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Political Parties Of The Marginalised: The Necessity Of Regional Political Parties In Bodoland Territorial Region (Btr)

Mr. Bahadur Basumatary

Assistant Professor

Tamulpur College, Tamulpur

Abstract: India is a largest democracy with the largest population in the world. A notable feature of Indian Political System is multi-political party system. Therefore, the existence of many political parties can be seen in India in the forms of national, regional local parties to fulfill the needs, demands and aspirations of the people. The Election Commission of India conducts quarterly evaluations of the situation of political parties, and the political parties must register with the Commission in order to run in council, state and national elections. As of now, there are around 2,598 parties registered in India, of which only a few are recognized as national parties, many of them are recognized as regional parties and around 2500 parties are unrecognized parties. In this paper, we are going to focus the necessity of regional parties in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) –a tribal administration area. Regional party means a party operating within a limited geographical area and its activities are restricted only to a single or few states. These regional parties focus and represent the interest, needs and requirements of a particular area. They focus on particular concerns such as the creation of jobs, satisfaction of local demands, language and culture of the local people, etc. They solely seek to capture power at the state or regional level and do not aspire to control the national government. The Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) is a Sixth Scheduled administrative district council of Assam comprising of five districts namely Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri and Tamulpur. It was earlier known as Bodoland Territorial Administrative Districts (BTAD) created on 10 February 2003, and was renamed as Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) with the 3rd Bodo Agreement on 27 January 2020. The regional parties of this region play an important role in the formation of council and state government of Assam. At present, there are basically two dominant regional political parties in BTR, these are Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL). The Bodoland People's Front was in power for 17 years from 2003 to 2020, and presently the power of the council is in the hand of coalition

government of UPPL, BJP and GSP. The rapid all round development and fulfillment of the needs and demands of the people can be seen in the region under the control of regional political parties, therefore it is very important to study the necessity of regional political parties in BTR.

Keywords: Regional, Political, caste, culture, language, Necessity, Dominant, Power, Local, National, Government, State, etc.

I. Introduction:

India is a largest democracy in the world. Since the independence many regional political parties have emerged in India and gained significant influence in some regions. Regional parties are those parties which do not operate in many states but their activities are mainly confined to a single state or in a particular region. The political observer claimed that regional political parties can represent all the local issues and better able to understand regional hopes and aspirations. India is a multi-lingual and multicultural nation. Regional political parties are the products of economic, religious, ethnic, culture and linguistic factors of a particular region. The linguistic and cultural diversities give rise to differences and regional aspirations. The people living in a particular linguistic region feel proud to identify and attach themselves with that region. Political parties also grab to exploit the ethnic and cultural factors for the gain of political power. The uneven development of regions also brings a sense of discrimination and alienation leading to the formation of regional political parties. Another important factor that played a role in the rise of regional political parties is the caste system that was and is an important part of the Indian political system. Generally, in the case of different regions, interests depend upon minorities and majorities. When one caste is dominant over the other, it results in caste prejudices and serves as an important factor of regionalism. People of dominant castes, who are in majority, become the vote bank and they become desirous of controlling the government. Caste interest gives people an opportunity to come together on a common platform. India, being a vast and diverse country with multiple languages, cultures, ethnicities, and religions, has a vibrant multi-party political system. While national parties play a dominant role in shaping the country's political narrative at the central level, regional political parties have emerged as powerful actors in state politics and, at times, in national coalitions as well. There are many regional political parties in different states of India such as Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) in Tamil Nadu, Shiv Sena and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) in Maharashtra, Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal. Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh, National Conference (NC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Jammu & Kashmir, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab and so on. These regional parties play significant roles in the respective states in the formation of government and work for the greater interest of their people.

Assam, a northeastern state of India, has a rich political landscape characterized by the presence of several regional parties. These parties primarily focus on the issues specific to Assam, such as ethnic identity, language rights, regional development, and autonomy. Unlike national parties that operate across India, regional parties in Assam aim to address local concerns and safeguard the interests of the state's diverse population. There are some major regional political parties in Assam such as AGP, BPF, AIUDF, UPPL and Rajior Dal. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) was founded in 1985. It emerged from the Assam Movement (1979-1985) which was centered on illegal immigration. It advocates for regional identity, protection of Assamese culture, and greater autonomy for Assam. It has been a significant political force in the state, forming government and opposition at different times. The All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) was established in 2005 by Maulana Badruddin Ajmal, AIUDF primarily represents Muslim voters and focuses on minority rights. It emphasizes social justice, minority welfare, and regional development. The Rajior Dal is a relatively new party founded in 2020, focusing on regional issues, anti-corruption, and Assamese identity. It aims to challenge traditional regional and national parties and promote grassroots concerns. From the above discussion we come to know that those regional parties of Assam advocate for the preservation of Assamese language, culture, and traditions. They often push for greater autonomy and focus on local development issues. These parties represent various ethnic and community groups, ensuring their voices are heard in the political process. These regional parties play significant role in the formation of government and frequently shape government coalitions and policy decisions in Assam.

The Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), located in the northeastern state of Assam, India, is home to some regional political parties that play a significant role in shaping the socio-political landscape of the region. There are basically three regional political parties in BTR they are BPF, UPPL and GSP. The Bodoland People's Front (BPF) was founded in 2005 and the founder leader is Hagrama Mohilary. The party dominated the Bodoland Territorial Council for 17 years until 2020. It represents the interests of the Bodo community and focuses on the rights, development and identity of the Bodo people and other tribes. The another one dominant regional party of BTR is the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), was formed in 2015, was earlier known as PCDR. It became the ruling party in BTC in alliance with BJP and GSP after the 2020 elections. It is a regional party mainly representing Bodo and other indigenous communities. It aims to promote peace, regional development, education, cultural identity and inclusive growth in the region. Both parties emerged from peace processes and now focus on development and reconciliation. They primarily represent the interests, identity, and aspirations of the Bodo people and other indigenous communities living within the BTR. The third regional party is Gana Suraksha Party (GSP), the founder leader is Naba Kumar Sarania an independent MP from Kokrajhar. This party represents non-Bodo communities in BTR. It seeks to protect the rights of the indigenous and non- Bodo groups. Overall these regional parties give voice to own ethnic and tribal identities. They influence local governance through the Bodoland Territorial Council and address unique regional issues such as land rights, language, employment, education, and cultural preservation.

II. Objective of the Study:

1. To know the causes which lead to the growth of regional political parties or regionalism
2. To understand the necessity and role of regional political parties in BTR.

III. Causes for The Growth of Regionalism:

The growth of regional political parties in India can be attributed to a variety of historical, cultural, economic, and political factors. The rise of regional political parties in India reflects the country's deep-rooted pluralism and diversity. They play a crucial role in strengthening federalism and making Indian democracy more inclusive by giving voice to local issues and communities. The major causes for the growth of regionalism are:

1. The different Indian federal divisions' desire to preserve their sub cultural areas and a higher degree of self-government has encouraged regionalism and sparked calls for more autonomy to express opposition to the central government's policies when it seeks to impose a certain philosophy, language, or cultural norm on all individuals and organizations. For instance, the southern states of India rejected the introduction of Hindi as the official language out of concern that the North would lead to domination. Similar to this, the Assamese started an anti-foreigner campaign in Assam to protect their own culture, language and identity. Political parties like the DMK, AIADMK, Akali Dal, Telugu Desam, Assom Gana Parishad, Janata Dal (s), etc., are widely known for running in elections by highlighting local issues and pledging to provide solutions if they win.
2. The desire for decentralization of power and the division of monolingual states has arisen as a result of the governing parties' persistent disregard for a region or area and the concentration of political and administrative power. The Sons of soil theory has sometimes been used to advance the interests of marginalized groups or state regions.
3. The growing awareness among the people of backward areas that they are being discriminated against has also promoted feeling of regionalism. The local political leaders have fully exploited this factor and tried to feed the people with the idea that the Central Government was deliberately trying to maintain regional imbalances by neglecting social and economic development of certain areas.
4. Continuous neglect of an area or region by the ruling national parties and concentration of administrative and political power has given rise to demand for decentralization of authority and bifurcate of unilingual states. On occasion 'sons of soil theory' has been put forth to promote the interests of neglected groups or areas of the state.
5. Regional pride has also been boosted by the growing awareness of discrimination among residents in underdeveloped regions. Local political leaders took full advantage of this circumstance and made an effort to spread the myth among the populace that the Central Government was purposefully

attempting to preserve regional imbalances by undermining the social and economic development of certain regions.

6. The desire of the various units of the Indian federal system to maintain their sub cultural regions and greater degree of self-government has promoted regionalism and given rise to demand for greater autonomy.
7. The uneven economic development has caused frustration in less developed states or regions. Regional parties capitalize on these grievances by promising better local development. Example: Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha highlights regional neglect by central governments.
8. The desire of regional elites to capture power has also led to rise of regionalism. It is well known that political parties like DMK, AIADMK, Akali Dal, Telugu Desam, Asom Gana Parishad, Janata Dal (s) etc., have contested the election by putting forth the local problems and promising solution to those, if they come to power.
9. Regional parties often build their support base among specific castes or communities. They promise social justice and political empowerment to marginalized groups. Example: BSP in Uttar Pradesh emerged to represent Dalits.

IV. The Necessity of Regional Political Parties in BTR:

In a diverse and federal country like India, both national and regional parties play important roles. However, in many regions especially those with distinct cultural, linguistic, or ethnic identities the regional parties are often more necessary and effective than national parties. They understand ground realities of local issues and aspirations of the people better than national parties. The Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) is an autonomous area in Assam created to address the distinct socio-cultural, economic and political aspirations of the Bodo and other indigenous communities. In such a diverse and historically marginalized region, regional political parties play a crucial role in representing local voices and safeguarding the interests of its people. Regional political parties emerge from the lived experiences, cultural identity, and specific developmental needs of the region. Their necessity lies in their ability to focus on local governance, preserve ethnic identity, advocate for constitutional safeguards, and promote inclusive development. In BTR, parties like the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) have become central actors in shaping the region's political future, ensuring that the aspirations of the people are neither ignored nor undermined. In this unique setup, regional political parties like the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) is not just political entities, they are essential instruments of self-governance, identity preservation, peace-building, and development. These parties have emerged from the historic Bodo movement and continue to represent the ethnic aspirations, governance needs, and socio-economic interests of the people in the region. They are like the guardians of autonomy under Sixth Schedule i.e. BTR. The BTR functions under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which provides autonomy of governance to the indigenous people. The Regional parties like BPF and UPPL are necessary to

protect and manage these autonomous powers, ensuring that decisions are made by local leaders familiar with regional needs. They must act as defenders of the council's autonomy and resist central or state-level overreach. Both the BPF and UPPL should play key roles in formulating and executing policies within the BTC's jurisdiction, these include decisions on agriculture, education, forest, public health, tribal welfare, etc. They are also like the voice of the indigenous people. Both the BPF and UPPL represent the Bodo community and other indigenous groups who have long struggled for autonomy and recognition. They provide political voice to ethnic groups like the Bodos, Rabhas, Koch-Rajbongshis, and Adivasis whose issues are often sidelined by national parties. They work for the preservation of ethnic identity and culture of indigenous people in BTR. The Bodo community has a distinct language, script, and cultural heritage. Both the BPF and UPPL actively work for the promotion of Bodo language in schools, cultural festivals, and protection of traditional customs. These parties champion constitutional recognition of Bodo identity, such as inclusion of Bodo language in the Eighth Schedule. They are also necessary for implementing the Bodo Peace Accords signed in 2020. The national party will not give importance and delay the implementation of Bodo Peace Accord. The BPF and especially UPPL which include former leaders of ABSU and signatories of the Bodo Accord, 2020 is crucial need in implementing peace agreements. They also helped to transform the former insurgents- the four factions of NDFB and NLFB into democratic participants, contributing to long-term peace and stability in the region. Instead of these, all of us know that the BTR has been suffered from underdevelopment, unemployment, and poor infrastructure since long decades of independence of India. It should be mentioned that both the BPF and UPPL focus on people-centric development, including education, healthcare, roads, and economic empowerment of the people in BTR. These parties always ensure that regional development funds are effectively used for local welfare and development of the region. These parties also bring the political awareness and grassroots participation in BTR. The BPF and UPPL promote active political participation, especially among youth and women. They strengthen grassroots democracy by contesting a free and fair election in council, assembly, and even parliamentary elections, bringing local issues to larger platforms. Lastly but not the least they promote social harmony and inclusive politics. While both the parties rooted in Bodo identity, have increasingly tried to include other ethnic groups also in their fold. This approach helps reduce ethnic tensions, promotes inclusive politics, and strengthens unity in the diverse BTR region. These are the reasons or factors why the regional parties are necessary in BTR. Without such regional players, the aspirations of the people of BTR would remain unheard or diluted under the broader agendas of national politics. From the above discussion we can say that the people of BTR should not give up or transfer the power of BTR to the national parties because they only focus on national agendas and don't understand ground realities of local issues and don't represent the local people. But the validation and necessity of regional parties like BPF and UPPL in BTR will lie in their ability to protect regional identity, uphold autonomy, ensure development, maintain peace, and empower local communities.

V. Conclusion:

The existence and active participation of regional political parties in the Bodoland Territorial Region are not just important but essential for the political, cultural, and socio-economic empowerment of the local communities. These regional parties, BPF and UPPL serve as direct channels through which the voices of the Bodo and other indigenous people can be heard and addressed effectively. They play a vital role in protecting regional identity, advocating for autonomy, and ensuring that developmental policies are tailored to the unique needs of the region. Without strong regional representation, the concerns of BTR may be overlooked in the broader national political discourse. Therefore, regional political parties are indispensable in strengthening democracy, maintaining peace and stability, and fulfilling the aspirations of the people of BTR.

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