

# Leadership of AGP in Contemporary Politics of Assam

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**Abstract**— India is a vast country full of different religions, races and cultures. Unity among diversity is an important characteristic of India. However, although we are bound together by the emotion of unity, there is a tendency to create a separate identity at the regional level at various times. Such regional aspirations have emerged in different parts of India at different times which we can call regionalism in the simplest sense. Assam is no different in this regard. Since independence, strong tendency of regionalism has developed in Assam at various times. The Assam Gana Parishad played an important role in developing this kind of sentiment in Assam. The Assam Gana Parishad, which was formed as a result of the six-years long Assam movement, gave birth to regional politics in Assam. The Assam movement, which began in 1979 under the leadership of the “All Assam Students’ Union” , ended in 1985 when the historic “Assam Peace Accord” was signed between the then Prime Minister of India, ‘Rajiv Gandhi’ and the leadership of the movement. After the signing of the “Assam Peace Accord”, Assembly elections were announced in Assam and some of the leaders of the “AASU” formed the regional political party called “Assam Gana Parishad”. Since then, the party has influenced the political system of Assam to a greater extent. In this paper we will provide an analytical study of the Assam Gana Parishad Party and its leadership and their effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Leadership, AGP, Regionalism, Assam Movement.

## I. INTRODUCTION

As a political ideology, regionalism can be defined as an expression that always wants to increase the self-determination of the people of a particular region. Regionalism begins when we start paying too much attention to the region in which we live. We all want to improve the area in which we live. Every region of a country has its own characteristics. These set us apart from other regions. Everyone living in any area wants their place to develop and tries to maintain their distinctive character. Such efforts create regional aspirations in people's minds. We all desire to improve the area in which we live. Every region of a country has its own characteristics. These set us apart from other regions. Everyone living in any area wants their place to improve and tries to maintain their distinctive character. Such efforts create regional expectations in people's minds. And excessive regional aspirations give birth to regionalism among us. Such an attitude has emerged in India since independence. People in different parts of India have been waging various democratic and armed movements since independence seeking regional autonomy. Regionalism seeks to increase the political power and influence of the inhabitants of a particular region so that they can create some distinct identity for themselves. According to regionalism, local people will benefit only if political power is strengthened. Regionalism seeks to create a strong sense of brotherhood and unity among the people living in a region that will protect the interests of those people in the future. However, strong regionalism often creates excessive attachment to their region in the minds of the people of the region, which often threatens the unity and integrity of the country. Most of the time, regionalism seeks to solve the problems of its region. There are two main ways to express their demands among the people - democratic movements and armed movements. Assam is one of the regions where regional aspirations have emerged strongly. After India gained independence, the problem of immigrants emerged in Assam. Foreigners who entered Assam at various times threatened the unity and integrity of Assam. In such circumstances, a strong sentiment developed among the people of Assam to free Assam from foreign immigrants. From 1979 to 1985, a strong movement led by the All Assam Students Union started to free Assam from foreign immigrants. This movement resulted in the birth of the Assam Gana Parishad, a regional political party that came forward to work for the development of Assam. Since then, the party has played an important role in the political context of Assam from time to time. This party has been led by many powerful and influential leaders. Many of them have occupied a distinct place in the minds of the Assamese people.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study are as follows -

- To study the brief history of Assam Movement.
- To study the formation of the AGP party and its performance in the elections.
- To study the effectiveness of leadership of the AGP party in contemporary politics of Assam.

## III. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design has been adopted while developing the text. All necessary information has been collected from secondary sources from magazines, books, government and non-governmental reports, newspapers, website and various working papers. The secondary data have been analyzed through a content analysis method. Literature reviews, books and documents not based on substantiated findings, were excluded from the study.

## IV. A BRIEF HISTORY OF ASSAM MOVEMENT

The population density of Assam has increased significantly after Independence due to migration from different parts of India as well as Bangladesh and Nepal. Most of the migrants started migrating to Assam to improve their standard of living. As the number of these people increased day by day, the problems of the indigenous people in Assam gradually increased. After the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, the foreigners problem took a serious turn in several states of the North East including Assam. In such conditions, the All Assam Students Union (AASU) led the famous Assam Movement from 1979 to 1985 to protect the interests of Assamese in Assam and against foreigners. According to the leaders of this movement, if these foreigners are not identified and deported from Assam, the Assamese people will become a minority in Assam. Later, the leadership of the movement focused mainly on illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. There were other aspects to the movement as well. Assam has always been rich in various natural resources like oil, tea and coal. But according to the leaders of the movement, the central government was only exploiting the resources from Assam. Assam did not get any benefit from this.

The Assam movement gained unprecedented popularity in Assam in a very short period of time. The deportation movement was initially democratic and non-violent but later in parts it turned violent. As a result, more than 800 people were martyred in the movement. This movement lasted for a long six years, and the historic Assam Peace Accord was signed on 15 August 1985 between the Rajiv Gandhi-led Union Government and the leaders of the movement and the movement came to an end.

## V. AGP AND ITS FORMATION

The movement in Assam ended in August 1985 after the signing of the Assam Accord between the Central Government and the leaders of the movement. There were no Assembly elections in Assam for the six years of the agitation. After the signing of the Assam Accord, Assembly elections were announced in Assam. It was during this time that a number of agitating leaders came together to form a regional political party called the Assam Gana Parishad. The Assam Gana Parishad was formed with certain objectives. Such as- stopping the ongoing infiltration of foreigners into Assam, identification of foreigners in Assam, Expulsion of foreigners, To expand education in Assam and establish all-India level technical institutes in Assam etc.

In 1985, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, was elected as the President of the party where Asom Jatiyatbadi Dal and the Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad were also merged with the AGP party. The Assam Gana Parishad won an absolute majority in the 1985 Assam Assembly elections and formed the government led by student leader Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the youngest Chief Minister of India. The AGP promised to transform Assam into a golden Assam by making it foreigner-free. However, in the 1991 Assembly elections, the AGP had to sit in the opposition. In 1996 again AGP was able to form the government. But since then AGP has not been able to achieve good results in the elections since then. The AGP did not win a single seat in the 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections. In 2001, Assembly elections were held in Assam and the AGP was defeated again. In the Lok Sabha elections of 2004, the Assam Gana Parishad won only two seats. However, the party suffered a defeat in the 2006 state Assembly elections. The party also performed disappointingly in the 2011 Assembly elections. The party failed again to win a single seat in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. In the 2016 Assam Assembly elections, the party formed an electoral alliance with the Bharatiya Janata Party and won 14 seats. The number was reduced to 9 in the State Assembly Election in 2021.

## **VI. LEADERSHIP OF AGP**

The Assam Gana Parishad was formed on the aspirations of the Assamese people. The party was formed as a result of the 6-year Assam movement. In the 1985 Assam Assembly elections, the AGP leader Prafulla Kumar Mahanta expressed the confidence of the people of Assam and helped the party to win an absolute majority. As the youngest Chief Minister of the country, Praful Mahanta also promised to take Assam forward towards development. He also said that he would turn our state into a golden Assam. The leaders of the new government formed in 1985 were enthusiastic but lacked experience and most of the promises they made did not come true. The party failed to maintain its popularity in the 1985 elections and suffered a defeat in the 1991 Assembly elections. In the Assembly elections of 1996, the AGP party led by Prafulla Mahanta again won the elections and formed the government but it lost the elections of 2001. In the early 21st century, the AGP faced a massive internal turmoil and its senior leader Atul Bora (Senior) withdrew and formed the Trinamool Gana Parishad. It was during this time that Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was accused of corruption during his tenure and the government's involvement in secret assassinations. The AGP removed him from the post of party president and elected Vrindavan Goswami as party president. The party's popularity increased slightly after this, but it did not last long. On July 3, 2005, Prafulla Kumar was expelled from the party on charges of anti-party activities. In 2008, the party leaders met and reunited to strengthen the regional party movement in Assam.

In February 2024, the AGP re-elected Atul Bora as its president for a three-year term and appointed Keshab Mahanta as its executive president. Atul Bora, who was re-elected, emphasized on creating a work culture in the party and adding new members to the party. Bora emphasized on including emerging youth in the party. The AGP is still able to maintain its influence among the people to a lesser extent and if the party is able to win the trust of the Assamese people through its policies and ideals, it will be able to regain their old position. Bora emphasized on activating the student sections, youth sections, women's sections and farmers' sections to reach out to the people. The party will rely heavily on Bora's leadership to win the trust of the people in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

Initially, the AGP established itself as a model for regional parties in the country. At a time when only the Congress party dominated Assam, the AGP was able to defeat the influential Congress party and form the government. This party beautifully expressed its image among the public. However, after coming to power, the AGP failed to fulfill the expectations it created among the people, which pushed the AGP towards collapse. The main reason for the collapse of this party is internal confusion. In many cases, the lack of vision of the party leaders also weakened the party. However, after its defeat in the 2001 Assembly elections, the AGP unfortunately failed to regain the confidence of the people. If it had been able to maintain its dominance, it could have become a big player in national politics like other regional parties like TMC, DMK etc . The party leadership will have to work hard to change its destiny. To keep the flag of regionalism flying, the party must learn from its past mistakes and take new and exceptional approaches.

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