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Shifting Paradigm: Politics of Transition in Karbi Anglong

Partha Pratim Baruah & Bikash Deka

The Self-determination politics of the Karbi people centers primarily around issues of socio-cultural identity control over resources and political emancipation. Being a part of the partially-excluded area of the British India, this hill region of Assam has been witnessing political movement ranging from democratic students' movement to violent militant movement since the post-independence period of India in one or the other form. Therefore, over the years there have been transitions in the political allegiance of the people in relation to the structural political domain of the state. The present paper aims to study the various phases of political transition in Karbi Anglong and the major issues advocated by the leaders for political mobilization of masses in each phase and also the latter's response.

Keywords: Political Transition, Identity, Control over resources, Tribal movement, Militancy, Circulation of Power.

Introduction

The large tribal ethnic identities of the Northeast India form a heterogeneous entity, though the state has attempted to categorize this peripheral region as a homogeneous political entity. The micro-heterogeneity ethnic composition has resulted in various ethnic resurgent since the commencement of Indian state as it has perpetuated the colonial legacy of tribal exclusion and governance. Tribal identity politics emerged due to apprehension among the smaller ethnic entities to protect their political and socio-cultural identity in the newly formed political structure of India. The apprehension hovering among them over assimilating with larger communities have resulted in ethnic movement and politics of identity came to dominate the larger political context of the region. The present paper aims to study the various phases of political transition in Karbi Anglong and the major issues advocated by the leaders for political mobilization of masses in each phase and also the latter's response. The

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present paper is based on in depth interview of certain leaders and members of political parties and organizations.

Tribal politics has played a pertinent role in the post-colonial era of Indian politics. Tribal politics and caste politics have parallel influence on the functional mechanism of the Indian democracy. The predominant presence of tribal groups in the Northeast region has contrasted the cultural demography of the same with the caste dominated mainland India. Both caste and tribe symbolizes two distinct social organizations viz; caste refers to social hierarchy based on hereditary of division of labor and tribe refers to absence of such social stratifications (Xaxa, 1999).

Though international boundaries have highlighted geo-political significance centering the region, yet it emerged as an important strategic geo-political zone since the demand for a separate sovereign Nagaland at the wee hours of India's independence. The demand by the Naga National Council (NNC) for a complete secession from India invited political significance and also raised the inherent issues faced by the tribal erstwhile shadowed by the nationalists' causes. Until then, this peripheral region particularly the hills areas were categorized as excluded and partially excluded areas by the colonial regime. Therefore, the political demand made by the NNC brought the tribal of Northeast India especially the Naga in close contact with modern political and economic structure. Prior to this the Naga being fragmented in different clans and sub-clans were highly governed by their traditional heritage and cultural norms. Moreover, this demand for a modern state structure transformed the earlier perspectives on tribe remaining in isolation and being governed by kinship norms. Eventually, the NNC under the leadership of A.Z.Phizo hold a national plebiscite for the self-determination of Naga nation where majority of the Naga people voted for a sovereign Naga nation. But this voice of self-determination was rejected by the Indian State and structural measures were applied to impose Indian nationalism on the Nagas. In response to the accommodative measures of the Indian state, the NNC spearheaded a militant movement which was a landmark in the tribal political movement for self-determination in the region. Amidst political instability in the region arising out of the Naga militant movement the then Naga Hills district was granted the status of the 16th state of Indian Union. The Naga militant movement came to a partial cease with the signing of the Shillong Accord on 11th November 1975 at Shillong (Mishra, 2013). Nonetheless, the Naga political movement persisted and it also became a reference to other smaller tribal entities of this peripheral region that vowed to safeguard their social, political and economic rights from the clutches of dominant groups controlling the state structure.

The Naga movement was followed by the Mizo political movement launched by the Mizo National Front which also demanded for a separate independent Mizo land to be carved out from the Lushai Hills of Assam. Several closely related ethnic tribes like the Paite, Vaite, Kuki, Simte etc. comprise the ethnic composition of Mizoram and they are structurally identified as a separate tribal entity known as the Mizos. These ethnic tribes share common linguistic and cultural traits with the other mon-goloid tribes of Northeast India and Myanmar (See Haokip 2011 & 2013). Therefore, imposition of Assamese language and other process of nationalization in the hill areas caused irk among them as they were apprehended of the fact of losing their

culture and identity as a separate entity. Meanwhile, the Lushai Hills attained the status of statehood on 20th February, 1987 and perhaps the Mizo Accord is regarded as the most successful in the entire Northeast (Bhaumik, 2011). While the Naga self-determination movement still endures in fragmented and ambivalent dimensions, with many factions still at loggerheads with one another. Inclusion of the tribal within the state mechanism in the aftermath of the colonial period without giving them space to naturally develop their orientation towards the same generated certain apprehension among them which sowed the seeds of decades long psycho-political and psycho-cultural attitude towards the whole. The modern state structure encompasses modernization through market expansion, industrialization, and technological development and so on. Therefore, the political system operates in such a way so as to provide compatibility to the market demands. Under such transformative phenomenon, the tribal communities in the remotest hills have faced identity crisis in the wake of neo-imperialism (Singh, 1987). Simultaneously, market expansion encourages encounter of consumers and producers resulting in large scale migration from alien land to the relatively sparsely populated Northeast India. The post-colonial period witnessed large scale migration from North India who came and settled both as traders and laborers and eventually controlled the booming market of the region. This also encouraged these migrant traders to employ land for economic benefits and private landownership came to be introduced in a society where land was accepted as community resource. The expansion of industries literally pushed the tribal to the remotest and thus aliening them from their rights over resources and made them a mere spectator of the so called structural development which was highly exclusive. In this regard, the booming tea industry that changed the industrial scenario of Assam can be highlighted as thousands of acres of fertile land erstwhile belonged to the ethnic Moran community particularly in the Tinsukia district was transferred to the British corporate and Marwari businessmen. The discovery of coal and petroleum in the tribal area of Upper Assam also encouraged the businessmen from North India to control the booming economy of the state leaving behind the question of kinship relation of land and resources. The ethnic tribal were unaccustomed to such transformations as they were not included in the whole process of economic transition, rather they were uprooted from their ancestral land and many became landless. Such paradox created apprehension among the tribal towards the state and modern bureaucratic structure because of their failure in initiating an inclusive development (Ibid). Drawing reference from the tribal movements initiated by the Naga, Mizos and hills tribe of Meghalaya, the plain tribe of the Brahmaputra valley largely the Bodo group continued their political movement in demand of a separate state known as the *Udayachal* in the wake of the language movement of the 60s and the 70s (Roy Burman, 2010). The Bodos falls in the first category of autochthon tribal of Assam and are regarded invariably as the first architect of the Brahmaputra civilization. In contrast to their hill counterparts, the plain tribal have to a great extent assimilated and absorbed in the caste structure of Assamese community through the process of sanskritization in the pre- colonial period both in the 'Shakta' (Sivaite) and the 'Vaisnava' forms of Hinduism. Simultaneously, education in the Assamese medium

schools and popular usage of the language as lingua-franca in the valley have also contributed towards the gradual waning of their tribal language and culture and assimilating in the caste structure of Assamese community (Hussain, 1992). In the wake of such gradual socio-cultural transition of the plain tribal and their meager stake in the political and economic sector of Assam led them to follow the path of their hills counterparts. The plight of the *Na Asomiya* tribal was such that they were neither fully accepted in the caste structure nor they retained their tribal culture and language resulting in a sandwich between tribe and caste. Therefore, the Plains Tribal Council of Assam launched both democratic and militant agitation to overcome their socio-economic oppression and cultural backwardness and attaining more political power and autonomy within the Indian Union. Apart from the plains tribal movement the twin hills district of the then Mikir Hills and North Cachar hills district also witnessed tribal uprisings demanding separate state for the Karbis and other hills tribe of the region. . In the paragraphs that succeed, the author has initiated a bird's eye view of the Karbi tribe and gradual transition of their traditional ruling system to modern democratic structure.

A Brief Historical Background

The Karbis are a group of hills tribe predominantly settled in the hills district of Karbi Anglong and other plain districts of Assam. They are also sparsely scattered in other Northeastern states of India. They are held to be the remnants of primitive Mongolian migrants to this region and belong to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group. On the basis of their racial features and also prevalent 'myths' and 'legends' the karbis are expected to have migrated from the present Southern China in the primitive period(Das, 2010 and Teron,2010). As the Karbi tribe is a small tribal entity, so it is not monitored and guided by hierarchical *caste* system. The Karbi society was governed by a well-knitted monarchical system where the common masses selected their own King known as the *Lindokpo* (Das, 2010). Their traditional system of socio-political structure had remained in vogue until and unless it was interfered by modern bureaucratic political and administrative system that came to be practiced with the advent of the British raj. But keeping in view the unique features of the hills tribal the British categorized the hills region into (I) excluded and (II) partially excluded areas (Guha, 1977). Thus in the post independence period a portion was carved out from the then Nagaon, Sibsagar and Cachar districts of Assam to form the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district in 1951(Bhuyan, 2008 and Rongphar, 2005).

The present Karbi Anglong district of Assam came in the political scenario of India on 17th November, 1951 based on the provisions enshrined in the 6th schedule of the Indian constitution. Initially, it was named as ' United Mikir and North Cachar Hills' district comprising of both the twin hilly region of Assam and after some months of constitutional procedures the erstwhile United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district was put under administrative and political control of United Mikir Hills and Hills District Council on 23rd June, 1952(Rongphar, 2005). The introduction of an Autonomous Council and exposure to education contributed the emergence of political leaderships from within the tribe who later on initiated and persisted further the

demand for a separate Karbi state. Shortly, after the introduction of Assam Official Language Bill on October 10, 1960 in the Assam Legislative Assembly, the All Party Hills' Leaders Conference was formed as a unified political platform demanding a separate united hills state Known as Northeast Frontier State. On the contrary, the All Party Hills' Leaders Conference was fragmented as results of decision of the Indian Union to re- organize the state of Assam. Following, the above political development, a new district based regional political party was formed on 1st January, 1970 known as 'Mikir Hills Progressive Party'. Erstwhile United Mikir and North Cachar District Council were divided into two separate political and administrative districts (Bhattacharjee, 1986, Bey, 2005 and Rongphar, 2005). Albeit, the demands for a separate state by the hills leaderships was at its peak during the period between 1960s and 1970s, but Karbi Anglong remained an integral part of Assam sustained by some minimal autonomous power, while Meghalaya headed on to become a separate state. However, the Karbi movement was moved to an organized track by the newly formed Peoples' Democratic Front on November 1, 1985. Under its patronage on 17th May, 1986, the Autonomous State Demand Committee was formed and it marked the beginning of a new political era in the history of Karbi Anglong. The formation of ASDC provided a new commence in further development of political institution in Karbi Anglong and emancipation of the issue of autonomy and identity politics. Meanwhile, the main motto of the ASDC was creation of an Autonomous State under Article 244(A) of the Indian constitution instead of a fully fledged state demanded earlier by other organizations (Datta, 1990). Therefore, moving a step forward after nearly a decade long political movement, the historic Memorandum of Settlement was signed on 1st April, 1995 after a tripartite agreement between the Central Government, State Government and the agitating leaderships, which subsequently transformed the status of the District Council to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council with some upgraded powers and autonomy (Rongphar, 2005). The political transition from a mere District Council to an Autonomous Council also simultaneously changed the political power structure within the council as for the first time a fully fledged regional political party took over the political regime of the Council. Therefore, the following categorizations have been made to discern the objectives of the study.

Regional Politics of Identity

Rise and fall of Regionalism in Karbi Anglong

The political transition that occurred in the aftermath of the accord privileged the leaders of the regional political party to control not only the political sphere of the district but also phenomenally intrigued the state politics at large. The KAAC was entrusted with more political autonomy to prepare its own annual financial budget and preserve its social and cultural heritage. In order to enable the custodians of the council to determine and prepare their own developmental policies, the council was empowered with independent legislative and executive powers. The Central government in the tripartite agreement made provisions to uphold the geographical integrity

of Assam and therefore, endeavored to involve the common tribal masses in the political structure and policy formulation. The key challenge facing the region is that of governance and lack of political acceptability. There has been attempt in the past to politically accommodate the tribal through mere financial grants but after realization by the state apparatus it was found that for a young and diverse country like India political integration of the tribal through active participation at the grass root level is fundamental. Tribal identity politics in the region is intrinsically related to self-determination movement, control over land and natural resources and structural safeguards of unique tribal history and cultural heritage. In concomitance with the preceding variables, the Karbi leaders also placed issues of political autonomy for socio-cultural safeguards and control over own resources in order to politically mobilize the masses. Therefore, the constitution of KAAC was an attempt to decentralize the governance and involve the tribal masses in determining their own political future which also remains an important benchmark for a successful democracy. Nonetheless, after attaining political power, the ASDC perpetuated its autonomous movement for preservation of its social, political and economic identity. It remains an interesting phenomenon to observe the analogy between identity politics and autonomy movement and political participation of the karbi masses. In regard to the identity politics of Karbi Anglong, there have been perpetual attempt on the part of the emerging political community of the tribe to uphold and protect the unique socio-cultural and economic identity of the karbis through structural provisions. The formation of ASDC marked the commencement of a new political era in the history of Karbi Anglong as it launched a joint political movement with the Karbi Students' Union for their self-determination. Besides, indulging in political exercises like picketing, strikes etc. alike its predecessors, they also attempted to create political awareness among the rural hill men through community education and community farming which brought them closer to the people and vice-versa. Such political exercises were implemented by the base structure of both the ASDC-KSA leadership through going in the country side and organizing free educational coaching and giving helping hand in the agriculture. Recollecting the days of the movement, a leader succinct, "The fact cannot be denied that the rural hill men of the remotest place became socially, politically and economically conscious during the period of ASDC-KSA joint movement". While, one other leader critically succinct, "The ill-effects of the political movement led by ASDC cannot be ruled out though yet it's far reaching merit is the socio-cultural and political-economic uprising during this period". The apprehension among the people to get annihilated in the mainstream Assamese society is one of the basic driving forces for their political mobilization which also provided the much needed fuel to the political propaganda of identity and autonomy. Thus, the urge to politically sustain as a socio-cultural entity embracing modern politico-economic structure remains an inevitable phenomenal feature of the emerging Karbi leadership in particular and the whole tribe in general.

Political decentralization through the regional committees of ASDC-KSA was exercised in relation to employment and resource control which politically motivated the masses to continue the political hegemony of the ASDC for more than a

decade. Albeit, the ASDC as a political power controlled the structural base of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), yet as a tribal political front continued its movement for an Autonomous state in the post accord period too which was resumed after the ASDC withdrew its support from the AGP led state government in 1997. However, in the long run the Autonomous state movement came to a cease in the wake of political fragmentation within the ASDC on 21st August, 2000 (Rongphar, 2005). Under such phenomenal political changes, the issue of Autonomous State got buried in the fratricidal conflicts and ideological conflicts that perpetuated for power space. Political instability within the regional political front created power vacuum that initiated the national political party to disseminate their propaganda. The assembly and council election that followed after this phenomenal incident were won by the Congress party and thus an era of regional governance came to an end.

The commencement of a new century also witnessed political transition in the hills politics and inclination of the masses towards a national ideology. It gives us room to think about the changes in the political behavior and political participation of the masses depending on the political environment. A Student leader has articulated the reasons behind the downfall of ASDC in his own words, "The high aspiration of the political leaders, political dictation and political incompetency has caused the downfall of ASDC". While another observer has critically articulated, "The regional party undoubtedly had a past glory, but at the present juncture their relevancy has diminished. In the present situation, they have to establish political allegiance with the national party in order to politically survive." Ideological vagueness and economic dependency of the common masses on the council were added factors of such changes in the political behavior. However, the divided regional forces came to an understanding to launch a common platform after the signing of a second Karbi Accord in 2011 between the Govt. of India, Govt. of Assam and the United Peoples' Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) that paved the way for structural up gradation of council. Following the accord the ASDC was dissolved on December 1, 2012 and reunification of all regional fronts started to take shape culminating in the formation of Hills State Demand Party in 2013 after a Karbi National convention held at KASA stadium. But again the HSDP was dissolved and another united political platform named Hills State Demand Council was formed on 10th February, 2015 (Baruah, 2015). Highlighting the above discourse on unification there appears to be ambivalence among the people. While a common voter succinct, "There is no doubt that it is a good sign of all regional leaders coming under one platform but it is only the coming time that would prove their relevancy." In contrast an ex movement leader observes, "In various cases over the years, it has been observed that the innocent and ignorant rural masses are motivated and mirage by a section of political leaders". Thus, over the years despite changes in the political ideology and platforms in articulating the tribal issues of Karbi Anglong, the issues have perpetuated to motivate the political behavior and participations of the masses. Therefore, dynamics of electoral politics to a great extent intrigue the political behavior of the masses and their attitude towards the issues.

Role of land

On the basis of some issues of identity discoursed above, the researcher have endeavored to discern the impacts of those in the tribal resurrection. One important among these includes the issue of land, its distribution among the Karbis, patterns of control over this natural resource and changing dynamics. Land is the source of all identity issues related to the Karbis as it is formidable in shaping, forming and developing a culture, economy and identity of the tribe or community depending on it. The land holding patterns of the tribal is unique and contrary to the modern system of private land ownership, of which the Karbis are no exception. Owing to such inherent customs, land in the tribal areas is regarded as Common Property Resources (CPR), but such community owned land is not recognized by the modern legal system and regards them as state property (Borbora and Fernandes, 2008). Recognition of CPR as state property enables the state to expedite the process of tribal land alienation to the non-tribal immigrants and use virgin vacant land in the tribal areas for capital purposes. Such measures adopted by the authority sustains the 1994 Rehabilitation Policy draft of the Government of India which states that following the economic policy of 1991, foreign and domestic investments would need more land for sustainability (Fernandes, 2008). The transition from community land ownership to private landownership in Karbi Anglong has been gradual and it primarily occurred both for internal and external reasons. The gradual acceptance of settled cultivation in the valleys of the districts in the post-contact period with plain counterparts in the 19th century and state sponsored initiatives to adopt cultivation of cash crops instead of traditional shifting cultivation have also been instrumental in patterns of land holding transition in Karbi Anglong district. Such process has contributed to not only individualization of land ownership, but also to the growing concentration of land in a few emerging elites within the tribe (Bathari, 2008). After interacting with the leaders and masses many interesting aspects have come up regarding the land issue. The unchecked illegal immigrants in the district are settled in the land erstwhile owned commonly by the tribe and crave for vote banks have further sustained such illegal settlements in the recent years. In most of the cases, in order to possess land and other resources these illegal immigrants have adopted marital policy i.e. marrying a local tribal girl which immunizes them to buy and sell land in their wife's name. Such marital approach has been widely practiced in the remote rural areas of Karbi Anglong and many a times the boy gets converted to Karbi as per local rituals. In this way, the right over land has been silently transferred legally from tribal possession to non-tribal possession, despite structural safeguards for the tribal land (Singh, 1987). Land has been instrumental in determining their separate socio-cultural and politico-economic identity, since ages. It has provided them space for sustainable traditional economic identity and also to emerge as a political community in the post-colonial period. The transition of land ownership from traditional to individual ownership has many negative implications in the Karbi socio-political life as common masses remain unabated from such transactions and transitions which are alien to them. In the present study, it was found that the changing land holding patterns has contributed towards concentration of capital in the form of land to a few

emerging middle class within the tribe. There have been large scale rubber plantations on the land erstwhile controlled by the CPRs and now owned by the political elites and new middle class which have consequently alienated the masses from their ancestral land. The most fundamental effect of such changes can be visible in their social relationship due to class difference within the tribe. Such waning away of tribal homogeneity has also opened up various dimensions to see the concept of tribe in the new era of neo-liberalization. Moreover, individualization of land has also led the non-tribal and even the immigrants to control land and other natural resources like stone mines, illegal coal and sand mines through de-facto means like acquiring lease for 99years or transferring the name of the land owner to a tribal person. While in pen and papers the owner is a tribal person but all the benefits generated from such transactions goes to the non-tribal de-facto owner.

Moving From Bullets to Ballots

Decentralization of democratic powers through the 6th schedule of the Indian constitution could not cater the political aspirations of the hills people due to hegemony of power hierarchy. As far as concentration of power is concerned, it remained confined to a few political elites leaving majority of the hills people to culminate their discontentment and alienation into a militant movement. In fact, the beginning of armed movement could be traced back to as early as 1972 when the ‘Mikir Hills Nationalist Liberation Organization’ was formed with the merging of various political and social organizations like the Mikir Hills District Youth Congress, Karbi Jirsong Amei, Mikir Hills Progressive Party, Karbi Students’ Association etc. However, this organization based on extreme ideology could not sustain for more years and had to confine themselves with mere disruptive and destruction of bridges and roads (Bey, 2005).

The organized and active militant activities began in Karbi Anglong with the formation of Karbi National Volunteers (KNV) on 22nd March 1994 and in the same year on 12th September, the Karbi Peoples’ Force, another militant organization was formed. The sole objective of both these militant organizations was achievement of a separate Karbi State within the Indian Union and propagated that socio-political-economic emancipation of the Karbi people would be achieved only through attainment of a separate state (Bora, 2008). Like their mainstream counterparts, these organizations too made attempts to mobilize the masses through reclaiming the demands for a separate state and reclaiming their space within their framed territory through employing extreme means. While interviewing one of the Central Committee Leader, he comments, “The attainment of Hemprak Kangthim i.e separate homeland is the ultimate solution for unemployment, financial crisis, social and cultural insecurity, economic development etc. But the prolong talks would only corrupt the situation and urges the government to adopt conflict transformation policy for sustainable solution.” Regarding the reason behind their formation, a local commander of a pro-talk extremist outfit asserts, “The formation of KLNLF and former KNV and KPF were driven by political motives to liberate the Karbi masses politically, socially and economically. There is need for a separate state for the socio-cultural and eco-political security of the karbi tribe.” However, after various violent activi-

ties and factional wars both the KNV and KPF eventually merged into a common platform known as the 'United Peoples' Democratic Solidarity' (UPDS) on 21st January 2000. Responding the peace proposal of the government the Chairman of UPDS Mr. P. Dili had announced a unilateral ceasefire for two months to be effected from 15th April, 2000. The peace agreement was legitimized on 23rd May 2002, and a bilateral ceasefire was declared for one year with immediate effect. At a time when the common people were optimistic of restoration of peace in the district, the UPDS too followed the footsteps of ASDC and was fragmented into two groups. As a result, in contrast to restoration of peace the region witnessed more bloodsheds and killings between these two factions. The anti-talks faction on 26th may 2004 had re-christened its name from UPDS to 'Karbi Longri N.C. Hills Liberation Front (KLNLF)'. Therefore, since then the politics of Karbi Anglong have been largely influenced by the activities of this militant organization. As a part of its strategic tactics it was involved in large scale violent activities to exercise its impact on the Government. In the later years, the KLNLF too had entered in a truce with the Central Government since 2010. The Government agencies too have been trying to bring all the militant organizations to the negotiating table and reach an amicable political solution (Bora, 2008).

Based on the theory of Johan Galtung, cessation of conflict through declaration of ceasefire is the first step to peace, where a conflicting situation is managed by the state through partial absence of violence followed by signing of a peace accord which he described as a step of peace making/ conflict resolution (Galtung, 1976). The UPDS which was in a ceasefire truce with the Indian state step forwarded towards signing an agreement that nullified their earlier demand for a separate state and paved the way for allotment of more powers to the existing Council under the 6th schedule of Indian constitution. The peace accord was signed on 25th November, 2011 between the representatives of Indian Government, Government of Assam, UPDS and the leaders of Peoples' Alliance for Peace Agreement (PAPA). Thereafter, the UPDS was disbanded formally and most of the signatories geared up for the upcoming general election of the council that was scheduled to be held at the dawn of the following year. Keeping in view the schedule of the election, the agreement turned out to be dramatic as the leaders of the UPDS and PAPA demanded dissolution of the executive body of the then congress run KAAC until the fresh election. Nonetheless, three signatories of the agreement and ex rebel leaders i.e. Horen Sing Bey, Kangjang Terang and Surjya Rongphar under the banner of PAPA won and were elected as members of the KAAC. Their involvement in the parliamentary politics through a regional political platform created speculation among the people of the dawn of a new era of ethnic politics in the hill region. Unlike the Bodo peace accord of 2003 where the signatory party i.e. the Bodo Liberation Tigers was given the opportunity to run an interim executive body of the council, the UPDS were not fortunate enough for an interim executive body of the council and had to contest direct election. The failure of the leaders of the UPDS in concretely articulating their charter of demands created apprehension among the people about the validity of the agreement. While giving his view on the situation, a student leader urges, "The political unwillingness

of the state to implement the accord has minimized their relevancy. Moreover, no constitutional amendment was made while articulating the MoS of 2011.” The political in competitiveness of the State Government towards implementation of the clauses of the MoS also gradually wane the political expectations of the people. Thus, involvement of the leaders of the UPDS in the electoral politics without fulfilling their political demands only reveals the negative dynamics of electoral politics that it had on the movement.

Transitional effects of politics in Karbi Anglong:

Circulation of power

Political power never tends to remain static and it revolves in a cyclic manner depending on the contest of power hierarchy. This theory of power transition was evolved by AFK Organski that he elucidated in his textbook, *World Politics* (1958). Albeit, by referring transition of power he intends to describe the power relation among different nations with different degree of power and the contribution of their status-quo towards maintaining the wheel of international power, yet the same was also decentralized to describe the various elements intriguing the regional power hierarchy (Lemke, 2002). Moreover, this model of power transition is also conceived with the domestic power hierarchy where different political actors exercise their role and are in constant power struggle to dominate the whole. Thus, such power contest among the political actors pave the way for power transition in the whole and cyclic process of power transition persists inevitably to consolidate the whole.

Therefore, drawing reference from the above theory, the perpetual power contest that led to the political transition in Karbi Anglong is a natural part of the whole cyclic process to consolidate the whole. Here, we would like to explore primarily on the transitional effects of politics in Karbi Anglong in the recent years specifically after the rise of Bhartiya Janata Party in 2016 assembly election and the subsequent council election that followed in 2017 where the once alien BJP swept the polls leaving behind its contenders without any structural trace. Prior to the assumption of power by the BJP the Congress was at the top of power hierarchy for three consecutive terms. Again, from the above discourses it is also revealed that the regional fronts since the mid-80s until the dawn of the 21st century was at the top of the hierarchy. The dramatic fragmentation within the regional fronts and change in the leadership hierarchy contributed the cyclic transition of political power in the region whereby the congress which was in constant contest as a political actor captured the power. Similarly, as the theory of power transition elucidate that a dominant nation which is at the top of international power hierarchy continue to maintain that status for 50-60 years after which the succeeding great nations at the hierarchy capture the power and thus the cyclic process persists through mutual capture of power. The BJP until 2016 was at the bottom of the power hierarchy but rose to the top after constant power struggle and waning of the power validity of the congress. Thus, the present discourse on the transitional effects of politics in Karbi Anglong would strive to discern the changes visible in the socio-cultural life of the people in relation to the

eco-political transition and tribal identity movement.

As discussed in the preceding paragraphs regarding the Karbi movement for self-determination to safeguard their socio-cultural heritage and endure as an independent political entity, it is interesting to observe the gradual transition in the behavior of their political struggle with changes in the power structure. Their political aspiration and struggle that followed culminated with the achievement of some sort of structural recognition under the 6th schedule of the Indian constitution. This also provided an impetus to the struggling leaderships to hold control of the miniature power structure embedded with independent legislation, executive and financial powers and power to employ Karbi customary laws. However, the political transition from ASDC to Congress and now to BJP depicts certain new dimensions in the whole political process. The common masses that were once against the participation of any national party in the politics of Karbi Anglong are now die hard supporters of an extreme right wing national party i.e. BJP, which depicts the role of electoral politics and its dynamics. Until 2016 the role of BJP as a political party was limited to only mere contest of elections and some formal political exercises leaving the inherent issues of the hills in the backdrop. But the other extreme right wing Hindu organizations have been functioning in a concealed way penetrating deep into the tribal society through charity, educational thrusts, NGOs and most importantly through religious reformation programs. In this whole exercise of gradual penetration into the tribal society through various mechanisms the role of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is crucial. The RSS along with its various allied organizations like Friends of Tribal Society, Ekal Vidyalaya, Shishu Shiksha Samiti, Art of Living etc. have been working parallel on mission mode among the remotest hills and rural areas of Karbi Anglong without practically exposing their concealed political and corporate character. The region being home to not only the Karbis but also hosts various other ethnic tribal entities like the Kuki, Dimasas, Rengma Nagas etc. witnessed various ethnic violence in the last one and a half decade due to overlapping of ethnic issues and proposed territories. In due course of such violence and conflicts these right wing organizations got the advantage to embark in the socio-cultural life of the Karbis through charity and free educational project (Phukan, et al., 2016). Besides, religious reformations and conversions also contributed towards the organizational consolidation. Nonetheless, the concealed role of electoral power politics in instigating such ethnic conflicts cannot be ruled out.

Politics of karbi Anglong post 2014

The downfall of United Peoples' Alliance (UPA) in the Lok Sabha election of 2014 and the clear mandate achieved by the BJP paved the way for BJP to form the government. These gradually began to influence the politics in Karbi Anglong where the Congress was also at the top of the power hierarchy. As a result of the anti-incumbency factor and impact of power transition in the national politics, the assembly election that followed in 2016 witnessed the dramatic win of BJP in the three assembly seats out of the four seats in Karbi Anglong. Later on, following the footsteps of

other dissident congressmen led by Himanta Biswa Sharma that joined the BJP prior to the election, the lone legislature of Congress from the Baithalangso constituency Dr. Mansing Rongpi also joined the BJP a few months after the formation of the BJP led coalition government in Assam. The historic victory of the BJP in the hill region of Assam that witnessed the growth of various regional national political fronts of the Karbis signifies a new dimension. Political comp ability with the central and state government is inevitable for financial sustainability of the KAAC. Chronological evidences also reveal the fact of political comp ability with the central and state government throughout the history of KAAC. Therefore, in the most dramatic event in the political history of Karbi Anglong, most members of the executive body of the KAAC joined the BJP on 23rd June, 2016 led by its Chief Executive Member Mr. Tuliram Ronghang and the congress was left with a handful of members. Interestingly, after few days even core members from the Hills State Demand Council and ex leaders of UPDS who were the signatories of MoS of 2011 too joined the BJP. This drastic political change in the region gave a political hegemony at structural level to the BJP which left the opposition parties at a very disadvantage position. The joining of the architects of the regional force and militant movement in a national party that has remained alien to the autochthon issues allude ideological vagueness and nullifies the MoS. Such paradoxes have also influence the political behavior of the common masses as during this phase of power transition at structural level, common masses too have invariably extended their support towards the new regime. In this regard, based on our interaction with a voter, he says, “We gave opportunity to both the ASDC and Congress, but they could not yield what they promised for us, therefore giving chance to the BJP is acceptable and people are optimistic regarding the new alternatives. Another person who was interviewed says, “For an Autonomous region to develop and achieve its goals, it is inevitable that we should be with that party which has formed the government both at the centre and state.” Through this we have also learned that reliable of common masses on the structure and those who control the structure also play a decisive role in determining the support of the masses towards the political actor at the top of the hierarchy. Nonetheless, factor of class hegemony also intrinsically influence the behavior of the masses in electoral politics. Structural politics is always influenced by class hegemony as the bourgeoisie always intend to control the whole. This whole process of relationship between the structure and class signifies the theory of circulation of elites elucidated by Gaetano Mosca(1939), where a minor section of elite group constantly struggle with the lower strata of the group to maintain the relationship via circulation of elites.

As the primary objective of the present paper is concerned literally with the transitional effects of politics in Karbi Anglong, therefore based on our empirical study we intend to explore the post-effects of this change in the power structure. In the recent years, there has been a rise of extreme orientation towards the Hinduvta ideology propagated by the RSS and other Hindu right wing organizations. Being a tribal group the ethnic Karbi people follow animism traditionally and the impact of

Hinduism and Christian is not old. Mainstream religious practices in the tribal areas invariably inculcate various traditional folk rituals too and in this regard, the Karbi society is no exception. But imposing religious beliefs through state structure signifies fundamentalism and militant Hinduvta ideology. The autochthon issues like preservation of tribal culture, language, political space, land etc. have been overshadowed by the issue of Hindu Rashtra and jingoism propagated by the RSS-BJP. The erstwhile stalwarts of the karbi political movement are now propagators of Hindu Rashtra and Hinduvta ideology. Interestingly, the KAAC which is a micro representative of the state structure is to structurally protect the socio-cultural and eco-political rights of the karbis and uphold its traditional customary beliefs is now indulged in propagating jingoism and other pan Indian issues. Therefore, under such phenomenon of political transition the autochthon issues are tend to get buried in the dynamics of electoral politics and emerging nexus between the whole and economy. Nevertheless, the political actors controlling the hierarchy are bound to follow the dimensions of electoral politics which makes them symbolically carry the issue of an Autonomous state under Art.244 (A). In this context, the present executive body of the KAAC under a joint platform of various organizations staged a demonstration with as many as 1000 people from the two twin hills district i.e. Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao district of Assam at Ramlila Maidan, Delhi on December 19, 2017.

Since, in the previous paragraphs we have highlighted the role of several Hindu right wing groups affiliated to the RSS in consolidating the BJP in the district, it is imperative also to bring in the present discourse about their concealed market interest. In the guise of capital investments, industrialization and employment generation the present authority of the KAAC is expected to allot 500 *bighas* land in karbi Anglong to open production unit of the Patanjali group. Now, the question arises how this group is going to solve the unemployment crisis in the district and pave the way for modern industrialization in the region? Are the local producers would be benefitted and would get their due rights? The KAAC being an autonomous body is embedded with certain financial powers by virtue of which it should have ameliorated its own industrial and production units. Under such circumstances, land right and resource control right of the karbi people which forms a formidable part of their custom gets menaced. Similarly, a government notification Dated 17/03/2017 was issued by the authority of the KAAC to allot land at Havarpi Tourist Complex, Diphu to Vyakti Vikash Kendra India (VVKI) Trust for Northeast Youth Centre for Excellence. Interestingly, this trust is run by Sri Sri Ravishankar and in the guise of various names the KAAC has been involved in allotting spaces to these religious and spiritual organizations at places initially constructed as tourists spot. This has raised controversy over the utilization of public funds as the Havarpi Tourist Complex was designed as a ropeway for tourist amusement way back in 2000 when the ASDC was in the power under the leadership of Mr. Jotson Bey. Thus, political transition in the recent years in Karbi Anglong does not only signifies mere change in the political power structure but it also signifies the related change in the socio-cultural life of the Karbis and their sustainability as a result of parallel expansion of market economy with fundamentalist nationalism.

Conclusion

Today political movements for tribal identity have become symbolic political exercises of the various political organizations involved in electoral politics. The masses are sandwiched between new political developments and the political aspirations introduced to them by the modern political structure and the political actors controlling the structure. In the perspective of Karbi Anglong it is seen how factors of socio-cultural safeguards and control over resources have influenced the beginning of an Autonomous movement that still persists to be a pivotal issue. The paradigm shift of the nature of political struggle and emergence of political vacuum has played a determinant role in the political transition. While, the endeavor for peaceful political solution of the insurgent problem led almost all the groups to come to negotiations and in the recent years many ex rebel leaders have also become part of the state structure. Such approach towards structural inclusion have influenced second phase of political transition. Despite, many transition the issues have remained same and people are captivated therefore in the old dream of a separate state. This draws them to sustain that political party holding the political structure at the centre and state. The role of middle class in this regard is noteworthy as they yield both political and economic opportunity through having an accord with such political transition. The third phase therefore, is based fundamentally on the effects of power transition at the centre. Therefore, it would be interesting to observe how tribal rights would be safeguarded in the light of growing jingoism and market economy.

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