CHAPTER VII:

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The present study “Democratic Deficit in Sixth Schedule Administration: A study of BTAD in Assam” attempted at recounting the journey of democracy in BTAD, Assam. The findings of the study reveal that BTAD has experienced tremendous challenges in providing equality, justice and liberty, the core values of democracy to its citizen. However at the same time it would be unfair to mention BTAD as undemocratic. The study is done through the democratic deficit perspective to measure the structural as well as functional aspect of the BTAD administration. Looking at the vastness of the area the study has been made limited in three aspects:

- Political participation of the citizen in the framework of BTAD.
- Accountability of the bureaucrats and representatives of BTAD.
- Development of the people of BTAD in terms of human development paradigm.

The findings of the study are mentioned below----

7.1 LEVEL OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN BTAD

In terms of political participation, it has been observed that there exists some type of structural deficiency in BTAD. For better participation of the people, decentralization of power to the grass root level is one of the important measures. The whole concept of Sixth Schedule is based on the principle of self styled government run by the local people. But like the other Autonomous Council, BTAD has also not implemented Panchayati Raj system in their area. It means BTAD administration has not decentralized its power to the grass root level which is opposite to the basic democratic principles. Instead of Panchayati Raj, BTAD has made a provision of decentralization of power by constituting VCDC and TCLCC. But mere decentralization does not mean
deepening democracy if the method involved in the decentralization process is not democratic. The provision of VCDC and TCLCC though meant for decentralizing the power, yet the method involved here is completely undemocratic. All the members here are nominated by the ruling party where local people do not have any say. Thus it can be commented that BTAD is suffering from structural Democratic Deficit in terms of decentralization of power.

Besides the structural deficit, BTAD is also facing challenges in the functional aspect of political participation. If one observes at the people’s participation from bird’s eye view the scene is very positive. The percentage of voting is very high (92.8%), majority section of the people participate in procession (60%). But mere participation in the procession and casting vote do not mean people’s involvement in the decision making process. Real participation involves well informed citizen about government plans, projects, and function and at the same time active involvement in the political process through membership of political party, organizing meeting etc. But in BTAD people’s involvement in active political action is very limited. In some cases attitude of the people seem undemocratic. For instance 40% of the respondent (Figure: 5.5) say that they support a political party for personal gain such as jobs, contracts and other facilities. This type of citizen’s approach also makes the system undemocratic in nature. Because democratic minded citizen is necessary to make a system democratic. If citizens become self centered, non committed to the society then the system has to suffer for it.

Though democracy demands free and fair election by making an environment where everyone can cast his/her vote freely yet BTAD again fails to fulfill this democratic demand. 34.7% (Table:5.15) of the respondent say that they cannot cast their vote freely because of threatening. Again 46.3% respondents say that they cannot cast their vote because of the presence of party men. This type of violation of democratic norms has made the democratic system of BTAD a mockery.

Another structural and functional deficit of the BTAD is found in the representation system. Though structurally BTAD provides for the representation of minority through reservation process yet the representation system is not proportionate to population of different stakeholders. Even in the reserved category they manipulate the provisions. In
30 seats which are reserved for the ST hardly give chance to the other ST people living in the BTAD. The open seats (5) which are made open for all communities living in the BTAD are kept in Bodo majority area. As a result of it, non Bodo people hardly get any chance to win from those constituencies. In another sense BTAD is suffering structural democratic deficit as it has not kept any constituency reserved for women that constitute half of the total population of the area.

The system support or legitimacy is another important aspect of a democratic regime. A system is democratic if the people of that particular system support it. If people do not support their system then there problems occur. A democratic system must establish balance between the people’s aspiration and government’s performance. In BTAD majority of the people do not consider it “as system for the people”. 84.1% (Table:5.19) respondent don’t consider BTC as system which takes step to uplift their livelihood, even 50% (Table:5.20) of the respondents do not consider BTC as a system which can preserve identity. All these reveal people’s dissatisfaction towards the system which ultimately has made the system unstable.

So, the first hypothesis “Higher the level of democracy higher the political participation” has proved true as it has been found that the democratic level of BTAD is not so high or deepening to increase people’s participation in the process.

7.2 ACCOUNTABILITY LEVEL IN BTAD

Like the political participation of the people, the accountability level of BTAD is very low. The accountability level of the bureaucrats and the representatives has been tried to measure from the citizens’ view.

Accountability means responsiveness and commitment of the bureaucrats and representatives towards the people. As democracy is considered as government of the people, by the people and for the people so the whole administration must be people centric. Lack of responsibility and commitment of the government officials and representatives will lead to the deficiency of the governance as well as the performance of democratic system. In BTAD it has been observed that the bureaucrats are less
responsive to the people. 81.3% (Table 5.28) of the respondent said that the working pattern of the officers is not satisfactory. Regarding causes of non satisfaction it has been observed that unsatisfactory behavior of the officers, irregularities of the bureaucrats and corruption constitute most important among all the causes of dissatisfaction. 60% of the respondent identified these problems as common in public offices. As government officials are less responsive to the people so people do not get required information (75.6%, Table5.31 ) from the offices regarding policies, plan etc. As a result of it the common people have to manage the middle men to get the services.

Corruption is also considered as an evil practice of democracy. It undermines democratic governance through many ways. When money becomes influential and rules, corruption makes the core principle of democracy such as equality, justice and fairness etc, useless. Poor section of the society has to pay more for corruption as they are unable to pay the bribe so they do not get the benefit of the policies. In field survey it has been observed that the level of corruption is very high in BTAD. 88.8% (Table 5.26 ) of the respondent informed that they are asked to pay bribe for each and every work done in the government offices As most of the poor people are unable to pay bribe for getting the benefit of government schemes, so they are deprived from those. The people have to pay bribe even for taking loan, for taking emergency medical service etc. The entire picture depicts clearly the horrible condition of the BTAD administration, which is completely undemocratic, anti people and anti development.

The representatives of the BTAD are also not democratic minded. In representative democracy, people send their representatives to raise their problems in the government and solve their problem as much as possible. This can be possible if he comes to the area and hear the problems in public meeting. 56.2%(Table5.17 ) respondent informed that their representatives do not come to know their problems. As a result their problems remain unresolved and unrepresented.

All the information regarding accountability of the People’s representatives and the bureaucrats show a malfunctioning democratic picture of BTAD. This type of administrative system is not suitable for democracy as well as for people’s development. High level of corruption, non responsive nature of officers towards the citizen can collapse a democratic system.
7.3 HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN BTAD

Human development and democracy are interrelated. The success of a democratic society depends to a great extent on the progress of human development. The core point of both the terms is inclusive progress of a society. So every democratic society determines its goals in terms of human development. Lesser the level of human development means lesser the success of democracy.

The finding of the study also reveals low human development in BTAD. Health constitutes one of the important aspects of human development. The health condition of BTAD is not satisfactory. Even in most areas there is not any primary health centre. The number of health centre existing in BTAD is not enough to provide the basic health facility to the people. Health centers are not equally distributed in all areas. There is also discrimination in the distribution of health centers between rural-urban areas, Bodo-Nonbodo areas. Even people are not satisfied with the existing health facility. 78% (Table :6.6) respondents replied total dissatisfaction with the present health condition. Regarding the causes of dissatisfaction, 91% of the respondent informed about lack of respect from the employees and doctors of the hospitals. Again 86% respondent says that the hospitals cannot provide the basic medicines to them. However, the respondent also informed that the doctors and medical employees do some unhealthy practices like selling the medicine in the pharmacy, taking fees for registering the name earlier. Even in the office time some medical staff takes money for providing emergency service etc.

Another aspect of maintaining health is facilitating pure drinking water to the people. Safe drinking water is defined to cover only tap and bore-well water. Open wells and hand tube wells are not covered.1 In BTAD government has taken some initiative to establish tube well, well, public water supply to provide drinking water to the people. But the quality of their work is so poor that after a few months of the initiation the tubewell, well becomes unusable. The tube well as well as the well become dry. The public water supply under Public Health and Engineering Department is stopped after a few months of initiation. As a result of that people’s satisfaction regarding the provision
of public drinking water supply facility is very low. 75.6% (table 6.8) of the total respondent replied that government has totally failed in providing drinking water to the people.

Education is another important aspect of human development. Table 6.1 shows the wide variation of the distribution of academic institution across the districts in Assam. In terms of overall distribution of academic institutions, the condition of BTAD districts is more or less equivalent to other district in the state of Assam. Overall picture of infrastructure (table 6.2) of the primary and middle school of the BTAD areas are more or less same with other states of Assam. Yet the quality of the education is very low from the respondent’s point of view. 55.3% of the respondents (table 6.3) say that they are completely dissatisfied with the quality of the education provided in government school. Regarding the causes for dissatisfaction most of them (85%, table 6.4) identified the absence of teachers in school. It denotes both structural as well functional deficiency of the BTAD administration. It implies BTAD administration has failed to introduce provision structure through which they can make the teachers as well as teaching officials committed to the job. It again reflects the irresponsibility of the Education Department towards providing quality management in school. Even in field study it was found that BTAD administration has adopted a differentiated eye for different area in establishing as well as improving the infrastructure of the schools. It has been observed that the infrastructure of the school of non Bodo areas is less developed than the schools of Bodo dominated areas. The schools of non Bodo dominated areas face problems like crisis of teachers, lack of infrastructure etc. On the other hand the schools of Bodo dominated areas are facing problems like absence of school teachers, low quality of newly built infrastructure.

Law and order situation is another important aspect for human development. For conducive development, government must be able to keep the law and order situation stable and secure. The authority must be able to secure the life and property of the people. But in BTAD the authority has failed completely to protect the life and property of the people. BTAD at present time has become vulnerable for clash. Many life as well as property has been lost by ethnic clashes occurred in different times. In present time
people do not feel secure due to frequent occurrence of conflicts and such other violent incidents. 76.3% people informed that they are not satisfied with the law and order situation of the BTAD. 

As BTAD has failed to fulfill the needs of the people so slowly it is losing legitimacy. The support base of the people towards different activities done by BTC has proved that BTC has lost the support base of the majority people. 76.3% of the people (table 6.20 ) of BTAD think that pre BTC period was the best condition for development while only a minority portion of respondent (17.5%, table 6.20 ) consider that BTC has improved their condition of life and livelihood.

So, the second hypothesis of the study that is, ‘Decentralization is not the only way of deepening democracy if grass root level people are not empowered’ has also proved true.

From the above discussion it becomes very clear that BTAD to a great extent has suffered deficit both in terms of structure and function. These deficits can be summarized in the following way-

7.4 Structural Deficits-

- The representation system is not based on proportion of population.
- Lack of provision for minority representation.
- Lack of mechanism for audit as well as for vigilance committee to control corruption.
- Lack of decentralized institution at grass root level.

7.5 Functional Deficits-

- Use of unscrupulous means in the election.
- Non accountability of the bureaucrats.
- High level of corruption in each and every field.
- Discriminatory development process.
- Failure in the protection of the life and liberty of its citizen.
- Failure in fulfillment of the basic needs of the people.
7.6 Suggestions-

To overcome these deficits some recommendations are enlisted below-

- Representative body for the village level needs to be constituted to deepen the democratic system.
- More representatives need to be included from the non Bodo community in the Bodoland Territorial Council and Executive Committee.
- Representation from the women needs to be included through the reservation system.
- Development project should be distributed not on the basis of caste but on the basis of economic condition.
- To provide good governance in BTAD, BTC must develop administrative skill, work culture and alertness of the people.
- Money is not enough for successful working of a system. The important thing is its proper utilization by checking corruption. BTC authority should give importance on it by establishing proper vigilance commission.
- Develop reconciliation policy to all the people living in the BTAD.
- Proper plan and programme to detect and deport illegal migrants.
- Education for skill development to tackle the problem of unemployment and poverty.

The study is not anti decentralization in any of its form. And the study is neither opposing Sixth Schedule nor BTC. It does not oppose this type of self styled rule of some specific group of India as beauty of India lies in its diversity. Rather, it is pro-decentralization and pro-Sixth Schedule as it aims to find out the existing problem in the system. It is an accepted view that mere decentralization or transformation of power from one group of elite to other group of elite cannot fulfill the aim of democracy. The real intention behind decentralization was inclusion and empowerment of the people at the bottom. Decentralization can become the viable way of deepening democracy only when the people at the bottom can have a say in the decision making process. But this is not happening in India as well as in BTC. Almost all the forms of decentralization
whether Panchayati Raj or Sixth Schedule have failed to a great extent in India. It has been considered failed due to its inability to empower large section of the society and for helping in the concentration of power at the hands of a few affluent people. Hence, it has become pertinent to find out ways through which loopholes in the process of decentralization can be identified and mitigated.

References and Notes