



প্রতিধ্বনি **the Echo**

Pratidhwani the Echo

A Peer-Reviewed Indexed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science

Published by: Dept. of Bengali

Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India

Website: <https://www.thecho.in>

ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)

Persistence of Bodo Terrorism: A Study on National Democratic Front of Bodoland

Nabin Hakhrari

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Political Science, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong

Abstract

Like many other political movements, the Bodoland demand movement in Assam also first started democratically and soon culminated into an extremist movement and two groups viz., National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and Boro Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) played an instrumental role in the process. Both group demand Bodoland, but BLTF demanded a separate state within India; on the other hand NDFB has been demanding a sovereign Bodoland outside the Indian union or secession from Indian Union. The demand of BLTF has been partially fulfilled by the formation of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), ignoring the demand of NDFB. So far, the Government authorities have not formulated or adopted any long-term strategy for a permanent solution to Bodo Terrorism; rather, they stratified the Bodo leadership and co-opted the middle class by negotiating with their demands. Meanwhile, some more militants have declined to lay down their arms.

In view of these developments, the paper seeks to examine the factors responsible for the persistence of Bodo Terrorism and implications of Government strategies in dealing with the same.

Key Words: Terrorism, Relative Deprivation, Demands, Fratricide.

Introduction: The Bodos are an ethnic community comprising 18 sub-groups.¹ According to E. A. Gait, Bodos are “the aborigines or the earliest known inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley”.² The 2001 Census report indicates that Bodos are the largest tribal groups in entire North East and eight largest tribes in India. Bodos are found in large numbers in the Lower and Middle parts of the Brahmaputra Valley, namely in the districts of Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, BARPETA, Nalbari, Kamrup and Darrang. According to the Census of India 2001, has been recorded as 33, 08, 570 accounting for 12.41 per cent of Assam state population.³ But, due to dissatisfaction towards the mainstream Assamese politician as well as society, the demand for a separate political identity and self determination raised. The perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities led towards the discontent among the Bodo leaders and looked forward for better political alternatives. It could be summarised that (i) no political violence can occur without political discontent; (ii) no discontent will exist unless somebody feels deprived; (iii) politicization involves both, normative and utilitarian considerations, and, even so, little or nothing will happen when facilitative and coercive resources available to dissidents and authorities are distributed one sidedly.⁴

It is to be noted that National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) a terrorist outfit was formed on 3rd October, 1986, often termed differently viz. ‘Insurgency’, ‘Terrorism’, ‘Extremism’, ‘Militancy’, ‘Secessionism’ etc. The term ‘Terrorism’ is used for the present study. William Blum observes that the word ‘terrorism’ is now commonly used simply to stigmatize any individual or group one does not like for almost any kind of behavior involving force. In addition, to him, terrorism is a methodology aimed at forcing a superior power to concede demands, usually withdrawal of forces, or the granting of independence, homeland, autonomy or some other goals. It is a tactic and not an entity in itself, with a life of its own. In brief, ‘terrorism’ is an organized violence against

civilians in pursuit of certain objectives; the fact that violence is organized with political objective is what distinguishes terrorism from common crime. Occasionally, terrorist movements also engage with government security forces, but their primary operational target is the civilians.⁵

Objectives:

1. To study the factors for formation of NDFB;
2. To study the reasons of persistence of NDFB.

Methodology: The paper is prepared collecting information from secondary sources. Various books, journals, research papers both from published and non-published sources of government and non government organisations have been consulted.

Formation of NDFB: The origin of BSF can be traced back to another organization called YBNA. The political foundation of the outfit was laid when a group of nationalist minded Bodo youth met at Udalguri, Darrang district for two days on January 17 and 18, 1983 and formed the Youth Bodo Nationalist Association (YBNA) with the objectives to fight for the freedom of Bodos, equal rights and freedom from all aspects. Ranjan Daimary first joined the YBNA in 1983. The YBNA embarked on a mission to install “nationalism and socio-economic and political consciousness among the illiterate, ignorant and uneducated Bodo people. For man power, training and for arms, YBNA had tried to establish contact with other armed revolutionary organization. They established contact with the NSCN, the Peoples Liberation Army of Manipur and other outfit of the region.⁶ Finally the BSF was formed at village Odlā Khashibari at the venue Odlā L.P. School on 3rd October, 1986 with 77 youths who met for the purpose. After nightlong meeting attended Bodo youths decided to go underground and take up arms.⁷ To carry out the armed struggle for national liberation the BSF shall have its own army known as the BOROLAND ARMY.

The BdSF felt necessary to change the name and style of the outfit and to give effect to that the meeting of the Standing Council, BdSF, held on the 18th April, 1993, a resolution was unanimously adopted to decide the nomenclature as THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT OF BOROLAND and its Army BOROLAND ARMY. And whereas the same resolution was approved to be enforced with immediate effect in the Central Council’s meeting from 22nd to 25th November, 1994. Hence, Boro Security Force an armed revolutionary organization had rechristened forthwith as the having the same principles and views of Boro Security Force.

Demands of NDFB: Demands of NDFB can be divided under three categories viz. *Political Demand*, *Non-Political Demands* and *Voluntary Demands*:

Political Demands: The outfit was never ready to compromise on the question of sovereignty since its formation. The main political demands as stated in their Constitution as like following-

- (i) To Liberate Bodoland from the Indian Expansionism and Occupation;
- (ii) To free the Boro Nation from Exploitation, Oppression and Domination ;
- (iii) To establish a Democratic Socialist society, promote Liberty, Equality and Fraternity; and
- (iv) To uphold the Integrity and Sovereignty of Bodoland.”

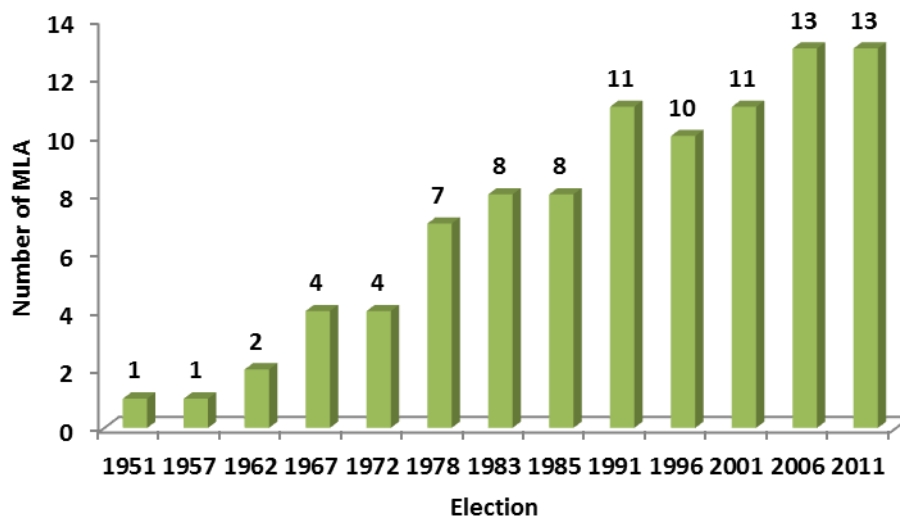
Non-Political Demands: A significant non-political demand of the NDFB was the demand for introduction of Roman script for the Boro language.

Voluntary Demands: NDFB sometimes demands the preservation of Tribal Belt Block. They also raised voice against the illegal migrant issues as they regarded as the threatening factors towards the indigenous population of Assam.

Factors responsible towards the formation of NDFB: The plans and policies of other Bodo organizations had changed intermittently, after achieving the political power many Bodo leaders changed their attitude towards the Boro society. After independence in every Assembly/Parliamentary elections Boro’s able to get political representation (As shown in **Figure 1**). In spite of that Boro leaders failed to promote the issues like, economic underdevelopment, unemployment, illiteracy etc. Bodo leader’s self-centered, political hobnobbing, unstable political principles cause the growth of dissatisfaction towards them and their ideologies. Bodos were expecting more from their political leaders who were supposed to represent the interest of the community. But, the ratio between expected and achieving have had huge gap, for this reason the feel of deprivation growth in the mind of youth. Hence some youth try to rectify the incorrect policy that other Boro organization preceding

leaders had adopted. Another factor responsible for the formation of NDFB was due to the dissatisfaction towards the All Bodo Students' Union President ship. The ABSU conference held at Bashbari, Kokrajhar in 1985, and few YBNA leaders expected someone from Udalguri should be elected as the ABSU President but it was not as they expected.

Fig.1. Boro Legislative Assembly Members in Assam



Source <http://www.elections.in/assam>

Figure1. Shows that in first (1951) and second (1957) Assembly election there was only one MLA, and in 2011 it reached up to 13 in numbers.

Fratricidal killings: It is to be noted that, after the failure of BAC, ABSU has lost their ground in the Bodoland Movement. The Bodo Volunteer Force formally disbanded after the signing of the Bodo accord, in 1996, they re-organized as Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF). Meanwhile, the phase 1996-2003 was the phase of ideological clashes and a phase of intra group clashes rather than the Bodoland movement. Because, the ideological differences had made NDFB and BLTF two rivals groups and decided to annihilate each other due to mutual distrust and rivalry. They declared war against each other, the NDFB launched operation *Doar* against their rival group, BLTF. On the other hand, the BLTF launched operation *Srangsrang* against the NDFB. It might be the sequence of the rivalry between Peoples Democratic Front (PDF) and Bodoland Statehood Movement Council (BSMC). Though, BLTF signed BTC Accord and surrendered but, according to different media sources still few cadres are continuing their activities as BRTF.⁸ They have involved in many secret killings in BTC area particularly assassinating NDFB cadres and their close relatives.

The BSS President Bineswar Brahma was assassinated in the year 2000 by NDFB due to the approval of Devanagari script instead of Roman Script. After a meeting held on 10 January 2001 in Bhutan, on 16 January, 2001, NDFB release press statement that the NDFB would be involved in 'selective killings' targeting rival Bodo groups such as the BLT, All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) and the All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation.

Government Responses: Government response towards the NDFB can be divided under two headings i.e. (i) Positive Responses and (ii) Negative Responses.

(i) **Positive Responses:** On 1st January, 2002, as a part of peace negotiation process Government of Assam offered a 30-day safe passage to NDFB and ULFA. Ranjan Daimary's 30th September, 2004 statement offered Unilateral cease-fire effective from 15 October. The formal cease-fire agreement between the NDFB and New Delhi signed on 24 May 2005. Meanwhile, the Union Government extended the suspension of operations against the NDFB for six months- valid till November 30. w.e.f. 1st June, 2007. On 6 January, 2009, the Government extended the cease-fire agreement with the NDFB for a period of six months. On 31 December Union Government

decided to extend the Suspension of Operations agreement with the pro-talk faction of the NDFB and DHD for a further period of six months up to June 30, 2010. Meanwhile, Government has appointed Shri P.C. Halder as Representative on November 04 to negotiate with NDFB. On 10 January, 2011, Ranjan Daimary, the 'chairman' of the NDFB-ATF, declared a unilateral ceasefire for six months.

- (ii) **Negative Responses:** The Home Ministry on November 23, 1992 announced the imposition of a ban on the BdSF under provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967.⁹ A Counter-Terrorism operation was launched and as a result in Tintala total 40 NDFB militants were gunned down on 16 December, 2003 Operation.¹⁰ Meanwhile, on 1st January, 2010, The Interpol issues a red corner notice against 'chairman' of the anti-talks faction of the NDFB, Ranjan Daimary, who is wanted as Doimary Ranjan alias Ronsaigra Nabla Doimari alias D.R. Nabla. Sources said that Daimary's name was put on the Interpol list after talks between Centre's Interlocutor P.C. Halder and the pro-talks faction of the NDFB. The Interpol accuses the anti-talks NDFB chief of "murder, wounding, theft, mischief, criminal conspiracy, and violation of explosive substances and firearms acts." Sources said the serial bomb blasts in Assam on October 30, 2008 led to the red corner notice against Daimary.

Split and New Leaders: On 18th November, 2008 the Ranjan Daimary faction the NDFB constituted its new 'Executive Committee' with Ranjan Daimary as the 'President', Dinthi Gwra Narzary as 'General Secretary', 'Captain' Sangbijit as 'Commander-of-Staff' and Barbai Basumatary as 'Assistant Publicity Secretary'. On 15th December, 2008, the NDFB held its General Assembly meeting at Serfanguri designated camp in Kokrajhar District and elected B. Sungthagra alias Dhiren Boro as the new 'President' of the outfit. B. Sungthagra was previously the 'Vice-President' of the outfit. On December 15 general assembly meeting of the outfit was held for the first time since the one held in Bhutan in 2001. The meeting was chaired by NDFB 'Speaker' B. Benga and was attended by top leaders, including the outfit's 'General Secretary' Govinda Basumatary. The NDFB after revamping its office-bearers with B. Sungthagra alias Dhiren Boro as chairman at its General Assembly meet at Serfanguri in the Kokrajhar District on December 15. On December 28, A day after Ranjan Daimary issued a statement claiming to be the 'chairman' of the NDFB, the outfit's 'Publicity And Information Secretary' S. Sanjarang said in a press release that B. Sungthagra alias Dhiren Boro was its 'President', confirming the rift within the outfit. On December 27, in an e-mail to the media, Daimary said: "I am still the chairman of the NDFB, and I will continue my efforts for the self-determination of the Boros." On 1st January, 2009, NDFB expelled its founder president, Ranjan Daimary *alias* D.R. Nabla, after replacing him with B. Sungthagra *alias* Dhiren Boro as its new chief.

The NDFB-RD also split the group led by the 'chief' of Bodoland Army (the armed wing of the faction), I.K. Songbijit, on November 20, 2012, announced the formation of a nine member "Interim National Council", with Songbijit as its self-proclaimed "Interim President". Other members of the "Interim Council" include 'Interim Vice-President' B. Naison; 'Interim General Secretary' B. Saoraigwra; 'Deputy Military Secretary' B. Jwngshar; 'Assistant Finance Secretary' B. Sansula; 'Assistant Forest Secretary' B. Sibigiri; 'Assistant Organising Secretary' H. Leba; 'Assistant Publicity Secretary' C. Rwikha; 'Member' B. Dwmwilu; and 'Captain' G. Bidai as the 'Deputy Chief of Bodoland Army'. Myanmar-based I.K. Songbijit called off the 'Indefinite Ceasefire' on August 8, 2012. However, the move was later dismissed by NDFB-RD 'Publicity Secretary', B. Naijab.¹¹

Major Findings:

By our thorough observation of the recent development in Assam suggests following findings:

1. At present activities of the NDFB suggest that Bodo Terrorism is still persisting due to co-opted leadership;
2. There are strategic alliances between the various terrorist outfit;
3. The intra-rivalry between the groups caused the fratricidal killings;
4. The split within the group resulted of slow progress in the permanent solution of the Bodo Terrorism;
5. Concerned authority is more relied on Negative peace rather than Positive Peacemaking;
6. Due to the dissatisfaction towards the Bodo leaders the NDFB was formed; and

7. The feel of deprivation was not only towards the Assamese politician but also towards the Bodo political representatives.

Remedies:

Following are some remedies so far for this issue:

1. The leaders of Statehood movements should avoid the aggressive attitude which could be result a dreaded ethnic violence;
2. Leaders should suggest their own community that these are political movements against authority but not within the communities as well as other communities;
3. Any activity against any community might be bring immense pressure to those community who are less in numbers; as scattered community concentrated in some places where they are majority and in some places minority, as a result in such places they face insecurity, suppression; and
4. The State, Union Government should talk with all factions so that any factions should raise same issues again.

Conclusion: The demands of NDFB has been always overlooked and it shown in both BAC and BTC Accord. The comparatively new insurgent group BLTF got the call for discussion and NDFB had isolated in both dialogue. That tactic was even implemented for the ceasefire agreement, and ongoing peace process. The peace dialogue and strategies of government for the solution of Bodo ethnic insurgencies not as community based rather stratified them. As a result of such stratification the one co-opted middle class emerged, they are neither land lord nor highly educated but they are newly emerged middle class with the co-operation of political elite. Authority is never looked so solve the Bodo ethnic insurgency issue, and try to revive them by stratifying into different group.

Endnotes:

- 1 Thomas Pulloppilil and Jacob Aluckal (ed.), *The Bodos: Children of Bhullumbutter*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1997, pp.1-3.
- 2 The Tribune, “124 killed in Bhutan operation”, online edition, Chandigarh, India - Main News, retrieve from <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20031217/main3 on 21-09-2010> at 21:18
- 3 Census Report 2001, Govt. of India, ABSU, Souvenir, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, 45th (2005) Issue Statistical Hand Book- 2007 Assam.
- 4 Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men Rebel*, no. 17, pp. 4-11. This book was the revised version of his Ph. D. Thesis on *Genesis of Violence: A Multivariate Theory of Civil Strife* (1965).
- 5 Rohan Gunaratna, “*Ideology in Terrorism and Counter Terrorism: Lessons from Combating al Qaeda and al Jemaah Islamiyah in Southeast Asia*” in Anne Aldis & Graeme Herd (Eds.), *The Ideological War on Terror: Worldwide Strategies for Counterterrorism*, Routledge, New York, 2007, pp. 21–34.
- 6 The Sentinel, June 4&5, 1992.
- 7 Ved Prakash, *Terrorism in India’s North- East: A Gathering Storm, Vol- I*, Kalpaz Publications, New Delhi, 2008.p.261.
- 8 The Sentinel, March 29, 2008
- 9 Sudhir Jacob George, “*The Bodoland Movement: Unrest to Accord*”. *Asian Survey*. Vol. 34. No. 10. October, University of California Press, 1994, pp. 878-892, retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2644967> on 27 August 2012 at 21:21.
- 10 The Tribune, “124 killed in Bhutan operation”, online edition, Chandigarh, India - Main News, retrieve from <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2003/20031217/main3 on 21-09-2010> at 21:18
- 11 The Times of India, “*Fratricidal killings feared between NDFB-R, new faction*”, Guwahati, retrieved from <http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2012-11-24/guwahati/3533 on 10-09-2013> at 11:40.
