁵² Baruah, P. (2020), "Bodo pact ensures surrender of 4 NDFB factions", *The Telegraph*, Accessed on, 05/03/2020, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/north-east/bodo-pact-ensures-surrender-of-4-national-democratic-front-of-boroland-factions/cid/1740653>.

⁵³ Narzinary, G. G. (2020), "Bodo Peace Accord, 2020", *The Shillong Times*, Accessed on, 11/03/2020, <https://theshillongtimes.com/2020/01/31/bodo-peace-accord-2020/>.

⁵⁴ "Three NDFB factions lay down arms, ammunition in Assam", (2020), *Northeast Now*, Accessed on, 05/03/2020, <https://nenow.in/north-east-news/assam/three-ndfb-factions-lay-down-arms-ammunition-in-assam.html>.

⁵⁵ "1615 cadres of 4 NDFB factions lay down arms in Guwahati", (2020), *The Shillong Times*, Accessed on, 05/03/2020, theshillongtimes.com/2020/01/30/1615-cadres-of-4-ndfb-factions-lay-down-arms-in-guwahati/.

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