

## **Movement for Political Power by Rabha Tribe of Assam: Response of State**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In Assam the movement of Rabhas played important role in shaping and changing the political structure and environment of the state. They started agitation by seeking political power and autonomy for managing and regulating their own community affairs. As a significant plains tribe, they demanded autonomy from state government of Assam. Because like other plains tribe, they felt that they are deprived and not getting sufficient opportunities under state government for their proper development. They started movement for autonomy provisions. This paper will discuss about the causes and objectives of Rabha autonomy movement and response of state to their desires.

**Keywords:** Political power, autonomy, plains tribes, rabhas.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In India, the state Assam is particularly home of many culturally diverse ethnic groups and communities. They are basically regarded as plains tribes. The Rabha community which is spread in different parts of Kamrup and Goalpara district, has rich culture and own traditional way of life. But due to negligence of mainstream assamese society, they facing problem in political, social, economic and educational development. Besides there are many core issues and causes exists for which they demanded for non-territorial autonomy from the state government to form their own legal and political institutions. In later stage of their movement, the political structure of Assam faced changes. Therefore, it is necessary to study about Rabha autonomy movement and response of state to their desires.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MOVEMENT**

The Rabha autonomy movement is important as it abled to make political consciousness among rabha tribe, educated them to seek their own rights and carry out own duties towards own community. It also accommodated all rabha people across the state. Through this movement, they were able to influence existing political scenario of the state. They challenged elite section of the state in political power. Overall, they democratically struggled for political power and succeed. For all these reasons, the movement is significant in political and social field.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To study the main causes of rabha movement for political power.
- To study the final political conclusion or response of state towards the movement.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The paper is based on qualitative method. Secondary sources are collected from some books, websites, articles etc. The paper is analytical and descriptive in nature.

## **MOVEMENT FOR POLITICAL POWER BY RABHA TRIBE AND RESPONSE OF STATE**

A nation or a community wants political power for managing and directing their own affairs. In this sense, political power grants authority which identifies the political legitimacy, grants and justifies the ruler's right to exercise the power of government. Rabhas wanted political power on the basis of non-territorial ground.

Besides, Rabhas regarded their struggle as autonomy movement. The term autonomy is derived from two Greek words 'auto' meaning 'self' and 'nomos' meaning law or rule. So, right to make one's own laws is called autonomy.

The affairs of agitations among plains tribal communities of Assam like Bodo, Deori, Sonowal, Mising, Rabha etc. are historical. They are recognized as plains tribal due to their special traditions and culture different from rest of mainstream assamese people. They are small in population but have unique culture and history. They are backward in all stages of political and economic development of the state and each and every fields of society in comparison to mainstream assamese people. Therefore,

### **The main causes of the movement for political power by Rabhas are as follows:**

- Cultural Ancestral Homeland: They are inspired by their ancestral Rabha kingdom and homeland on the basis of it they demands the huge land ranging from Phulbari from West ( now included in Garo hills district) to Rani and Beltola in the East, and the northern foothill areas of Meghalaya, as "Rabha-Hasong" the ethnichomeland of the Rabha tribe. the Rabha community today assert themselves as the son of soil of this region and demands this region as their traditional ancestral ethnic homeland as 'Rabha-Hasong' that is the 'land of the Rabhas' on the basis of their ancient glory and have launched movement to attain and preserve their traditional ethnic territory.
- Negligence from the State Government: The state did not took any initiations to protect the land from the people of other community in the ancestral homeland of rabhas. Besides, they had not given important place in existing social system. Unemployment problem of rabhas took them to poor living standards.
- Distinct Ethnic Culture and Fear of Submerzisation: Under the umbrella of Indian Constitution, the rabhas demanded self-determination on the basis of their own distinct culture and ethnic identity, and distinct way of living. They are feared of submerged under mainstream society as they are minority community in Assam like other plains tribe.
- Impact of reference-group : The rabhas were impacted by bodo movement by bodo tribe of Assam and inspired by experiencing their success.

The movement of rabhas for political power got its goal, when their own political institution RabhaHasong Autonomous Council was formed to protect their social, cultural and political autonomy.

### **The response of state towards the movement:**

Formation of RabhaHasongAutonomus Council (RHAC): Finally, the government of India formed RHAC under the 'Rabha Accord' in 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1995 as an autonomous administrative area within

Assam through state legislation. In this way, the objectives of rabha movement for political power were fulfilled by state. The RHAC is formed by General council, Executive council and village councils. RHAC is inclusive in nature, where non-tribal community's representation is also considered living in its areas. Along with rabhas, the other tribal communities also live in RHAC.

## CONCLUSION

Though rabhas got their autonomous council and political power through administration, their problems of administering the council properly not solved yet. Because they can't achieve territorial autonomy, due to small groups spreading in different parts of Assam. So, they got statutory autonomous council. But election of the council can't not be done due to not possibility of demarcate the constituencies. Village council of one area can't co-operate needs and requirements of other areas due to not having contiguous areas. Corruption of administration got high day to day. Due to not having experience of political power like elites of the mainstream political authorities, they are failed to meet needs and aspirations of simple, needy villagers of their community. But, we can't ignore the increasing literacy rates, women empowerment evidences, more or less economic development of rabha dominated areas through the activity of council.

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