



## Opposition in Assam Legislative Assembly: an Analysis From 1990 To 2011

Dhiraj Kr. Das

Assistant Professor, Naharkatiya College, Naharkatia, Dibrugarh,  
Assam – 786610

### ABSTRACT

*A strong opposition is essential for proper functioning of democracy in the parliamentary type of government. Democracy is a government of the people and not of the majority only. It exists not for the interest of the majority but for the people as a whole. The ruling party by virtue of their majority may overlook this principle and forget the people, but they are reminded of it by the existence of an opposition. The opposition acts as a watch-dog, observes the activities of the government and whenever it finds them working undemocratically or acting against the interest of the people, brings the government into the right track through criticism, expressing protest and dissension. The government cannot go unbridled and unchecked if there is an organized and alert opposition. The opposition points out the weakness of the administration; it also offers constructive suggestions to modify defective programmes of the government. Existence of an organized opposition has also its importance to make the government responsible.*

*It has been observed that the problems of opposition in Assam Legislative Assembly are major in present time. In the present study it is proposed to carry out an intensive investigation to understand the role and problems of opposition in Assam Legislative Assembly (hereinafter to be the ALA).*

*In Assam, the opposition has not succeeded in making its impact felt in a worthwhile manner inside and outside the Assembly. Importance of the opposition in parliamentary democracy is yet to be realized by the people at large. For their part the opposition parties have not contributed significantly to secure such realization through political education of the electorate. Parties generally come closer to the electorate in times of general elections. Mass organisations are not that strong which could maintain close liason with sections of the people at every major step in their life's activities.*

### KEYWORDS :

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Existence of an organized opposition has also its importance to make the government responsible. Modern parliamentary democratic government is a party government. The party in power which forms the real executive is responsible to the legislature. In a legislature consisting of a single party without any member affiliated to other party principles, the ruling party tends to act most irresponsibly and parliamentary democracy in such a case is reduced to a farce. Under a strong party government, popular feelings and interests are neglected and in its place party interests and its well-being are only looked after. Party principles and interests dominate everything and everywhere. In fact, under such a situation there is the party and nothing else.

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### Objectives of the study

The study has the following basic objectives:

1. To highlight the importance of opposition for successful working of democracy.
2. To assess the strength of opposition parties in Assam Legislative Assembly (ALA).
3. To examine the role of opposition parties in the deliberation of the ALA.

### Methodology to be applied

The entire work will be studied by applying the historico - analytical method. The historical method will be used to know the historical background of the genesis and working of the opposition party. The analytical method will be applied throughout the work to make critical analysis of the dynamic role of the opposition in the ALA on the basis of the ALA proceedings. Besides, historico-analytical approach behavioural approach will be employed to examine the behaviour of the party including the opposition leaders.

The role of opposition in ALA is insignificant. In Assam the Indian National Congress has been able to maintain its dominance for long time. Till the sixth general election (to the House of the People) Indian National Congress (hereinafter to be the INC) maintained its dominance at Centre as well as in States. In sixth general election when the rest of India particularly in the north the electorate rejected the INC, in Assam it could manage to secure 10 out of 14 seats with 50.6% vote share. The INC dominated the state politics of Assam by securing absolute majority in all the first five general elections to the ALA and formed the government in the state. Right from the first to the fifth Legislative Assembly the opposition was numerically weak in Assam and were incapable of checking effectively the dominance of the ruling INC.

However, the sixth general election of 1978 marked the beginning of a new era in the history of ALA. It was in this election the Janata Party effectively challenged the dominance of the INC. In 1978 general election to the ALA the ruling INC was forced to sit in the opposition. But the INC legislators in the state were not content to play the role of responsible opposition.

It is found that prior to 1985 general elections the regional political parties had limited success in the state politics. In 1985, for the first time a regional political party namely Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) formed the Government in the state and in 1996 for the second time they came to power. Thereafter, the Congress party unbeatably comes to power and continues their rule in the state.

It is thus clear that opposition in ALA failed to play a significant role to provide opportunity to the people for the change of a government. There was an exception of this only in 1985 and 1996 ALA elections. Earlier in 1978 general election the Janata party had been capable of challenging the dominance of the INC by coming to power but unfor-

tunately failed to retain the same. Though there was exception from this generalization, the INC has uninterruptedly been dominating the state politics of Assam since independence.

In Assam Legislative Assembly regional political party Asom Gana Parishad was in power for the first time from 1985 to 1990 and Indian National Congress was in opposition. But the AGP government failed to meet the popular expectations of the people of Assam. The major problems remained unsolved. Besides, they failed to implement the Assam Accord mainly because of the lack of efficiency and experience. The prominent members of the government were involved in various scandals and allegations of rampant corruptions were also leveled against them. Thus the government lost confidence of the people of Assam. Conversely, during AGP rule, the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), an extremist organization, became active which disturbed the AGP government. Later, President's rule was imposed on 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1990 and the AGP government was dismissed on the ground of its failure to maintain law and order situation in the state in the wake of violence perpetrated by the ULFA. Most of the AGP supporters began to feel unsecure about the party future. Ultimately the AGP was divided into two hostile camps, the AGP and the NAGP (Natun Asom Gana Parishad).

After that in 1991 simultaneous election were held to the Assam Legislative Assembly and to the Lok Sabha (after the dissolution of 9<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha). In that election Congress (I) captured altogether 65 seats in 126-member legislative assembly. The dominant regional party AGP won 63 seats. Thus in 1991 election AGP could not retain its majority.

In 1996 out of the total 126 constituencies of Assam Legislative Assembly, elections were held in 122 constituencies. In this election, altogether 18 parties contested. The AGP won highest number of seats i.e. 59, whereas the then ruling party INC contested 122 constituencies and won 34 seats. Another important regional political party namely UMF won only 2 seats. The ASDC contested in total 5 seats and won 5 seats, securing 1.98 percentages of votes.

Asom Gana Parishad again come to power in 1996 Assembly election by securing absolute majority and remained in power till 2001 Assembly election. The then ruling Indian National Congress lost confidence of the Assamese people and was relegated to the position of the opposition in the election of 1996.

In 2001 Assembly elections the Indian National Congress (INC) came to an understanding with seven smaller political parties. In this election Congress contested all the 125 constituencies and won 70 seats. As a result Congress came back to power. In the same election AGP contested 77 out of 125 constituencies won only 20 seats, the total vote polled 21, 30,118 and the percentage of votes was 20.13.

In 2006 Assembly elections the electoral performance of the AGP was poor. The AGP contested in 100 constituencies out of 126 constituencies won only 24 seats. The Indian National Congress contested in 120 constituencies and won 53 seats. In this election a new political formation, the AIUDF significantly emerged victorious overnight securing 10 seats pocketing 9.02 percent of votes. For the first time AIUDF appeared in 2006 Assam Legislative Assembly elections. In this election no single political party secured the absolute majority and virtually the assembly was a hung assembly. However, a post-electoral alliance was made between the Congress and the BPF. The Congress (I) formed the government under the leadership of Tarun Gogoi after gaining support of 11 BPF MLAs. The Congress dominance thus remained unabated.

In 2011 elections performance of different political parties was poor except Indian National Congress. The Asom Gana Parishad contested for 104 constituencies out of 126 constituencies and won only 10 seats. The Indian National Congress contested in 126 constituencies and won 78 seats. In this election AIUDF contested in 78 constituencies and won 18 seats. The other national political party BJP contested in 120 constituencies and won only 5 seats. The leftist party CPI contested in 17 constituencies and could not win even a single seat. Another leftist party CPM contested in 17 constituencies but could not win even a single seat. Another national political party NCP contested in 35 constituencies but, it too failed to win any seat. The ASDC also contested in 1 constituency but failed to win. Another state po-

litical party BPF contested in 29 constituencies and won 12 seats.

For the first time in Assam 126-member Assembly no opposition party has won the minimum number of legislators for its leader to be recognized as the leader of opposition. The Congress won 78 of the 126 Assembly seats, while its ally, the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) won 12 seats. Surprisingly the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF), led by Badaruddin Ajmal won 18 seats whereas the party had won just 10 seats in 2006.

The Congress came to power for the third consecutive term. The main opposition AGP got only 10 seats with most of its heavyweights including the president Chandra Mohan Patowary facing defeat. In a similar fashion the BJP won 5 seats but the president Ranjit Dutta failed to win. It also lost its stronghold Barak Valley to the Congress. Even the combined strength of the AGP and the BJP was less than the number required for recognition of the leader of the combination as the leader of the opposition. For the first time since independence the Assam Assembly have no recognized opposition. The AIUDF, which won 18 seats, was the largest opposition party though it fell short of three seats to be recognized as the opposition.

In this connection the worse performance was shown by the AGP. In 2011, the party could retain only 10 seats. It obviously means the AGP lost the status of the main opposition party in the Assembly.

In Assam, the opposition has not succeeded in making its impact felt in a worthwhile manner inside and outside the Assembly. Importance of the opposition in parliamentary democracy is yet to be realized by the people at large. For their part the opposition parties have not contributed significantly to secure such realization through political education of the electorate. Parties generally come closer to the electorate in times of general elections. Mass organisations are not that strong which could maintain close liason with sections of the people at every major step in their life's activities.

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