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Tribal League and Politics in Assam: A Historical Study of Tribal Politics In Assam During The Colonial Period

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Abstract:

Assam is the land of diverse tribes. The Bodos, Mising, Karbi, Rabha and Kachari are the main tribes of Tribal community of Assam. Among them Bodos is the largest tribal community of Assam. These tribes have distinct languages, cultures, and traditions and contributing to the rich cultural tapestry of Assam. During the colonial period in Assam, tribal communities played a complex role, often resisting British rule and asserting their distinct identity. They also sometime engage with colonial policies for their own benefit. Some tribes actively fought against British expansion, while others sought to maintain their traditional governance structures and land rights under colonial rule. The tribal communities of Assam played important role in society as well as in politic of Assam from 1937 till to India gain Independent. But the leaders of Assam belonged to higher class of the societies did not focus the sacrifices of the tribal people contributed for the formation of Assamese tribes in colonial period and in freedom struggle. So they began to think themselves deprived class. This period saw the alienation of tribal communities from mainstream Assamese people. This led to the emergence of "Plains Tribal" organization for their own cultural as well as political identity. This organization played king maker in the government formation from 1937 to 1746 in Assam.

Key words: Bodo, Mising, Karbi, Rabha, Kachari Plains tribal & king maker.

Introduction:

Assam is a state in northeastern India known for its diverse tribal communities, each with its own unique culture, traditions, and languages. These tribes contribute to the rich tapestry of Assamese society. The Bodo, Mising (Miri), Karbi, Rabha, and Kachari being are some of the major tribal groups of Assam. Though the Assamese is the principal language of Assam; many tribes maintain their own languages. Tribal communities in Assam face various challenges that can be characterized as backwardness. They are facing economic hardship, limited access to education, and social inequalities. These issues often stem from geographical isolation, cultural differences, and historical factors. Tribal League in Assam refers to various political and social organizations representing the tribal communities of the state of Assam particularly

those residing in the plains areas. The term "Plains Tribal" itself was initially used by colonial rulers to categorize diverse tribal groups in Assam. However, this category was later adopted and shaped into a unified political and social identity by tribal leaders during the late colonial period. During the colonial period they played vital role in forming government in Assam from 1937 to 1946. The tribal organizations has been always given priority to their community's issues to preserve the rights of own tribes.

Objectives:

Objectives of the paper is to make an:

1. Investigation into the part played by tribal organization in politics of Assam during colonial period to Indian independence to preserve the identity of tribal community.
2. Inquiry the role of tribal leader forming government in Assam during colonial period.

Data and Methodology:

In this paper both primary and secondary data have been used. Primary source included oral traditions, interviews etc. The secondary sources included books and journals. The methodology adopted for the work is subaltern approach to understanding the role and the activities of tribal organization and it will be presented in the form of descriptive narrative. The role of tribal league in the politics Assam implies an investigation of the participation of tribal league in the party politics of the Assam from colonial period to Indian independence.

Analysis and Discussion:

The tribal communities of India participated in the national freedom movement and contributed to its achievement of freedom. But of late, unfortunately it is seen that their participation and sacrifices were not properly focused and it is matters of debate. Like schedule caste and the schedule tribes of India they are also deprived class and considered to be lower class in social strata. The National Party and leaders were always been paying indifferent toward their basics rights. The constitution of India provided Quota system to the lower classes to establish social equality in the society.

Like the tribal of other provinces of India, the tribal community of Assam was also dissatisfied with the national parties for their negative attitude towards the problems of tribal. In such situation they had been tried to unify politically among themselves to solve their own community's problems. They began to think themselves as socially and politically exploited and deprived class in Indian social system. The caste system that had been prevailed in Hindu society is responsibility for considering the tribal as the lower origin. The behavior and mentality of the higher class of the Hindu society towards the tribal community compelled them to give birth to its own organization like Tribal League to protect their own interest and rights.

Andrew Claw, then governor of Assam (1942-46) after observing the sentiments of tribal people of Assam rightly commented that "The Assamese Caste, Hindus and the Muslims, professed solicited for the tribes but neither had troubled to study the question nor had any real sympathetic with the tribes.

Being deprived from their privileges, by the higher class of the society, inspired the various tribal associations to organize a common or central tribal body to preserve their rights. The Kochari Sanmilon, konch Rajbanshi Sanmilon, Mattak Association etc. were come into being to look after the problems of their own community. Those tribal organization were merged into a single organization in the twentieth century and formed All Assam Plains Tribal's League. This was the effort of the leaders of tribal people to bring all the Mongolian community and all tribal people Assam into a single political platform. Tribal leader like-Bhimbar Deori and Rupath Brahma took initiation in this direction. Bhimboar Deori was born in village named Borganya Deori on May, 1903 in a poor family. He was graduated from Cotton College and passed the Bachelor of Law from Calcutta University. He was the founder member of Tribal League and the first general secretary of Plains Tribal league. Bhimbora Deori was undisputed leader of tribal and he tried to unite all the plains tribes of North East. He convened the conference of all the tribes of the Brahmaputra valley at the Kashi National Darbar Hall of Shillong held on 21 to 23rd March, 1943 where they formed Assam Tribes and Races Federation. He requested the authority of hostels of educational institutions to allow tribal boys in general dining hall. He criticized the improper mass literacy campaign programme of

government during Assam Legislative Council budget held in 9 to 13th 1943. Bhimbor was stern supporter of the creation of Tribal Belt for safeguarding the right of the indigenous tribal people of Assam. This undisputed leader received immature death at the age of just 44 years in 1947 due to critical illness. Rupnath Brahma was also another important top leader amongst the tribal who tried his best to unite all the tribal people of North East. He was born in middle class family on 15th June 1902 in Onabari village of Goalpara District. He took his graduation from Cotton College and passed Bachelor of law from Calcutta University.

The tribal people thought that if they did not unite they could not pressurize their expectation and problems upon the national party and central government. They had many socio-economic and educational problems. The chief aim of forming All Assam Plains Tribal League was to fight against their inherent socio-economic problems. The leaders of tribal's were tried to extent primary education into the tribal area, eradicate illiteracy, and stop the use of opium in tribal area. They were the staunch supports of creation of tribal belt to restrict immigrants. The tribal people anticipated that line system help inflow of large immigrants into Assam would destruct the tribal community and their culture. So the tribal organizations since its inception were opposed the immigrants policy of Saadullah government and his willingness to include Assam into grouping plan were the major cause of losing his popularity of Saadullah among the people of Assam. The instable and uncertain political situation of Assam alarmed the Hill Tribes of North East. They contemplating to unite all the Mongolian Tribes and Plain Tribes of the province into single political platform and accordingly they founded the Assam Tribes and Races Federation at Shillong. The first session of this organisation held on 23th March, 1945 and in this session they took resolution of sovereign Assam by uniting all the Mongolian tribe and races. The convenor of the session Khongphai argued that Assam was a sovereign state before British coming to the province. Padmeswar Gogoi forced the session to take the proposal like- "In view of the rest of India that past history of Assam proper being never like that of the rest of India, this convention urge upon government that Assam be separated from rest of India where there are number of division like Pakistan, Hindustan etc and let Assam's destiny be guided by people of Assam". Besides this, the session demanded the government to preserve the political and socio-economic rights of the indigenous people and eviction of immigrants from Tribal Belt. Already relation between the tribal league and Saadullah government was strained on the issue of Grouping plan. Gopinath Bordoloi taking the advantage of the strained relation tried to get support from tribal league. Bordoloi proposed to tribal leaders the reservation of seat for tribal to the Assembly and to contest in the election. Rupnath Brahma then president of tribal league and Satish Chandra Bosumatary, the secretary accepted the proposal of Bordoloi. G. Bordoloi inducted Bhimbar Deori in his Ministry on 14th, Aug, 1947. Thus the tribal leader played the role of king maker in the politics of Assam from colonial period to Indian independence.

Conclusion:

During the colonial periods, being deprived equal treatment from the higher class society the tribal communities formed Assam Backward Plains Tribal League (ABPTL) in 1933 which organization is later popularly known as Tribal League, aimed to unite various tribal groups from the plains of Assam to address their shared concerns and advocate for their rights. Bhimbar Deori and Rup Nath Brahma were the prominent personalities who took vital role in formation of Tribal League.

The tribal leaders and tribal people always favors the creation of protected Tribal Belt and block to safeguard themselves from encroachment of their ancestral land right. The chief aims of formation of Tribal League were to safeguarding the all the tribal people against illegal encroachment and unite all the plans tribes under a common platform. During the colonial period from 1937 to 1946 the tribal League led by Bhimbar Deori and Rup Nath Brahma played the role of king maker in forming government in Assam.

They withdrew support from Md. Saadullah government twice in Assam, first time in 1938 and second time in 1946 for non-fulfillment of tribal issues for which government had fall. The tribal leaders of the colonial period did never compromise their own tribal issues. Of late it is seen that the tribal leaders does not dare to compromise the tribal issue for their personal benefit. For example when the Assam government modified Murkonselek Tribal Belt withdrawing provisions of Chapter 10 and Sissibargaon Legislative Assembly was made open from reservation, no complaint or opposition from tribal leaders of the community has seen. This kind of activities will be proved negative to the tribal community in near future.

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