

Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati

Doctoral Thesis

Factional Politics in Assam: A Study on the Asom Gana Parishad

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**Factional Politics in Assam: A study on the Asom Gana Parishad**”, is the outcome of my research duly carried out in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, under the joint supervision of Prof. Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed and Prof. Archana Barua. The academic investigations and reporting of the scientific observations are in conformity with the general norms and standard of research. This thesis or any part of it has not been submitted to any other University/Institute or elsewhere for the award of any other degree or diploma.

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This is to certify that Mr. Dipak Kumar Sarma has prepared the thesis entitled **“Factional Politics in Assam: A study on the Asom Gana Parishad”** for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati. The thesis embodies record of research work conducted under our supervision in strict conformity with the rules laid down for the purpose.

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Abstract

Study of factional politics is very much rewarding for better understanding of political force in operation in a democratic society. Factionalism does not operate in vacuum; it is a reflection of the socio-political environment in which the political party functions. Factionalism may occur due to ideological drift or for personality clash among the top leaders. It has both integrative and disintegrative implications. Occasionally, it widens the support base of the party, when it is cooperative and competitive in nature. However, degenerative type of factionalism is bane for the political party even may lead to split in extreme condition. Political leaders are the key actors in factional politics. The leader and his followers form a separate clique within the party organization in order to pursue distinct political aims; not satisfied within the existing apparatus of the party.

In India, factionalism is an order of the day in the political parties. It has added to the mushrooming growth of political parties in the country. Factionalism in Indian party system had drawn attention of scholars like Salig Harrison, Morris Jones, Myron Weiner, Paul R Brass and others. Through their research various socio-political dynamics of Indian party system could be established. Impact of caste-community factor in factional politics was also documented in few states like in the Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. But the dynamics of factionalism in a regional political party operating in a multi-ethnic society is not addressed till now. This research based on a case study of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) is a humble attempt to bridge the gap in study of factionalism in India.

The study is based on interview method and non-participant observation of the political affairs in the AGP. Content analysis of the specific reports, government documents, party papers and party proceedings has proved beneficial for this study. The AGP was the first regional political party in north-east India to capture power independently in 1985. It was an offshoot of the Assam movement that ran for six years since 1979 in Assam. The AGP carried over the legacies of the

movement and was expected to materialize the objectives of the movement. But, very soon the new regional political party plunged into factionalism and could not ensure development to all section of people. Therefore, an attempt has been made to understand the role of factionalism in this regional political party and its impact on political process and social dynamics in Assam. Within a span of twenty years, the AGP faced vertical split thrice which degenerated its position in state politics. The study covers the trajectory of factional politics in the AGP since its inception.

Factionalism in the AGP was degenerative and it brought crisis to the regional political forces in Assam. Factionalism in the AGP hindered formation of an inclusive Assamese society based on a common identity that led to disillusionment of various ethnic communities. Sub-regional issues and demands put by the tribal communities was a major factor of factionalism in the AGP. Besides, powerful civil society organizations and state actors operating in Assam created a gap among party leaders too. It is found that homogenous concept of Assamese society adjacent to the Assamese language is not a suitable political idiom for the AGP. As Assam is a heterogeneous state in terms of language and ethnic diversity.

Therefore, changes in socio-political environment since 1986 shaped factional politics in the regional political party. Leaders of the AGP got divided over the ethnic issues and demands of the tribal communities. A kind of personality cult emerged in the party which became an important factor of factionalism in the AGP. The nature of factional politics in the AGP was mostly bi-factional: two equally strong leaders led the factions. The followers were peers of the factional leader and enjoyed equal power in the factions. In the absence of any arbiter politician, factionalism became very intense and degenerative. Thus, lack of an accommodative political leadership and inclusive policy for all the stakeholders led to decline of regional party. In fact, study of factional politics in the AGP presents a different model of factionalism in a multi-ethnic society.

Acronyms

AAGSP	: All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad
AAP	: Aam Aadmi Party
ASS	: Asom Sahitya Sabha
AASU	: All Assam Students Union
AAMSU	: All Assam Minority Students Union
ABSU	: All Bodo Students Union
ABVP	: Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad
ACKSA	: All Cachar Karimganj Students Union
AGP	: Asom Gana Parishad
AGP (P)	: Asom Gana Parishad (Pragatisheel)
AIADMK	: All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
AITC	: All India Trinamool Congress
ALA	: Assam Legislative Assembly
AUDF	: Assam United Democratic Front
AJD	: Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal
AJS	: Asom Jatiya Sanmilan
AJYCP	: Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad
APLA	: Assam Peoples Liberation Army
APLF	: Assam Progressive Liberation Front
APS	: Assam Police Service
ASDC	: Autonomous State Demand Committee
ATTSA	: Assam Tea Tribes Students Association
ATASU	: All Tai Ahom Students Union
AYS	: Asom Yubak Samaj
AYSA	: Asom Yuva Samaj, Asom
BJD	: Biju Janata Dal
BTC	: Bodoland Territorial Council
BLT	: Bodo Liberation Tigers
BPF	: Bodoland People's Front
BSF	: Bodo Security Force
BSP	: Bahujan Samaj Party
BTAD	: Bodoland Territorial Area Districts
CPI	: Communist Party of India
CPI (M)	: Communist Party of India (Marxist)
CPI (M) (L)	: Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Liberation)
DC	: Christian Democratic Party (Italy)
DMK	: Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
GASS	: Ganatantrik Adhikar Sangram Samiti
ECI	: Election Commission of India
IM (DT)	: Illegal Migration (Determination by Tribunals)
INLD	: Indian National Lok Dal
JD	: Janata Dal
JD (U)	: Janata Dal (United)
JMM	: Jharkhand Mukti Morcha

JP	: Janata Party
KIA	: Kachin Independent Army
KMSS	: Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti
LAC	: Legislative Assembly Constituency
LDP	: Liberal Democratic Party (Japan)
LJP	: Lok Janshakti Party
MASS	: Manab Adhikar Sangram Samiti
MAC	: Mising Autonomous Council
MULFA	: Muslim United Liberation Front of Assam
MULTA	: Muslim United Liberation Tigers of Assam
NAGP	: Natun Asom Gana Parishad
NCP	: Nationalist Congress Party
NDFB	: National Democratic Front of Bodoland
NEC	: North Eastern Council
NRC	: National Register for Citizens
NSCN (IM)	: National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Ishak-Muivah
NSCN-K	: National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Khaplang
MLA	: Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	: Member of Parliament
PDF	: People's Democratic Front
PLP	: Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad
PTCA	: Plains Tribal Council of Assam
PPCA	: Progressive Plain Tribal Council of Assam
PWD	: Public Works Department
RAW	: Research and Analytical Wing
SP	: Samajwadi Party
TGP	: Trinamul Gana Parishad
TMPK	: Takam Mising Porin Kebang
TNVF	: Tripura National Volunteers Force
ULFA	: United Liberation Front of Assam
UMFA	: United Minorities Front of Assam
UPPA	: United Peoples Progressive Alliance
UTNF	: United Tribal Nationalist Front
URMCA	: United Revolutionary Movement Council of Assam

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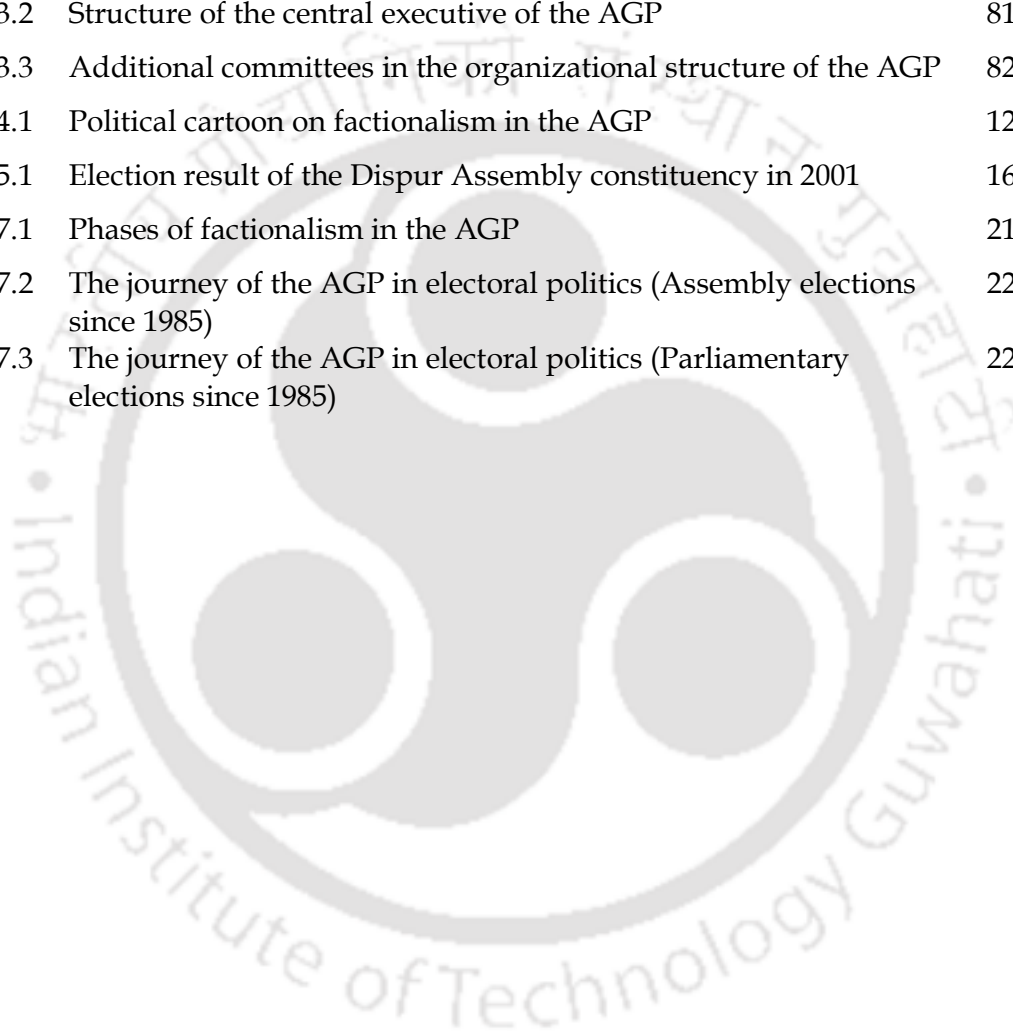
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Introduction | Chapter 1

1.1 Assam: a peripheral state of India

The state of Assam in the North Eastern part of India with a territory of 78438 square kilometer is the home for many ethnic communities having different cultures, languages and community organizations. Once a kingdom, ruled by the Ahom dynasty for nearly six hundred years since the 13th century, Assam became acquainted with the modern political culture during the British rule, after the Yandaboo Treaty of 1826. It was British regime which familiarized the people of Assam to the monetized economy, western education and modern thought process. Assam became famous for tea and petroleum and got a place in the map of colonial capitalist economy during the British rule. Assam is a place of beautiful landscape, blue hills and a famous for bio-diversity. The mighty river Brahmaputra and its tributaries traverse the length and breadth of the state. Her demographic milieu, ethnic variety, linguistic and cultural diversity have been fascinating that contributes to the distinct identity of the region. The tribal and folk culture has been a matter of attraction for the ethnographers and anthropologists since the colonial period. Since the coming of the British, Assam had to provide a space to immigrants from mainland India and outside India as a consequence of the colonial political economy. The Adivashis from the Chotonagpur plateau were brought as tea garden labour, Bengalis came to perform the administrative works, Nepalis came from Nepal for dairy farming and animal husbandry, Biharis were brought for manual labour, Marwari traders from Rajasthan came to reap the benefit of new market economy, etc. These inflow of people as permanent settlers changed the traditional demography which became the focal point of newly emerging Assamese middle class politics and political mobilization in 19th century.

The new land settlement system and monetary economy was a shock to the Assamese peasants and villagers who fallowed their cultivable land at large scale,

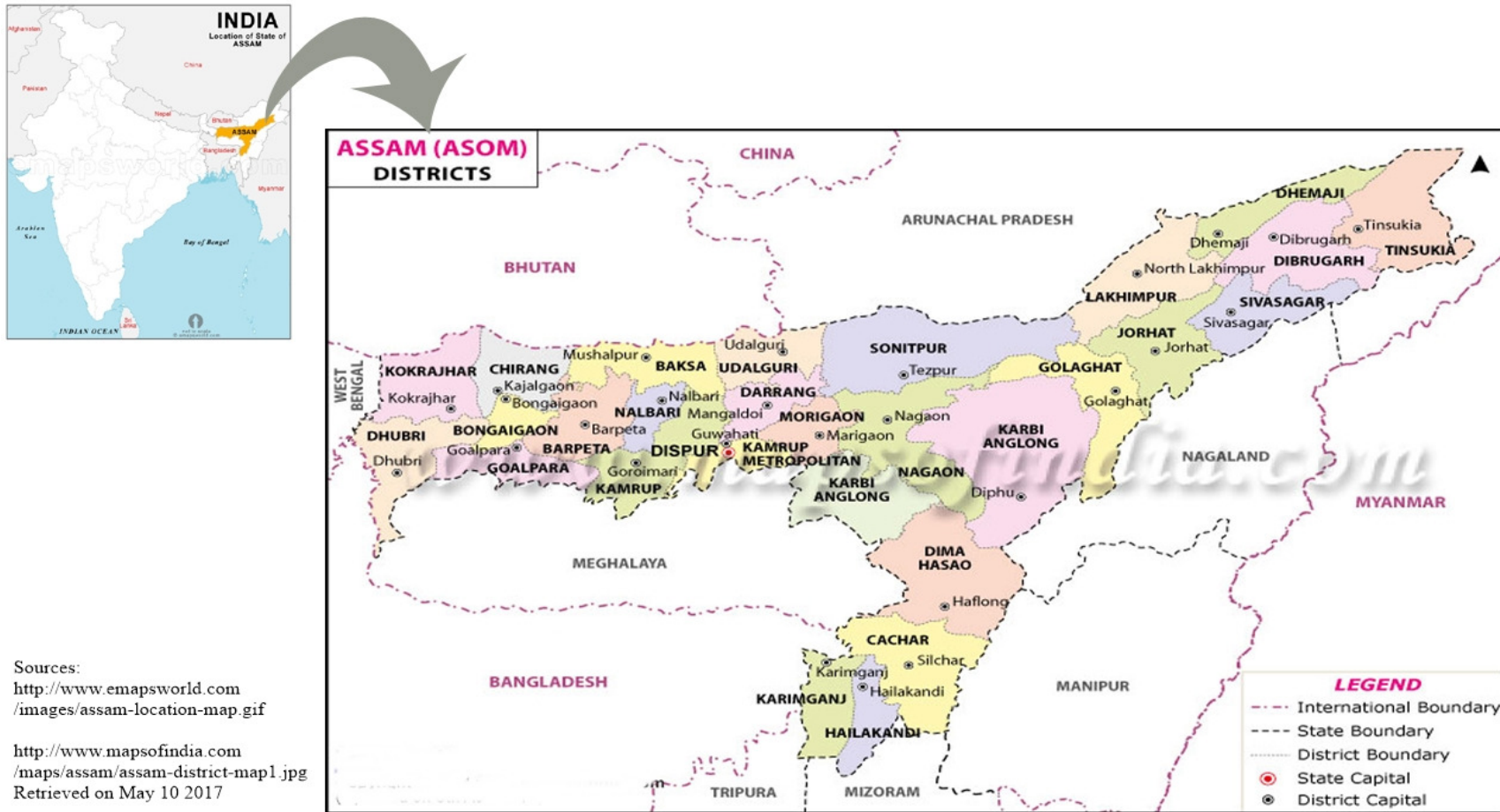
unable to pay land revenue. Previously, their livelihood pattern was based upon *pika system*¹ and barter economy during the Ahoms. The sudden change was untenable and unintended. Therefore, people of Assam organized *Rais Mels*² to protest against high rate of land revenue and various other taxes imposed by the British. These *Rais Mels* in 19th century are the first instances of popular political mobilization in Assam. Another aspect of resurgence of Assamese in mid 19th century was the official language issue. Initially, Assam was ruled as a part of the Bengal Province. Eventually, Bengali language was made the official language here in Assam in 1836 mainly for two reasons. First, Bengali educated sections were readily available for administrative work and the emerging Assamese middle class was yet to cope up with the new demands of modern bureaucracy. Second, Assamese language had not developed so far. The British colonial interest worked upon two aspects; first, spreading Christianity and second, running the administrative machinery. The movement for recognition of Assamese language as the official language in Assam instead of the Bengali language was the starting point of Assamese-Bengali conflict. In 1873 Assamese language was accorded the official language status and in the next year Assam was made a Chief Commissioner's Province independent of the Bengal Province. This paved a new epoch of regional politics.³

¹ *Pika system* was introduced by the Ahom rulers in order to organize the whole male population of the kingdom between the ages of fifteen and fifty, except the nobles, priests and persons of high caste, for state service. As a reward for his service, each *paik* was allowed two *puras* (nearly three acres) of the best rice land free of rent. He was given land for his house and garden also. Paiks were organized in *got* and *khel* commanded by an officers. This system created a standing army for the Ahoms, which were useful both during war and peace. Reference: Edward Gait, *A History of Assam*, Seventh Edition (Guwahati: Lawyers' Book Stall), 228-29.

² *Rais Mels* are assembly of people who gathered in protest against the British revenue system. Some important *Rais Mels* became revolutionary in 1860s and 1890s in Assam. This was the period when political socializations started in Assam.

³ Paramananda Majumdar, *Colonialism, Language and Politics* (Guwahati: DVS Publishers, 2014).

Map 1.1
Location of Assam



Sources:
<http://www.emapsworld.com/images/assam-location-map.gif>
<http://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/assam/assam-district-map1.jpg>
Retrieved on May 10 2017

1.1.1 Emergence of the Assamese middle class and regionalism

Assamese middle class politics started to consolidate along with the development of Assamese language and literature. Various political and social organizations namely, the Jorhat Sarvajanik Sabha, Rangia *Raij Mel*, Tezpur Sarvajanik Sabha, Asom Sanmilan, Asom Sahitya Sabha and many others were formed during 1861 to 1921 to articulate regional aspirations. At the same time, the unabated influx of people from outside Assam patronized by the British regime continued. The British officials applied their time tested 'divide and rule policy' to check the growing aspirations of the Indians for independence. The Census Report of 1930 and the warning of Census Commissioner Muller that Assamese will be minority in their homeland due to the growing Bengali speaking Muslim immigrants from East Bengal flared up the regional sentiment. Ambikagiri Raichoudhury became the torch bearer of this new political mobilization to safeguard Assamese identity during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1937, the Muslim League had formed first elected government in Assam Mahammad Sadulla became the Premier of Assam. It is alleged that this government patronized large scale immigration of Muslim peasants from Sylhet and Mymensing districts of East Bengal under the 'grow more food programme'. During this time Muslim League pushed their demand for Pakistan and Assam was designed to be incorporated into Pakistan in view of the large scale Muslim populations in the state. The Cabinet Mission Plan in 1946 proposed Assam to be clubbed in Group C states along with East Bengal. Assam Pradesh Congress Committee vehemently opposed this 'grouping plan' and stood against inclusion of Assam into Pakistan. One major district of Assam, Sylhet was incorporated into East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), decided over a plebiscite.⁴ The remaining part of Assam became a constituting state of India. After the independence both Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the Home Minister, repeatedly put pressure on Gopinath Bordoloi, the Premier of Assam, to absorb the entire refugees coming from East Pakistan after the partition. Nehru pointed out that the Government of India was

⁴ Bidyut Chakrabarty, *The Partition of Bengal and Assam: 1932-1947*, (London: Routledge, 2004).

giving top priority to the refugee issue and said, "If Assam adopts an attitude of incapacity to help in solving the refugee problem, then the claim of Assam for financial help would obviously suffer".⁵

The Chief Minister of Assam, Gopinath Bordoloi, pleaded that not much waste lands are available to settle the refugees since Assam was purely agricultural and underdeveloped. Besides, about 50000 peasant families rendered homeless due to flood in the previous years needed to be rehabilitated. Bordoloi was in great stress because of Nehru's economic threat to Assam. He wrote to Nehru, "I feel extremely hurt when you say that the claims of Assam for financial help would suffer for our incapacity to help solving the refugee problem."⁶

He wrote several letters to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Home Minister Sardar Patel asking for executive power to Assam Government to solve the impending problem. But such powers were not allocated to the Assam government. Bordoloi also demanded inner line permit system to check the unabated immigration which was also denied.⁷ Nehru instead of giving due consideration to the difficulty of Assam, charged it of "following a narrow provincial policy excluding others". He even warned that "it will be difficult for the Central Government to have any major scheme in Assam".⁸ There was serious law and order situation in Assam during the formative period of independence and Bordoloi was forced to shoulder the burden of refugees amidst manifold difficulties. Nehru became infuriated, when he heard that talk was going on in Assam regarding dual citizenship. All these issues and concern for political and economic security of Assam led to resurgence of regional movement afterwards.

⁵ Letter of Nehru to Bordoloi, May 18, 1949, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), New Delhi, Top secret file No. PS 4/49.

⁶ Letter of Bordoloi to Nehru, May 7, 1949, NMML, New Delhi, Secret and personal

⁷ Hiranya Saikia, 'The Foreigners issue in Assam', *Times of Assam*, December 9, 2012 retrieved from <https://www.timesofassam.com/headliens/the-foreigners-issue-in-assam>.

⁸ Letter from Nehru to Bordoloi, August 7, 1949, NMML New Delhi, File No PS 4/49

Assamese people had organized protests against transportation of crude oil to feed the refineries outside Assam. During the first two decades after the independence, there were movements for establishment of oil refinery, building of bridge over the river Brahmaputra, improvement of transportation and communication, solution of flood and economic problems, etc. These had set the stage for regional politics against the central policy and attitude towards Assam in 1950s and 1960s.

1.2 Assamese middle class, social factions and the Assam Movement

The Assamese middle class played great role in leading the nationalist struggle against the British. The middle class in Assam was a compound product of British administration, English education and the colonial tea industry in Assam⁹. Though Assam is a multi-lingual state inhabited by different ethnic communities, yet middle class formation in Assam in 19th century centered on the political aspirations of caste Hindu Assamese people. Assimilation of the tribal communities with the Assamese linguistic communities got a setback when the British administration implemented the 'excluded and partially excluded area' policy to safeguard the tribal culture and traditions in the Northeast. Therefore, the plain and hill tribe in Northeast fell apart from the mainstream Assamese people. As such, the society in Assam remained semi-feudal and semi-tribal. The caste Hindu sections dominated the Assamese middle class. After the independence, government and administrative machineries in Assam were mostly controlled by Assamese middle class. There were two sections of Assamese middle class during the colonial period. The first was represented by the Assamese writers like Nilamoni Phukan, Suryya Kumar Bhuyan and others expecting the small tribal communities to mingle with the Assamese middle class thoroughly. The second trait of Assamese middle class was represented by people like Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Phani Sarma and others came up with a broad vision recognizing the special needs of the backward communities in Assam. In such a situation, left cultural ideology, literature, and movement for a balanced Assamese society emerged. So there were two currents of regional political thought

⁹ Rajen Saikia, *Social and Economic History of Assam: 1853-1921*, (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), P 163.

in Assam- one was chauvinistic Assamese nationalist thought and the other was progressive Assamese nationalist thought. The first regarded Assamese nationalism as melting pot for others and the progressive one stood for a more egalitarian Assamese society. This ideological difference on nation building process dominated the socio-political scene in Assam since independence. There were radical socialists like Bishnu Prasad Rabha who refuted the elitist democratic culture of the Indian state. Assam became a fertile ground for communist politics and it was reflected in the Assembly election of 1978 when the left parties could bag 25 seats in Assam Assembly. This was perceived as threat to the chauvinistic section of Assamese Middle class. They banked upon the issue of illegal immigration from former East Pakistan which continued unabated even after the independence. The illegal influx of foreigners took acute turn after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. Various sections of the civil society including the Assamese media and regional organizations, cultural and literary association, youth and student unions, academicians vouched for detection and deportation of the foreigners from Assam in order to safeguard the rights of the indigenous people. Thus, a movement led by the AASU started in 1979. The three principal objectives of this movement were detection of foreigners, deletion of their names from voter's list and their deportation from the country. The communists and left minded people in Assam didn't support the movement on ideological concern. They pointed out that movement was based on people's emotion, unorganized and not well directed which will potentially lead to erosion of social harmony in Assam. Some intellectuals even criticized it as "little nationalism turned chauvinist" (Guha, 1981). In spite of criticism from a learned section of Assamese intelligentsia the movement flourished. The critics specially the persons with left ideology were treated as traitors in those days.

Despite of these ideological contradiction and social cleavages, the Assam Movement was largely participated by all ethnic communities, tribal and non-tribal, indigenous Muslim and other minorities because it had a wider appeal. Movement could unite a large section of people in Assam on a common platform.

People had great expectation upon their leaders and believed that once the objectives of the movement fulfilled all woe of Assam would disappear. After long six years struggle, Assam Accord was signed on August 15, 1985 and the movement came to an end officially¹⁰. As per the provision of the Accord, Assam Assembly was dissolved and fresh election was declared by the Election Commission of India. Immediately, the leaders of Assam movement formed a new regional political party viz., the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and decided to contest election. The AGP succeeded in winning the election of 1985 and formed the government in Assam with a hope to materialize the promise of the great movement. But very soon the AGP dipped into factional conflict. Leaders of the party got entangled in dissent and disagreement very soon. Lack of governance under the AGP, was heartbreaking for the people. The trajectory of factional conflict in party organization and government of the AGP is the pillar of this research.

1.3 The larger context of study on factional politics in India

Every matter or every object is theoretically unity of two opposites, so contradiction and arguments is necessary in modern democracy. Since the ancient period, India has cherished the dialogic tradition of arguments that supported pluralist society, democracy, secularism and even the pursuit of science. Arguments and debates among the philosophers since ancient India time helped in the growth of civilization and culture in India.¹¹ During the freedom struggle, ideological debate between the 'moderates' and the 'extremists' section of national leaders, the arguments between Mahatma Gandhi and Subhash Bose over the course of the struggle and emergence of the Congress Socialist Party in 1934 as a socialist caucus within the Indian National Congress (INC) are some incidents of the argumentative tradition. However, the Congress could retain its consociational nature and remained stable in the first decade of independence in India. Political success often came about as a proven loyalty to the charismatic 'tall men' and party leaders such as Nehru. However, in the absence of well-developed opposition,

¹⁰ Monirul Hussain, *The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology and Identity* (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 1997).

¹¹ Amartya Sen, *The Argumentative Indian* (London: Penguin Books, 2005), xiv.

parliament itself provided effective instrument for the ventilation of grievances and the crystallization of dissident opinion within the party structure of the Congress. But the rise of regional political parties in the States during 1960s had shaken the dominant position of the Congress party. The defeat of the Congress in eight States in the general election of 1967, out of the total 16 states at that time was attributed to factionalism. Many of the opposition leaders who formed government in the states were dissident leaders of the Congress themselves. There had been an ongoing conflict between the 'ministerial' and 'organizational' wing of the Congress party since independence in most of the States where the Congress as the only dominant political party enjoyed power. At a local level, congressmen aimed to seek popular support not only to win election but also to strengthen their positions for political benefit viz. a viz. other factional leaders within the party. On some issues Chief Ministers had to fight against the centre in order to shore up local support. In the 1980s factionalism in Congress became all-pervasive. Indira Gandhi's centralizing and authoritarian tendencies had caused strain on federal consensus. Factions developed based on social class, regional diversity, traditional values and for personal ambitions. Thus, 'amoral familism'¹² developed in 1980s resulted in rampant factionalism in the political parties leading to backwardness of the rural societies in India. The Congress experience has shown that 'one dominant party system' with no major threat from other parties is a breeding ground for factional rivalry.

The Communist party of India (CPI) has also tasted factionalism. A serious rift within the party surfaced in 1962. The party got divided in the early 1960s over the question of the Sino-Indian war, where one faction backed the position of the Indian Government, while other took a pro-Chinese position claiming that it was a conflict between a socialist and a capitalist state. There were three factions in the CPI during that period - the 'internationalists', the 'centrists', and the 'nationalists'. The party succumbed to factionalism and split in 1964 creating the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M). The factional politics in the communist party was

¹² Edward Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (USA: Free Press, 1958)

ideological. After this the communist bloc was again divided during the time of the Naxalbari Movement in the 1970s when the Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (CPI-ML) came into being. The Communist Party of India (Maoist) is a new addition to the list of ideological factionalism in the left parties.

1.3.1 Factionalism in the regional political parties in India

The importance of regional political parties occurred in India when the consociational nature of the Congress party dwindled since the 1960s. Most of the regional political party in India flourished as a reaction to the policy of the Congress or the apathy towards regional development. Another aspect of the mushrooming growth of regional political parties in India was the emergence of a new middle class based on regional identity.

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) of Tamil Nadu was the first regional party in India which could independently oust the Congress from power in 1967 under the leadership of CN Annadurai. When Annadurai, the founder general secretary of the DMK died in 1969, factional politics between M Karunanidhi and V R Nedunchezhiyan started. The later was the most senior leader in the DMK, but Karunanidhi faction sidelined him in the party and Karunanidhi became the Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. In 1972, the DMK witnessed another episode of factional politics between M G Ramachandran (MGR) and M Karunanidhi, the then president of the party. MGR called for a boycott of the party's General Council. With the crisis falling into call for corruption probe by MGR, he was eventually suspended from the General Council. Thus, a new political party namely the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) emerged in Tamilnadu. In 1977, the DMK lost the Assembly election to MGR's AIADMK, and stayed out of power till 1989. After MGR's death in December 1987, the AIADMK also fell into factional politics and two factions surfaced in the party, viz., Janaki (MGR's wife) faction and Jayalalithaa faction. Later on, Jayalalithaa grew in status as unchallenged leader of AIADMK. Since then the DMK and the AIADMK have been sharing the political power alternatively in Tamil Nadu.

Shiromani Akali Dal (Akali Dal) is another significant regional political party based in Punjab. The basic philosophy of Akali Dal is to give political voice to issues of the Sikh (panthic cause) and the belief that religion and politics go hand in hand. The current party recognized by the Election Commission of India is led by Prakash Singh Baadal. The Akali Dal has splintered into numerous groups due to factional politics in the parent organization. Such as, the Shiromani Akali Dal (Longwal) founded on the legacy of former president of the original Akali Dal; Shiromani Akali Dal (Democratic) led by Sardar Kuldip Singh Wadala; Akali Dal led by Simranjit Singh Mann also known as Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar); Shiromani Akali Dal (United Kingdom) etc. There are splinter groups of the Akali Dal based in neighboring states of Haryana, Delhi also.

Other important regional political parties of India like the Shiv Sena of Maharashtra, Telegu Desham of Andhra Pradesh, National Conference of Jammu & Kashmir, Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) of Uttar Pradesh has also been witnessing factional rivalry time and again. The Maharashtra Navnirman Sena was formed by Raj Thackeray, nephew of Bal Thackeray, in July 2005 as a result of factionalism in the Shiv Sena. Before that Uddhav Thackeray, son of Bal Thackeray became the chief of the Shiv Sena in 2004. The hereditary shift of leadership from the father Bal Thackeray to his son became the issue for factionalism in the party. Similarly, Amar Singh, prominent leader of Samajwadi Party in Uttar Pradesh also opposed the coronation of Akhilesh Singh Yadav as the leader of the party after his father Mulayam Singh Yadav. Amar Singh was expelled from the party on January 1, 2017 evidently to squash his faction in the SP. The National Conference of J&K also faced intense factionalism over some pragmatic issues since the independence.¹³ Lok Janashakti Party (LJP) of Bihar and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) of Jharkhand are few examples of regional political party reeling under factionalism. The Janata Dal-United and Rastriya Janata Dal of Bihar, Telegu

¹³ Prakash Chandra, "Factional Politics in Jammu and Kashmir", Ph. D dissertation. (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1983) p 333.

Desham Party (TDP) of Andhra Pradesh, Trinamul Congress of West Bengal has been able to control factional politics due to its strong organization, ideology and centralized leadership. Therefore, these regional parties are in power in the respective states. The latest example of factionalism in newly formed political party is the Aam Admi Party (AAP). Factional politics and public acrimony started soon after the AAP captured power in the State of Delhi. Ultimately, Yogendra Yadav, Prashant Bhusan and Anand Kumar, three important party ideologues were expelled from the AAP in April 2015 primarily due to their conflict with Arabind Kejriwal, the Chief Minister of Delhi. The factional politics in the AAP in recent time doomed its prospect in the Assembly election of the Punjab state in 2017.

The case of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), is significant in the sense that it emerged after a social movement spearheaded by the civil society in Assam. The AGP as was claimed by its leaders was a people's party. It was formed on the basis of a homogenous concept of nationality or identity, i.e., the Assamese nationalism. Though, Assam is inhabited by various communities of different ethnic identity having distinct language, culture and lifestyle. Politics in such a social setting is contentious. In the opinion of Pahi Saikia, 'Contentious politics can encompass issues concerning civil war, riots, strikes, demonstrations, ethnic conflict, revolutions, civil disobedience or everyday resistance.'¹⁴ Therefore, sustaining a common ideology and political discourse was a challenge for the AGP. Therefore, an attempt has been made to study factionalism in the AGP which is expected to open new horizon of knowledge about political culture and political development in Assam.

1.4 Statement of the problem: Objectives of the research and hypotheses

The state of Assam witnessed several fragmentation of her society on the basis of ethnicity, caste, religion and language resulting in several social movements since

¹⁴ Pahi Saikia, *Ethnic Mobilization and Violence in Northeast India* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2011) p 7.

1950s. These movements were directed against the Center or against the policies of the State Government e.g., the refinery movement of 1956, the official language movement of 1960, the movement for implementing Assamese as the medium of instruction in higher educational institutions in 1972, movement during the food crisis in 1974 and finally the Assam Movement of 1979 to 1985. The AGP was an offshoot of the Assam Movement. It was the first regional party in North East India which could break the “one party dominance’ of the Indian National Congress. It occupied power twice in Assam in 1985 and 1996. But the regional party faced internal dissention just after it formed government in 1985. The party was split thrice due to factionalism. It is interesting to learn that a mass movement that culminated into formation of the AGP did not result in a coherent political party. One may argue that there was no unity at all among the leaders of Assam Movement who later formed the AGP to occupy power. Gradually, the AGP’s posture as epitome of regionalism and alternative to national political party declined in Assam. Therefore, this research seeks to analyze the *modus operandi* of the regional political party and its response to factional politics. Study of factionalism and its various dynamics within the most prominent regional political party of Assam would reveal truth about leadership pattern, organizational structure, leader-supporter relations in the party and role of ideology.

1.4.1 Objective of the study

The basic objective of the study is to investigate the determinants of factional conflict in the AGP. How the factional leaders could garner support and what was the impact of factional strife in functions of party organization and the AGP government? Whether factionalism played a role in election campaigning, candidate selection for elections and government formation? Was there any impact of the ethnic and identity politics upon AGP factionalism? What was the impact of the ULFA and other insurgency groups in factionalism? And lastly whether factionalism in the AGP was integrative or degenerative type?

Based on the above observations major objectives are summarized as below:

1. To study the events, issues and causes leading to the formation of 'faction' and the working of factional politics in the AGP.
2. To examine the manifestation of factionalism in the formation of splinter group leading to vertical spit of the AGP and downward performance in elections.
3. To understand the organizational capacity and the role of leadership in dealing with the challenges of factionalism in the AGP.
4. To look into the relationship between factionalism in the AGP and the sub-national identity formation in Assam.
5. To analyze the nature of factional alignment, factional support base, goal orientation of the factions.

An attempt is made to examine the inner party democracy of the AGP as this is an essential aspect of democratic culture. The study also looks into political culture prevailing in Assam, about its nature and its impact upon overall development of the State. Assam is a multi-ethnic society and communities are set apart on different stages on the ladder of development. Factionalism also illuminates upon such social factions and inter-play of such factions upon the AGP.

1.4.2 Hypotheses of the research

With the help of objectives set above some hypotheses are assumed to be examined based on data collected from field study. These hypotheses are-

1. Factionalism in the AGP is not ideological, caste based or issue oriented; instead it was the result of personal power struggle among the leaders.
2. There was a relationship between factionalism in the AGP and organizational shortcomings of the party.
3. Lack of adequate representation of different regions, social segments in Assam led to factionalism in the AGP.
4. Ethnic identity formation and factionalism in the AGP was closely linked.

5. The AGPs electoral performances since 1990s onward were affected by factional politics.

1.5 Factional Politics: Conceptual framework

Factionalism is hard to define. James Madison, the 4th President of the USA, used the term 'faction' more or less as a synonym to party or clique within big political party conveying the imputation of selfish or mischievous ends or turbulent or unscrupulous methods. Madison in his paper 'Federalist No 10' saw faction as inevitable due to the impulsive nature of man to form alliance for protection and enhancement of self interest.¹⁵ Madison along with Hamilton, another statesman of the USA addressed the destructive role of a faction in breaking apart the republic and said diversity of opinion in political life is the source of faction. Abraham Lincoln, another former President of the USA, in one of his public speeches delivered during the civil war in the country on August 12, 1861 mentioned, 'And whereas when our beloved country, once, and by the blessings of God united, prosperous and happy, is now afflicted with faction and civil war.'¹⁶ These conceptual frameworks regarding factionalism on national scale attributed to the negative attitude of the scholars towards factional politics.

Political parties in modern democracies are meant to articulate people's interest; and even a faction within the political party may have appeal of the general interest. As we talk about intra-party democracy, healthy faction may add strength to the political party also. A political faction is a grouping of individuals, such as political party or trade union or other group with a political purpose. The individuals within a faction are united for a common goal or set of common goals. They band together as a way of achieving these goals and advancing their agenda and position within an organization. Factions are not limited to political parties; they can and frequently do form within any group that has some sort of political aim or purpose.

¹⁵ James Madison, 'Federalist No.10' Wikipedia, accessed December 28, 2011 [https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalist No.10.html](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Federalist_No.10.html).

¹⁶ Kees de Mooy, Eds., *Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln*, (USA: Citadel, 2004)

In short, faction is a group of persons forming a cohesive, usually contentious minority within a larger group. Faction depicts conflict within an organization or nation. Faction is an internal dissension. It may occur due to a personal clash or ideological cliff. The reason of factionalism in Communist Party of India in 1964 was ideological. But factionalism in the DMK in Tamil Nadu was due to mostly clash of personal interest of the leaders.

Paul R. Brass examined the impact of factionalism in diverse societies and the ability of a political party to deal effectively in such a competitive environment. Concentrating on the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, he analyses the problems of party organization at the local and district levels, where political idioms of modern democracy and traditional values of the society met. The Congress party in Uttar Pradesh had to deal with such forces as Hindu-Muslim tension, conflict and alliance between castes, and the continuing influence of ex-landlords in the countryside. He argues that political faction arises when self regarding interest overwhelms the other regarding interests in the party organization.¹⁷

1.5.1 Philosophical dimensions of factionalism

According to the liberal perspective, factionalism is inevitable in democratic political system, because the political parties provide a platform to the diverse and contradictory groups in the civil society to ventilate their grievances. Therefore, factional rivalry and contradictions are the necessary evils to strengthen democracy itself. On the other hand, the Marxist perspective denounces faction formation in political parties. So, factionalism within a communist party is never recognized. Marxists believe that factional conflict for personal gain would weaken the class struggle. Therefore, small groups and diverse interests are treated as reactionary forces. According to this approach, the Socialist revolutions would ensue in classless society eliminating the capitalists and there would be no need for political

¹⁷ Paul R Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian state: The Congress party in Uttar Pradesh*, (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1966)

party either. As such factionalism occurs only in the bourgeoisie democracy and bourgeoisie party system which promotes the vested interests of the capitalists.

There is another dimension of factionalism, that is, social faction and ideological faction. The Civil War of England in the 17th century and that of the USA in the 18th century was an outcome of factionalism on national scale. Even during the Indian freedom struggle, factional ideology emerged and dominated the political scenario. The ideological differences between B R Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi, M A Jinnah and Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Basu and Mahatma Gandhi are some evidences. As such, factionalism may occur on national scale or even in a village, in a social movement or in a socio-cultural organization. It is noteworthy that in the developing countries, political articulation and political socialization over caste, religion, language, ethnic identity is common which make the political parties in these countries victim of factionalism.

In a nutshell, factional politics is the articulation of political interest - of majority or minority group - within an organized party structure, with a view to promote the desired end, either through exerting pressure upon the parent organization or by forming a new political party.

1.6 Methodology of the Study

The present study undertaken for academic enquiry is based on qualitative method. Interview schedule and structured questionnaire are the principal tools for data collection during this research. Factionalism, though primarily a political phenomena has sociological interpretations also. Therefore, analytical rigour in methodology is avoided. For a comprehensive understanding of factionalism, both descriptive and empirical analysis is attempted. The factionalism in the AGP is studied in a historical context since its inception in 1985 till the present. Deductive method is applied to analyze the data collected from the field. At the same time, empirical data collected from Election Commission of India, of the elections in which the AGP participated, is also put to empirical test.

Study of factionalism in the AGP which emerged out of a popular social movement is proved to be a difficult task. Besides, a long period of almost 30 years of its existence has been considered for the research. Again, this is the maiden attempt to understand factionalism in a multi-ethnic social setting in India. Therefore, any fragmentation of the research period would have been unsustainable. The research was conducted unearthing fresh data during the field study which were hitherto unavailable. Therefore, the study qualifies as ethnographic research. It was found to be extremely difficult to undertake a survey involving a large number of respondents selected purposively to test the hypotheses. The initial difficulties encountered were as follows:

- a) Absence of proper record on the membership of the AGP.
- b) As regards the leadership issue of the AGP, it was not possible to adopt one of the three models; namely, positional, decisional and reputational. Because of the fact that positional and decisional approaches are afflicted by intermixing of responsibilities and functional activities. The third one, that is reputational approach needs an extensive survey of the AGP supporters and followers, in order to ascertain who are the top leaders of the party according to their estimation. Such a survey could not be possible for a lone researcher.

Therefore, different categories of people, such as AGP leaders, intellectuals, media persons were interviewed in order to assess their views about the intra-party conflicts and bickering in the AGP. (A list of persons interviewed has been placed in Appendix I)

1.6.1 Sources and types of data

Both primary and secondary data concerning factional politics in the AGP comprised the crux of the research. The data on background of the AGP and its leadership is important to analyze factional behavior in the party. The leadership of

the AGP is diverse and comes from nine different organizations that participated in the Assam Movement. These are the All Assam Students Union (AASU), the Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), the Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal (AJD), the Asom Sahiyta Sabha, the Asom Yuba Samaj, the All Assam Tribal Youth Association, the All Assam Tribal Students Union (AATSU), the Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad (PLP) and the Guwahati Young Lawyer's Forum. News published during Assam Movement and during the initial years of the first AGP government is very helpful to understand the roots of factionalism in the AGP.

Others important secondary data sources are:

- News paper reports on internal politics of the AGP
- News on the cabinet decisions when the party was in power
- Pamphlets, manifestos, party proceedings etc
- scholarly articles, research papers, books published on electoral politics in Assam
- Resources of the Library of Gauhati University, Library of ICHR-North-East, Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Library of the Dibrugarh University and Central Library of JNU-New Delhi, the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi etc were of invaluable help.
- INFLIBNET and N-List online resource of Dhakuakhana College library was used to access back issues of *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Seminar*, *Social Scientists*, *Mainstream*, etc.
- The Library of Assam Legislative Assembly in Dispur was visited twice to see the Assembly debates during two terms of AGP government.
- Some personal collections provided by well-wishers of the AGP had been very helpful in getting firsthand information about the trajectory of factional politics in the AGP

Collection of primary data for research on factional politics in a political party is a challenge. Because of the fact that factionalism is considered a taboo in the political circles in Assam. Therefore, the party statements, manifestos, resolutions, decisions on important issues are not made available for content analyses at the party

headquarter. Some personal collections provided by well-wishers of the AGP have proved to be great source of firsthand information about the trajectory of factional politics in the AGP. Besides, extensive interviews are conducted with the help of uniformly structured interview schedules prepared separately for the AGP leaders, former AGP leaders, current and former MLAs and MPs. There separate interview schedule are prepared for interviewing the AGP well-wishers, academicians, journalists, literary persons of Assam who had been close to the AGP or has been an eye witness to the factional rivalry in the AGP. Interview with some well-known critics of the Assam Movement also constituted important source of primary data.

District and local level functionaries of the AGP are also important source of information on factional rivalry. When the top brass of a party become faction ridden it is local leadership and office bearers who keep the organization in grassroots intact. In order to understand the impact of factionalism on grass root organization of the AGP questionnaires were distributed to all District Presidents and Secretaries. For the district level AGP workers questionnaire schedule are prepared containing objective type questions. Questions were set both in English and Assamese and sent by post to all District Presidents and Secretaries of the AGP. There are 27 District Committees of the party. The first part of the Questionnaire is framed to understand socio-economic background of the respondents and the second part is intended to elucidate information on internal factional conflict, internal democracy of the AGP and the perception of the AGP workers about party leadership and future prospects, etc.

1.6.2 Universe and field of study

As mentioned above, the AGP is the case study of this research. This political party operates only in Assam and recognized by the ECI as a regional political party. Its organizational branches percolate down to the district and the village levels. Therefore, universe of the study is operational areas of the AGP in Assam. Its leaders, office bearers and members are the respondents for this research. In factional conflicts, the top leaders of a political party, who can exercise influence

from the top to the bottom, are main players. However, the strength of a faction depends upon the magnitude of support the factional leader can garner from his followers. Obviously, the AGP leaders and workers who either actively participated in factional conflict or eye witness to it are interviewed for primary data. Factional alignment and core issues of factions within the AGP changed from time to time. Most of such news and incidents hit the local newspapers and became a point of intellectual debate in academia. Such academicians, journalists, intellectuals, literary persons were interviewed for valuable input for this ethnographic research. In a nutshell, the whole area of Assam where the AGP as regional political party functions is the field of research. The present leaders and former leaders of the AGP, current office bearers, well-wishers, civil society member forms the universe of this study. Total respondents who are contacted for this research are classified as follows.

Table: 1.1
Respondents of the study

Types of respondents	Classification of respondents	Respondents(Number)
AGP Leaders	Sitting MLAs	7
	Ex MLA & MPs	15
Ex AGP Leaders	Members of other political party	3
Intellectuals & Civil Society member	Academicians	10
	Literary Persons	3
	Journalists	2
	Well wishers	7
District and Local level AGP workers	Office bearers and members interviewed	8
	Questionnaire sent by post (Assamese version also)	52
Total		107

Grand Total: 107 (Hundred and seven)

The interview schedules prepared separately for the leaders and well-wishers of the AGP are attached as Appendix II and III questionnaire prepared for the District level office bearers of the AGP is attached as Appendix IV. But only a few of the

questionnaires have been filled up and returned by the District level office bearers of the party.

1.7 Significance and limitations of the study

Study on Factionalism has been a neglected field of study in India as a whole. In Assam also there are few studies on electoral politics. However; Assam has drawn attention of the scholars of the world in the field of insurgency, autonomy movements, secessionist movement and identity politics. The Assam movement was a mass movement; therefore it could draw attention of scholars and journalists of mainland India. But the academia hardly paid attention to various issues relating to the AGP and electoral politics of Assam afterwards. There are, of course, a few studies on the AGP, which focuses mostly on regionalism. The politics of the AGP, its internal conflict and causes of splits on a few occasions are subject of scholarly research. Such a research on the AGP and its factionalism would highlight the impact and working of regional political agenda upon the political society in Assam. Research on factional politics became popular in 1950s and 1960s. The Oxford scholars took an attempt to understand political culture and process in newly independent countries through research on factionalism. The behavioral revolution also exercised influence to conduct such study. Prof. Paul R Brass led this type of ethnographic study on Indian National Congress in India. After that numerous studies on factional politics at State level, District level or at village level have been conducted on various political parties in almost all the states of India. But none was done in the context of Assam. Here lies the academic rationale of the present study.

The present study is a based upon historical and documentary evidences on factional politics in the AGP. But there is dearth of literature and materials directly related to the AGP. No previous scholar has done a comprehensive study on the AGP and hence it is a limitation to this study also. During this research, several personal interviews are conducted. But cross verification of the data created during personal interviews became sometime impossible. Important leaders of the AGP

like Bhriku Kumar Phukan, Paragdhar Chaliha, Nagen Sarma, Dinesh Goswami, Ganesh Kutum, Muhiram Saikia have gone to their heavenly abode. The remaining few were in a doldrums to speak up about the internal politics in the AGP. The AGP is a party which had completed 30 years in politics in Assam. Yet record of the party was not easily available even at the Headquarter in Ambari. Actually, the logic of political development due to the factors internal to the political structure of the AGP has never been studied. Some volume of the proceedings of the Central Committee meetings, which would have been an authentic source were inaccessible. Articles published in newspapers had biased views and reports, statements published by the AGP were tilted towards party agenda. Therefore, I have comes across insurmountable difficulty in getting correct information and portraying a real picture of internal politics of the AGP. Though this study suffers from the limitations, yet research ethics are not compromised and best possible efforts are employed to give an objective account of factional politics in the AGP.

1.8 Review of Literature

In the following discussion an attempt has been made to trace the trend of literatures on factional politics. The literature consulted in this research are categorized as international study on factionalism, study on Indian factionalism and study on party system, political process and electoral trend in Assam.

1.8.1 International study on factionalism

Study on factional politics became a suitable source of information on political culture; articulation of people's demands and leadership in the developed countries in 20th century. David Hume, Sartori, V O Key and others studied factionalism to discover intra-party political dynamics in Europe and United States of America. Behavioural revolution in mid 20th century provided new impetus to this field of study. During the cold war, western scholars at number of well-known universities were encouraged to study factionalism in developing countries. In this way this branch of political study spread all over the world.

Factional political behavior in democratic set up is considered as normal. It is present in all political parties. Sometimes it adds strength and sometimes it degenerates the party. Study on factional politics first started in western countries. A brief idea about factional politics in different European nations is presented in '*Factional politics and democratization*' edited by Richard Gillespie *et al.* (2004). It contains case studies on factional politics in Spain, Portugal, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Turkey. Therefore, it is huge source of data on variance of factionalism in different political scenario.

The Chinese Communist Party, the only political party allowed to operate in China has also paid the price of factional politics. 'Factionalism in Chinese Communist Politics' (2006) by Jing Huang, Andrew J Nathan (1973) in '*The China quarterly*' penned 'A factionalism model for CCP politics', another source of Chinese factional politics.

'Rethinking Factionalism: Typologies, Intra-Party Dynamics and Three Faces of Factionalism' a research article by Francoise Boucek in *Party Politics* (2009) a Sage Journal, is an insightful study on theoretical dimension of factional politics. This is based on a comparative case study of Christian Democratic Party in Italy (DC) and Japan's Liberal Democrats (LDP). The author summarizes key studies of factionalism in political science and concludes that there are three faces of factionalism-cooperative, competitive and degenerative. Boucek's model of factional theory is useful for research on factional rivalry in a declining regional political force like the Asom Gana Parishad.

'The landscape of Factional politics and its future in Iran' by Hossein S. Seifzadeh (2003) in '*Middle East Journal*' offers schematic overview of factional politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran. There is factional division in Iranian society on the issue of Islamic Republic, between its supporters and opponents. Factional grouping can be divided into reformists, pragmatists and fundamentalists. The author has concluded that factional politics in Iran is a residual legacy of modernization and ideological debate of the Cold War era.

Behavioral political scientists in the United States, quite obviously, made an academic inroad into the factionalism in the Southern States. 'A theory of southern factionalism' by Earl Black (1983) in *'The Journal of Politics'* is based upon seminal work of V O Key. Students of factional systems have typically followed Key's lead in identifying three varieties of interparty competition. Like bi-factionalism, unifactionalism and multi-factionalism are Key's theoretical construct. These ideas are also utilized in this study to build up independent factional model for the AGP.

1.8.2 Study on factionalism in India

In India, studies on factionalism have proliferated since the late 1950s. The western scholars in an attempt to study Indian political system, concentrated on the dynamics of caste, religion and language. Selig Harrison in 1956 studied caste based factional politics in Andhra Pradesh. Harrison's study reveals that social cleavage between the two peasant castes, Reddis and Kamas transformed into political cleavage in Andhra Pradesh¹⁸. His work highlighted the inbuilt destabilizing factors in factionalism. This approach became a guiding approach to study of factional politics afterwards. A H Hanson (1968) also assesses impact of caste and effects of class formation in Indian democracy and electoral politics. Hanson's study maintains liberal democratic approach in line with that of Myron Weiner, Morris Jones, Paul Brass and F E Bailey.

Impact of caste-community formation in factional politics in India is fully documented in a few states. For example, American political scientist Paul R Brass (1966) studied factional politics in the Congress party in Uttar Pradesh though he mainly emphasized on historical roots of factionalism. According to Brass, "the devolution of power from center to the state and the change of a mass movement to an effective political party have resulted in incessant factional struggle in Uttar Pradesh."¹⁹ Factional conflict during the freedom struggle revolved around issues like traditionalism *vs* modernism, secularism *vs* revivalism or personality cult. The

¹⁸ Selig Harrison, *India: The Most dangerous Decades*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960)

¹⁹ Paul R Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State, The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh*, (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1966)

leaders during this period were traditional and virtuous politicians. They strictly followed the party ideology and the senior ones acted as arbiter politicians. In spite of serious factional struggle the Congress party could survive because of these arbiter politicians. However, the new generation of Congressman understood the traditional Indian society in which contemporary politics must operate.²⁰ They were able to maintain cohesion despite factional struggle because of their ability to distribute patronage. "Patronage" according to Brass, is the cement of organization."²¹ His study on factionalism, based on an extensive field study of four districts in the Uttar Pradesh, has also put special emphasis on caste and religious factors.

G. Radhakrishna Kurup (2004) has also studied factionalism in the Congress party in Kerala. His research is also based on extensive field study. The researcher considers variables of gender along with caste and religion while locating bases of Congress factionalism in Kerala. Unlike the Paul Brass study in UP Congress, this work is purely quantitative research and so presents a unique analysis of normative political behavior.

Prakash Chandra (1983) studied factional struggle of the ruling parties (National Conference Party and the Congress Party) of Jammu and Kashmir. National Conference is a regional party. He has tried to explore the cross-religious and cross-regional aspects of factional conflict in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Factional politics performs both integrative and disintegrative functions. He defines factional politics as illegitimate, typically impermanent and informal groups within the political party which carry a great amount of de-facto authority and influence in the decision making process. Every party's ideal is to avoid faction as much as possible, but they still exist.²² A faction germinates at the behest of a potential leader who, in search of the avenues for influencing the process of the authoritative allocation of values (for society), mobilizes the support of various like-minded

²⁰ *ibid*, P. 35

²¹ *ibid*, P. 231

²² Prakash Chandra, *Factional Politics in Jammu and Kashmir* (New Delhi: PhD dissertation submitted to SSS, JNU, 1983)

persons of a party or an organization. The gratification of the objectives and interests of these followers in this process becomes its primary aim. Such type of factional behavior can be defined in terms of patron-client or interest group relationship.²³ Prakash Chandra's study added a new dimension; that is the regional dimension to the study of factionalism in India.

Bhupinder Singh's (2006) case study on Siromani Akali Dal (SAD) of Punjab is a vivid description of factional politics in the regional political party. He studies factional strife in the Akali Dal since its inception in 1920. Factionalism has affected its political performance and overall politics of Punjab. Paul Wallace and Surendra Chopra's (1981) edited volume '*Political dynamics of Punjab*', is intuitive study on political dynamics of Punjab which has some kind of similarity with the state of Assam. Therefore, this book helps to conceptualize and understand factionalism in Assam from comparative perspective. However there is basic difference between the Akali Dal and the AGP in terms of ideology and programme of action. Another work by I Singaram (1996) on party organization and leader-supporter relations in the DMK in Tamilnadu also help us to analyse factional politics in Assam in a comparative perspective.

Mary C Carras (1972) argues that in order to analyse the dynamics of factional alignment it is desirable to distinguish between two levels of actor and two levels of awareness. At one level, there are the political leaders and protagonists in the factional struggle. At the other level, there are the supporters or followers of political leaders. These two kind of political actors have different kind of motivations for political office. For the leaders the ambition for office may be an end in itself, that is, perceived as something whose possession is in itself gratifying, wielding power, either to meet personal end or broad end relative to one's caste, community etc. But in the case of the supporters, the office for the leader is an instrument to achieve personal or perhaps community or village goals. Its value is chiefly instrumental rather than intrinsic. It is interesting to note that factional groupings in a political party are less distinct in policy orientation or ambition. It

²³ *ibid.* P 21

suggests that personal feuds act as motivating factor in factional conflict. This study helps us to understand the dynamics of factional behavior at village level in Maharashtra. Village level factionalism is an important aspect mostly neglected by Indian academia. Padma Mishra & K S Padhy (2000) try to fill up this gap. Their study looks into profile of village level factional leaders and their role in election process at local level. Its field works on interplay of factional politics in cultural organization, educational institution, co-operative society, caste organization and sex affiliation create new idea on factionalism in rural India.

There are a number of works on the theoretical aspects of factional politics. P N Rastogi (1975), studied factionalism as a type of social conflict. His analysis of conflict situation in Indian National Congress puts light upon Indian type of factional conflict. He identified thirteen dimensions to analyze a faction situation like number of factions, proportion of group membership, stability of membership over a given time, relative magnitude of change in membership, beginning of dissension, nature of dissension over a given period, issues of discord, nature of interests and values involved, intensity of conflict, scope of conflict, social bond among faction members, status of conflict resolution elements, location of conflict resolution elements etc. The emergence of factionalism is related to the relatively serious changes occurring in the environment of the group. These changes may be social, cultural, economic and political. Factions meet important social needs of the individuals that remain unmet under the available institutional mechanisms of the social structure. These theoretical analyses are applied to find out the root causes of factionalism and nature of factional alignment in the AGP.

Myron Weiner (1955), V.O. Key (1949), Duverger (1964) and Zariski (1960) studied factionalism from liberal democratic viewpoint. These studies are conducted on national political parties. These studies mostly establish the dysfunctional aspects of factionalism in the developing societies leading to biasness towards the study of factionalism. This is clearly highlighted by Francoise Boucek's (2009) who classifies factionalism into three modes- Cooperative, competitive and degenerative. His study also takes into account factionalism in parliamentary and non-

parliamentary spheres. Yet, these studies are shy of considering factional politics in the regional political parties. Regional political parties specially in the developing countries are becoming more vibrant and assertive in power and influence. In this era of para-diplomacy and coalition politics regional parties represent the peripheral yet crucial ideas. Therefore, it is an injustice to look into the internal politics of regional parties from a periscope of national political party.

1.8.3 Study on party system, political process and electoral trend in Assam

Most of the studies on political process in Assam are concerned with the cause and effects of ethnic tension, identity issues or insurgency. Unlike the mainland India, caste is not considered as viable political dynamic in this state though Assam has many caste groups and sub-caste groups. There are ample researches on regionalism-nationalism dichotomy. Electoral trend and election study is also not a neglected field of study in Assam. Specially, Center for Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) has been contributing and generating a lot of data on Parliamentary and Assembly elections in Assam. Being a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic state, Assam should have attracted the attention of Indian and foreign scholars for study of factionalism too. There are some passing references on factionalism in Assam in the scholarly articles and books. But till date no study with a primary focus on factional politics has been conducted here. Research works on factionalism and political behavior will open new vista of knowledge about democratization in multi-ethnic peripheral state of Assam.

Election politics and trends in Assam received more attention of the scholars since the 1980s when the Assam movement was going on and eventually the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) occupied the seat of power in Assam. The critical debate over the nature of the movement and the role of Assamese middle class opened a new vista in political writing in Assam. Amalendu Guha, Hiren Gohain, Sanjib Baruah were some of the prominent scholars who contributed to this famous debate on Assamese nationalism in the Economic and political weekly. Amalendu Guha's seminal title "Little Nationalism Turned chauvinist: Assam's Anti-Foreigner Upsurge, 1979-80" is specially important to locate the historical root of Assamese

nationalism which the AGP claims to represent. Monirul Hussain's (1993) critical study on the Assam movement illuminates upon the class dimension of Assam Movement. This movement provided the background of the AGP. His research on the course and consequences of the Assam movement on political and culture life of Assam is fascinating but the study falls short of an account of the social factions operating within the movement. The researcher has traced the political development of Assam since the colonial period leading to the Assam Movement and gave a Marxist interpretation of Assamese middle class politics. But the various stakeholders to the the movement are not classified properly. Whether these stakeholders got adequate representation in the AGP which was formed afterwards is a subject of study.

The rise of the AGP as regional political party in to power in Assam after the Assam movement got attention of Samir Kumar Das (1997). In his study, the scholar tries to answer the questions like; how does a regional party, formed after a mass movement without proper organizational apparatus, face the intricacy of power politics and how does the claim to represent the Assamese nationalism stand in composite state like Assam having multiple sun-national identities? This is a pioneer study on the ideology, support base and objectives, leadership and organizational structure of the AGP. He also gives subtle reference to the genesis of factional conflict in AGP during the first tenure of governance. Sandhya Goswami (2012) while illuminating upon issues and dynamics of electoral politics in Assam since 1985, traces the history of electoral performance of the AGP in comparision to other political parties. This study based on data collected from post-poll survey of Assam Assembly and Parliamentary election held in Assam is proved useful. Haren Kalita (2011) traces the historical background of Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and electoral base and performances of the party. The author researched on election campaigning of the AGP and socio-economic background of AGP leaders basically to find out that there is lack of party solidarity, internal democracy in the party. He draws a conclusion that poor performance of the AGP in elections since 2001 is attributed to the fact that regionalism in Assam is fractured and divided into several hostile camps and the ideology of regionalism has declined. The author

seemed to have neglected the factional politics operating in the party for some queer reasons. Hirannya Kumar Bhattacharyya (2015) on the other hand categorically pointed out this aspect in the AGP as the primary menace in the party. His work, written in autobiographical style, is important source of data on factional rivalry and shortcomings of party organization of the AGP. Bhattacharyya was mainly concerned about unabated demographic aggression from Bangladesh. His writing shares his personal and firsthand experience as senior IPS officer posted as DIGP Border during Assam Movement. He saw from close quarter politics in Assam during those troubled days. Some of his observations are convincing but can't be cross verified. Nani Gopal Mahanta (2013) unfurled a new vista of undersatding in the ULFA-AGP relations. The United Liberation Fron of Assam (ULFA) is the extremist faction of Assamese nationalism. The Assam movement incorporated both the extremist and moderate ideologies. After the Assam Accord, these two ideological factions of the movement got separated; the moderates formed the AGP and trooded the parliamentary path and the extremists took revolutionary path. ULFA's close allies in civil society of Assam may have caused panic for AGP government. Secret killing of ULFA relatives and counter killing by ULFA during second term of AGP government and AGP bonhomie with the rebels during its first tenure are some issues that destabilized the regional party. The work is a complete narrative of events covering issues like identity politics, change in demographic pattern, impact of insurgency upon human development, big dam issue, Asom bondh culture etc.

Apart from this, there are a number of articles and books on electoral politics in Assam. Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed (2006) reviews the post 2004 Lok Sabha election scenario in Assam. The scholar did extensive content analysis on election process and voting behavior in Assam. It is essential reading to understand political environment and political culture of Assamese society till 2006. Social issues, such as, population growth, autonomy, ethnic issues and their impact upon electoral politics are aptly dealt with proper data in this volume. The chapters on nomination process, election campaigning of different political parties in Assam are insightful. Role of media in Assam election has been very important since Assam

Movement. Interplay of media and public opinion upon the political process is given due attention in the book. Yet the book is not specific to the internal political dynamics of the political parties in Assam.

Sanjib Baruah (2007, 2011) deals with the history of sub-nationalism in Northeast India. Some of his research questions are; how the autonomy movements and insurgency in Assam have threatened the legitimacy of the AGP regime, what is the history of social conflict in Assam and what are the tensions between pan-Indianism and Assamese sub nationalist etc. India's formally federal but actually centralized government structure is causing divisive sentiment in the peripheral states making the society unstable and prone to conflict. Baruah argues that the system of the institutionalized authoritarian tactics of the state, since the days of company upon society and politics of the region has been endemic and durable which have alienated people from their forests, land and resources.

In all these aforesaid books the cardinal point of the present research, that is the factional rivalry or conflict among the top leaders of the AGP, has not been discussed and analyzed. That is why the present study on this issue of factionalism in a regional party stands on academically rationale basis. The very fact that none of the available books on regionalism in Assam have taken up the intra-party conflict within the AGP; makes the present research academically relevant. Further, by undertaking this study, an attempt has been made to philosophies the future of the only regional party in the state which twice came to power and eventually started declining.

1.9 Scheme of chapters

The thesis is divided into six interdependent chapters for systematic understanding of factional politics in the AGP. The first chapter is introductory in nature. A brief outline of political development since the colonial period leading to emergence of Assamese middle class and regional sentiment is depicted. The location and context of the study is highlighted with a little bit of idea about the conceptual framework on factionalism. Any academic research depends on selection of suitable

methodology and observation of the defined approach in an objective manner. Data collection after determining the universe of the study is another important aspect of academic work. This aspect along with a note on methodology is also written in this chapter. This chapter contains literature review covering a host of research on factionalism in different countries of the world, in India and also in Assam. The rationale of selection of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) as case study and limitations of the research are also expressed.

The second chapter is devoted to theoretical aspects of factionalism, various theories of factionalism, approaches to the study of factionalism etc. It deals with topics that vary from types of faction to nature of faction, functions of faction to the solutions of faction etc.

In the third chapter titled 'The trajectory of factional politics in the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)' the case study of the research is introduced. The chapter begins with the origin of the party, ideological basis and support base, features of its leadership, organizational structure and the roots of factionalism in the party. It also peeps into the trajectory of factional alignments in the AGP along with its distinct patterns.

The title of the fourth chapter is 'Dynamics of factional politics in the Asom Gana Parishad'. The name suggests that the chapter directly deals with the main issue of the study. Starting with the initial shades of factionalism, the chapter goes on to examine how friends of the Assam Movement turned into foes due to factional rivalry in the course of time. It reveals the impact of factionalism on the party organization, on the governance process in Assam, leadership relation in the AGP and overall development during the period from 1985 to 1995.

As the time frame of this research is almost 30 years, so the dynamics of factionalism is depicted in two chapters. The fifth chapter titled 'The degenerative factionalism in the Asom Gana Parishad' is an extension of the fourth one. The chapter deals with factional politics from 1996 when the AGP occupied power in Assam for the second term. Factionalism in the AGP displayed during this period

had some specific patterns absent earlier. Factionalism from 2001 to 2011, when the AGP faced repeated failure in elections, turned into degeneration of the party, its support base etc. The rise of national political parties in the aftermath of the Lok Sabha election of 2014 posed a pertinent question as whether regionalism has ended in Assam or it's a new epoch in regional politics. These issues are dealt as postscripts in this chapter.

The sixth chapter is devoted to interplay of factionalism in the AGP and the crisis of Assamese nationalism. The research would have been incomplete without considering the catalysts of factional politics and ideological issues concerning regionalism in Assam. Factionalism in a regional political party formed out of a social movement can't occur in vacuum and as the epitome of Assamese nationalism how did the AGP responded to the social factions is an important aspect of this study. Factionalism in a political party and the social environment is integrally linked, so this aspect is given attention in this chapter. The study on factionalism ends with a conclusion and summery of the findings in the seventh chapter.

Factionalism: Theory and Practice | Chapter 2

2.1 The concept of faction and nature of factionalism

Political factionalism is considered to be an intra-party competition among rival leaders. It is struggle for power between different groups within a political party. Factional groups may emerge in a political party either for ideological drift or incompatible aspirations of the leaders and their supporters. Faction and factional politics is common feature of all political parties in liberal democracies. It is not unknown to the socialist and communist political parties as well. The famous factional rivalry between Stalin and Trotsky in former USSR is a glaring example. Factional politics arises at organizational level of the political party or in political process. Factions presuppose a bond of group unity. Accordingly, two rival political parties are not factions, but two or more sub-groups within a party trying to capture power or control the party machinery are called factions. The existence of factions signifies that the cohesiveness of the wider group has been seriously disturbed. Factions are apt to fission off as separate identities in case of mounting alienation leading to split in the party.

Study on Factional behavior within a political party has been very much rewarding to understand political process of a society. It is a part of the pathology of politics. Factions are inherent in party organization. Charles Merriam, Franz Neumann, Maurice Duverger, Samuel J. Eldersveld and many others are of the opinion that multiple social and economic interests of the society exist in the form of factions within the party organization and in their bid for capturing the power apparatus. In doing so, they confront each other in conflict.²⁴ Therefore, study of factional politics illuminates upon the political culture, social dynamics and nature of political leadership in a society.

²⁴ Prasanta Sen Gupta "Intra-party politics: A Preliminary note", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.40, No.1 (March, 1979)

2.1.1 Definition of faction

Myron Weiner (1955) defines faction as a group which articulates a set of goals, which operates within a larger organization, but not created by or created with the approval of the parent body. According to V.O. Key (1949), factions are 'political machines' that help in sustaining one party rule locally. Key referred to multi-factionalism in the American Democratic Party in the Southern states of the USA during 1940s. Factions reflect diversity within the political party. Duverger (1964) regarded factions as 'sub party units'. Tolerance of such units within party depends on nature of the party itself, whether it is heterogeneous or restricted. Zariski (1960) defines faction as 'any intra-party combination, clique or grouping whose members share common identity, purpose and are organized to act collectively as a distinct bloc within a party to achieve their goals'. Factions can articulate shared values, different strategic conceptions, common interests and even personal or local clique. Factions are seen as significant structural features inside parties that deserves academic research. Sartori (1976) used the term 'fraction' instead of faction to avoid anti-faction bias of earlier writers. In his opinion fractionism can be positive if it provides competition in sub competitive party system. Factions as a form of human aggregation are present in social groups, political parties, civil society organization, village community and all possible form of human association.

2.1.2. Legal connotation of 'faction' and other similar terms

There are some concepts like 'faction, 'clique' 'division' and 'split' which are used extensively in this thesis. But these terms, though looks similar in meaning, are actually different. Oxford dictionary defines these terms in the following way.

'Faction is a small group of people within a larger one whose members have some different aims and beliefs to those of the larger group.'

'Clique is a small group of people who spend their time together and do not allow others to join them.'

'Division is defined as disagreement or difference in opinion, way of life, etc., especially between members of a society or an organization.'

'Split is defined as a disagreement that divided a group of people or makes somebody separate from somebody else.'

These definitions clearly suggest that faction is different from the other three terminologies. Factional politics or factionalism has wider political connotation and therefore, the present study has given academic thrust to the terminology 'factionalism'. Clique refers to a kind of personal bonding among a group of people who are either friends or peers. But a faction is formed when some members of an organization tries to pursue different aims which are political in nature. Factions may lead to 'division' within the organization and eventually the party or the organization may split apart. After the split the factions became separate and are recognized as different organizations.

2.1.3 Structure of factions

Faction arises within a group in a context of opprobrium and persistent differences. When a section of group members do not find it possible to completely identify themselves with the policies and activities of the group, then they get organized around one or more prominent dissident members and form a faction. The leader is called factional leader or dissident leader, who leads the unofficial group for advancement of particular policy, activity, etc., that favours their faction over other faction and over the group as a whole. Thus, factions are small, loosely organized, relatively temporary and unstable groups. Factions are unofficial groupings but exercise pervasive influence over the thought and action of the whole group. The coherence and durability of factions depend upon how long the differences remain. If resolved the faction may fade away. On the contrary, unresolved differences may prolong factional rivalry and working of the group may be impaired leading to its eventual disintegration also. In case of disintegration or split, the faction emerges as the core of new group with separate identity. The structure of a faction can be determined on the basis of three aspects:

- i) **Membership of a faction:** Membership changes depending upon the changes in internal group situation. Members come and go as per their interest or perception of the situation. The relationship among the

members is also influenced by the socio-cultural milieu in which the group operates. There are some catalysts of factional bonding among the members. For example, ties of friendship, kinship, caste, region and reciprocal obligation, communal solidarity based on language, race, religion and many others work as catalysts. However, the universal and viable bond in a faction is the result of a common interest against a common enemy²⁵.

- ii) **Nature of participation:** Participation in a faction is related to individual ties with other members of the group. Members and leaders of a faction maintain client-patron relationship. Clients support his patrons out of a sense of obligation and loyalty for benefits derived in the past and in anticipation of advantages in the future. The recruitment of members to different factions in the community is based upon their personal aspiration involved in the actual cause of rivalry. The community and variations in the social structure provides reinforcing element of stability. As such factional alignment and social milieu has a complementary relation. .
- iii) **Structural rigidity:** This is another benchmark that determines the level of conflict in factionalism. The level of conflict is likely to be low in an open and pluralistic group. In such a group, faction operates in a loose manner as rallying point of opinions, interests and views. On the other hand, factionalism assumes intense level in closed and rigid structure. Such faction demand high ego involvement and maximal psychic participation of the members. Examples of closed groups are radical political movements, revolutionary organizations, etc. Solidarity and commitment are precious values strictly maintained in such rigid structures. When conflict breaks out in such group, it does not remain confined to the current issues and tend to acquire the momentum of previous discords that could not find a legitimate outlet of expression²⁶.

²⁵ P N Rastogi, *Nature and Dynamics of Factional Conflict* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1975) ,4

²⁶ *ibid*, p 6

2.1.4 The idea of factional leader and his significance

The task of organizing a faction and maintaining its unity lies with its leader. The leader is a person of political power and can provide position, fund and other necessities of good life to his followers in exchange of their support to him. This is political patronage extended by the leader to his followers. Sometimes, feeling of awe, respect and devotion to a leader because of his charismatic qualities or feeling of loyalty evoked by caste or community ties or by family links etc., work as the cement of leader-follower relationship²⁷. Paul R Brass (1964) in his study of factionalism in Uttar Pradesh Congress party found this warm personal tie of affection and loyalty similar to the Guru-disciple relationship in educational and religious institutions. A faction leader must possess seniority and personality. He is adept in political tactics and builds strategy required for effectuate compromises and holds divergent elements together²⁸. Factional leaders are competitors for political power and they use varieties of resources to draw members into their respective factions. Leaders make principles and strategies of the faction; ensure strength and cohesion of their faction. Factional leaders are prominent members of a group who compete with each other for power, status, influence and control of resources. This competition leads to internal discords and disagreements over policies and activities of the group.

2.1.5 Faction and Factionalism

Factions are sub-groups within an organization. Factional activities i.e., competition for limited resources and power may persist and increase due to ineffective group mechanism. Factions operate to promote the sectional interests of their own members against the broader interests of the group as a whole. Thus, factionalism is the act of indulging in factional politics. It refers to the conflict or competition between two or more factions within the same party organization, the prime

²⁷ Prasanta Sen Gupta, "Intra-Party Politics: A Preliminary Note", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.40, No.1(March,1979) :83

²⁸ Scalapino, Robert A and Masumi,J. *Parties and Politics in Contemporary Japan*, (USA: University of California Press, 1962) as quoted by Prasanta Sen Gupta in "Intra-Party Politics: A Preliminary Note", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.40, No.1 (March, 1979) : 81-96

motive being winning the power struggle. Factionalism has also been defined as two or more 'divisions' covertly competing against each other within the framework of an organization created and maintained for the pursuit of ostensibly common goals²⁹. If remain unresolved, factionalism becomes headache for the management machinery. Functions of factionalism may be integrative and disintegrative. In a less competitive political environment, in the developed countries, factionalism helps in widening the support base of the party; hence it is positive and integrative. But in multi party system, specially in the developing countries, factionalism weakens the structure of the parent organization; hence it is proved negative and disintegrative. In such a situation, party managers want to cover up factional politics in the organization.

2.1.6 Nature and factors of factionalism in political party

Gupta (1979) discussed growth and nature of factionalism. Factors of factionalism differ from country to country. Factionalism is omnipresent and multi-dimensional phenomena. Omnipresence of factionalism refers to the universal character of factionalism. Factionalism may grow out of wide variety of factors both in liberal democratic and communist political party. In case of the Indian Communists, ideological issues and cleavages prompted factionalism and the party suffered split in 1964. But factionalism in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), especially between Stalin and Trotsky, was largely based on personal factors. In liberal democratic party system, wide variety of social and personal factors though couched in ideological rhetoric cause factionalism. Regional or ethnic incompatibility also contributes to factionalism. India is an interesting case where regional diversity, demographic variance, caste, language, ethnicity, sect, etc., are vehicles of political maneuvering. Therefore, growth of factionalism in India is endemic and pervasive in nature in all political parties. In India, national political parties with a 'high-command structure' are more capable of managing factional conflict. This has been proved by Paul R Brass (1966) in his study of Indian

²⁹ Prasanta Sen Gupta, "Intra Party Politics: A Preliminary Note", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.40, No.1. (March, 1979) :83

National Congress in Uttar Pradesh. But, regional political parties in India are less equipped with 'high command structure' and suffer the most due to factionalism. The Asom Gana Parishad in Assam and the Akali Dal in Punjab are glaring examples. On the contrary, despite having factionalism within the party, the DMK and the AIADMK in Tamilnadu has remained strong and organized till date.

There are various factors responsible for the growth of factionalism in political party. Some of which are discussed below:

i) Personal factor: Personal enmity between prominent party leaders due to incompatible ambitions causes factionalism. Paul R. Brass is of the opinion that factionalism may unfold in an environment marked, not by ideological dissension, but by personal rivalries among the leaders. He observed that in a factional situation self regarding interests get preference and other regarding common interests are overlooked. Self-regarding interests become the overriding concern of the leaders about how to get things done for their followers and constituents. Most of the factions in the Congress party after independence are based on personal factors. Same is true with the regional and state political parties as well. in the words of Paul R Brass-

*"Although the language of conflict is often phrased in terms of important principles....factions and factional conflicts are organized completely around personalities and around personal enmities among party leaders"*³⁰.

ii) Ideological Factor: Difference in ideological or policy issues of the party may result in factional politics. Ideological difference affects the party organization. The objectives and goals of the party are interpreted differently by different ideological factions. Factionalism in the Chinese Communist Party and the CPSU were based on ideological factors. Even in India, we have witnessed ideological factions in the Communist Party of India in 1964 over the issue of acknowledging Russian leadership in world communist movement. Marry C Carras (1972), in contrast to Paul R Brass, declined to interpret the dynamics of Indian political factions

³⁰ Paul R Brass, "Factionalism and the Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh", *Asian Survey*, Vol.4 (1964): 1040

primarily in terms of personal loyalties. In her study on factional behavior in Maharashtra, she argues that ideology has played crucial role in factionalism in the Congress party. She writes:

“It is specifically the economic philosophy of the ‘mixed enterprise’ which has produced a mixed or mixed up political enterprise within the Congress party organization itself. This ambiguity towards public policy and private economic activity in the party ideology, reflected in the juxtaposition of incompatible economic practices and interests, is by extension, carried into the political behavior of Congressmen. The result is factionalism.”³¹

However, economic philosophy is not the sole ideology that generated factionalism in the Congress party. There were left and right wing ideological factions in the Congress party since the freedom struggle. This is a testimony of the fact that ideology is an important determinant of factionalism. Sometimes, deviation from accepted ideology or inability of leadership to sustain ideology also results in factionalism. Indira Gandhi in 1969 was accused of being uncommitted to the Congress ideology. The old guards of the Congress known as the ‘syndicate’ had revolted against her leadership.

Gupta (1979) has presented the case of Italian Christian Democratic Party (DC) in the mid 1940s. The Italian party during this period was divided into two factions; one led by De Gasperia and the other organized by Giuseppe Dossetti. Under the leadership of De Gasperia the party became dependent upon conservative Catholic organization. This resulted in formation of faction known as Dossettians, named after its leader Giuseppe Dossetti. This was the left wing of the party which opposed Catholic clergy influence in party affairs of the Italian Christian Democratic Party. This faction argued that the dependence of the DC on conservatively oriented catholic organizations would render the policy of economic

³¹ Mary C. Carras, *The Dynamics of Indian Political Factions: A study of District Councils in the state of Maharashtra*, (Cambridge University Press

reforms unworkable.³² The purpose of this reference here is to emphasise on ideological element as a factor of factionalism.

iii) Political and social environment as a factor: The political and overall social environment is also an important factor of factionalism. The differences and 'divisions' in a party or organization may be an outcome of socio-economic pressure from outside. Factionalism signifies the ineffectiveness of group management which may be a result of socio cultural change or change in political economy of the environment. Therefore, sociological analysis of faction is necessary to understand the course and process that lead to evolution of a factional situation. A faction arising out of rapid social change going on in society may lead to immobility and disintegration of the parent group or party. The regional political parties in India formed on the basis of ethnic or primordial loyalties are facing the challenge of multiple identity formation in a globalized environment. Factional conflict and disintegration characterizes in mushrooming growth of political parties in India which is an indication of social factions operating at the grass roots.

2.1.7 Factionalism in dominant party and multi-party system

Status of the party in political system also determines factional outbreak. As Gupta has put it-

*"A dominant party, called so because of its unchallenged monopoly of political power, patronage and financial resources available to it, obviously attracts itself to a wide variety of social and economic interests and, thus becomes a haven for the most desperate elements which group through it, for political recognition, articulation and control."*³³

Gradually the dominant party fails to hold in check the divergent interests and sentiments within it. This has been proved true in case of the Congress party in

³² G Galli and A Prand, *Patterns of Political Participation in Italy*, Yale University Press, (1970) :79 quoted in "Intra-Party Politics : A Preliminary note" by Prasanta Sen Gupta, *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.40, No.1, (March, 1979)

³³ Prasanta Sen Gupta, "Intra-Party Politics: A Preliminary note", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.40, No.1(March, 1979) : 87

India and the Christian Democratic Party in Italy. Both these parties have seen proliferation of intense factionalism when there was no effective opposition. The Italian party had produced a total of nine factions by June 1961³⁴.

The concept of dominant party in power susceptible to factionalism also finds support in the experiences in the United States of America. Southern states of the USA like the South Carolina, the Alabama, the Mississippi, the Arakansas, the Texas, and the Florida experienced chaotic factional politics in the mid 20th century as these were the strongholds of the Democratic Party and there were no real opposition party to challenge its' monopoly. Harold Lasswell is of the opinion that, *"Whenever effective opposition appears....., factional strife (in dominant party) subsides spontaneously, compromises are made..."*

As such, environment does have impact upon internal politics of political party. Factional conflicts are likely to unfold in an immature political society where social mobility is less. Again, traditional society infected with rapid social change threatening the power position of the traditional elites, absence of class identity, lack of articulation of the weaker section's interests and consequently non-emergence of organized interest groups are breeding ground of factionalism. In such a scattered society, individuals seek to realize their personal aspirations through the vehicle of politics resulting in formation of clique and faction either in the society or in a political party.

Apart from the factors discussed above, nature of political institution or organizational features also influence factional strife. Even a role of electoral system in some cases can't be denied. Parliamentary systems tend to inspire factionalism more than Presidential system. Liberal democratic parties are prone to factionalism than cadre based communist parties where ideological influence writ large upon its members. One dominant party system (Indian National Congress in 1950s and 1960s) or bi-party system have inherent weakness like lack of opposition, lack of social avenues for ventilating personal aspirations which lead to

³⁴ *ibid*, 88

factionalism within the party. But multi-party system is relatively on the safer side from these syndromes. Finally, factionalism occurs not because of a single factor, but multiple reasons and factors combine with the socio-political environment to give birth to factional situation. Faction once occurred has a tendency towards its proliferation, if not resolved by the organizational machinery addressing the grievances of the faction.

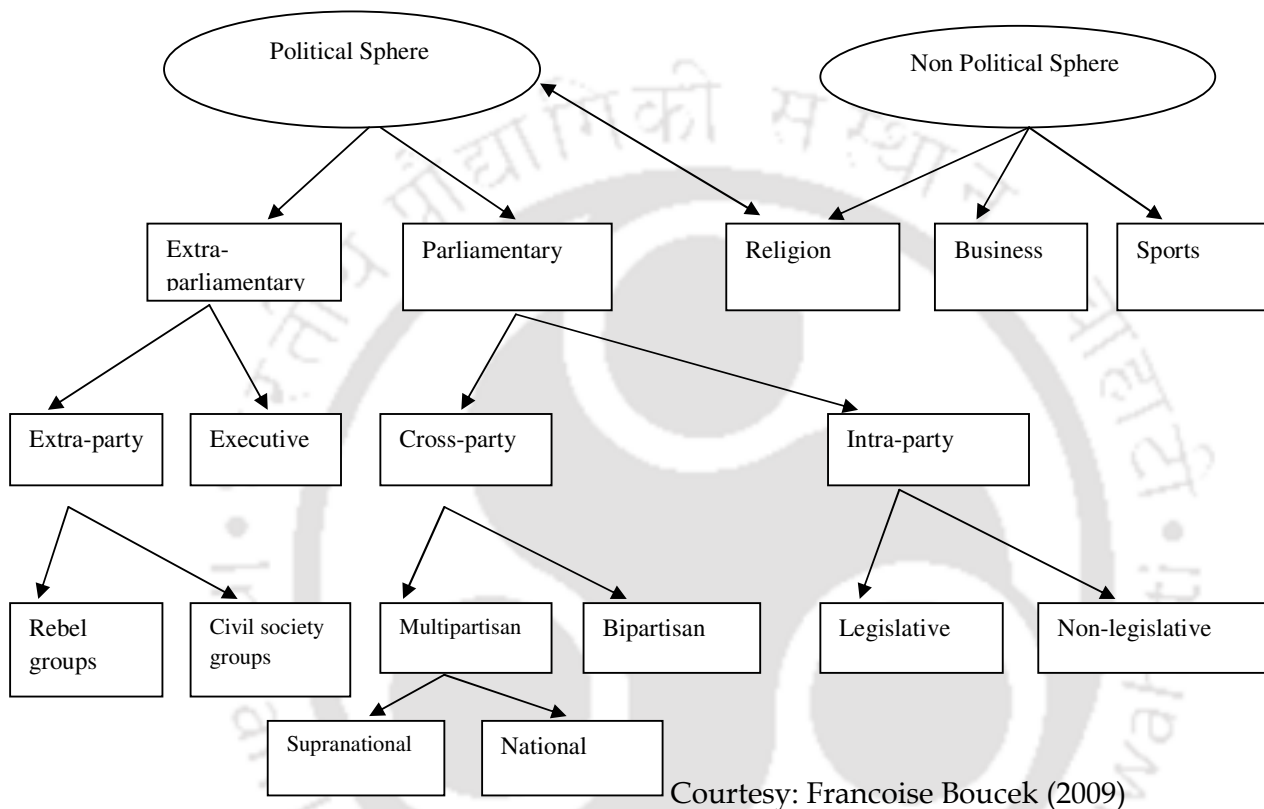
2.2 Classification of factional situation and Factional pattern

Francoise Boucek (2009) has illustrated factionalism dividing the scope into political and non-political sphere of influence. Non-political factions are often reported in religious, sports and business organizations. However religion in some situations can be termed as political sphere also and religion influences in politics. Religious factional conflicts tend to be highly political or they become politicized. The Shia, Sunni and Kurd factions in Iraq, the Hamas and Fatah factions in Palestine are such examples³⁵. In political sphere factional situations arise in parliamentary and extra parliamentary arena. Extra parliamentary sphere refers to the situation which are outside the influence of parliamentary system. It may again be sub divided into extra party and executive arena. For example, Maoist rebel groups in Nepalese society before joining parliamentary politics in Nepal were extra party factions. Same is the case with the social factions based on ethnic communities in India. Factions also occur at executive category of Presidential system e.g. the case of Vladimir Putin in Kremlin (Russia). Meanwhile parliamentary category can be divided into cross party and intra party faction. Intra party factions can be seen in legislative or non legislative arena. This type of factionalism is frequent in Indian party system. The focus of our study is also intra party faction in a regional political party in a competitive political environment. Cross party factions can themselves be subdivided into bipartisan (the US Congress system) and multipartisan (the Russian Duma). Multipartisan faction may be national and supra national faction. National factions are obvious in multiparty

³⁵ Francoise Boucek , 'Rethinking Factionalism: Typologies, Intra-party Dynamics and Three Faces of Factionalism' *Party Politics*, Vol. 15. No. 4 (2009) : 1-31

system but supranational or transnational party federations are only seen in European Parliament. For example European People’s Party or Party of European Socialists operates on transnational platform resulting in cooperative factionalism³⁶.

Figure 2.1
Mapping and labeling factions



Intra-party type of faction is most common and studied form of factionalism in political science. Well known political parties like the Indian National Congress, the Conservative and the Labour party in Britain, the Republican and the Democratic Party in USA have intra party factions. The factions in these parties are more or less institutionalized and salient feature of the respective political system. One might safely put it philosophically that in democracy one is entitled to agree to disagree, differ on crucial issues, and express contesting voice. As a result, it is obvious that there could be a group of people who rallies behind the other view point and likely

³⁶ *ibid.* 7-8

to form a faction. Therefore, factionalism is a universal phenomenon in democratic politics.

2.2.1 Patterns of factionalism

Factionalism in a political party may be of three kinds; unifactionalism, bifactionalism and multifactionalism. Factional patterns are conditioned by wide variety of factors operated within and outside the party environment. These are discussed below:

i) **Unifactionalism** refers to the situation when a single cohesive faction controls the power of the party concerned. The single factional group, thus, prevent emergence of any other faction in the party. Even if there is a second faction, it is disorganized and insignificant in terms of political power. Some political scientist does not regard unifactionalism as a specific pattern. However, V.O.Key (1949) has observed that competent and shrewd strategy, high degree of discipline over the local political leaders, affiliated with the party organization are the pillars of unifactional pattern. The 'high command' in such a pattern play crucial role by exercising democratic practice in case of dispute settlement, candidate selection and nomination for the election. Diverse political aspirant and man of political ability finds place in such a factional pattern on the basis of unquestioned loyalty. Such type of factionalism is seen only in mature political culture and certain degree of homogeneity is important to maintain such pattern. The Democratic Party in the State of Virginia in the USA during 1940s demonstrated such unifactional pattern. It was led by the Byrd faction named after its leader Senator Harry F. Byrd³⁷.

ii) **Bifactional** pattern means presence of two well defined factions within a political party. Some glaring examples of bifactionalism are Stalin-Trotsky rivalry in CPSU, Mahatma Gandhi-Subhash Chandra Basu ideological division in Indian National Congress, etc. In the absence of strong opposition, bifactionalism may serve as a boon for democratic polity. The presence of two durable factions in the

³⁷ Prasanta Sen Gupta, "Intra-Party Politics : A Preliminary note", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.40 No. 1 (March 1979) : 90-91

political party might lead to clarity and order in political programme. It might be an alternative to two-party competition, as was in the case of the state of Louisiana in the USA. Bifactional pattern added in Louisiana relatively stable polity and kept chaotic factional politics away in 1940s³⁸.

Bipolar factional make up of a party may give way to multipolarization of factions due to change in political environment. After the independence, the Congress Party in India succumbed to such change. The party was no more a movement but transformed itself into a power structure to translate social and economic interests of the masses in reality. Divergent social and economic sub groups in their bid for realizing their aspirations entered into 'conflict relationship' within the Congress party³⁹. Paul R Brass in his study of the Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh had shown how the dominant party managed multifactional pattern and came victorious in elections in the 1950s and 1960s. Indian politics is competitive and contentious. Therefore, caste, religion, language and other primordial loyalties find a place in Indian political system leading to emergence of several social and political factions in the scenario. As a result, the number of contending group increases. It may be argued that the social environment in which the party operates, exercise influence over the factional structure of the party and may even initiate change in it.

iii) Multifactionalism is caused by lure of power and individual position in the party organization. As such, the leaders bargain among themselves for personal interest and sometimes form temporary alliance of mutual convenience. In multifactional pattern, many sub groups or cliques operate. Multifactionalism generally flourishes when politics is disorganized, individualistic or atomized. Factional leaders in such a situation display demagogic qualities that attract voter's attention. They win elections based on own qualities and exertions. Indian political parties mostly demonstrate multifactional pattern. Such faction sometime discontinues for either a solution acceptable is found or the faction opposing the

³⁸ Allan P Sindler, "Bifactional Rivalry as an Alternative to Two-party Competition in Louisiana", *American Political Science Review*, Vol.49 (1955)

³⁹ Gupta, *op cit.* p 92

dominant one have become weak. It is seen that factional leaders or even supporters switch over factional bloc according to their convenience. Such factional pattern is loose factionalism. Generally ideological factions are tight factions. But in case of personal factional groupings, prestige and patronage becomes the prize in the absence of issues. Factional leaders often cross factional lines which are seldom tightly drawn. Thus, flux and fluidity, impermanence and uncertainty become the rule in multifactional pattern.

2.3 Functions of Factionalism

Every incident and action has cause and effect relationship. The same is true in case of factionalism also. Faction and factional politics do not operate in vacuum. It causes change in organization, support base, leadership in the political party. The nature and scope of politics in society also undergoes change according to the pattern of factionalism. Therefore, functional aspect of factionalism is crucial to understand the political process and political culture in a society. The effect of faction politics may be either 'functional' and positive or 'dysfunctional' and negative. There is another viewpoint regarding the functions of faction put forwarded by Fancoise Boucek (2009). He wrote about three faces of factionalism: Cooperative, Competitive and Degenerative factionalism.

2.3.1 Functional and positive functions

Factional politics perform several important functions in party organization. Prasanta Sen Gupta has identified five main functions of factionalism. **First**, factionalism helps to provide new supporters and new members to the party. **Second**, party members adhering to factional group in a political party attain greater prestige or better connection within the party. **Third**, factional politics creates informal lines of communication vertically; party orders from top to bottom and demands from bottom to the top is freely communicated through the faction. **Fourth**, ideological factional conflict in political party keeps alive the interest of the activists and instrumental in heightening the morale of party workers. This strengthens the cohesiveness of the party. **Fifth**, acceptances of faction's position by

the party and by the society at large provide psychological satisfaction to its members.

Factional politics is an obvious consequence in liberal democratic polity. It reflects the state of affairs in the political party and also in the society. Factional politics recruits new blood in to the party and thus strengthens the party. It is a blessing in disguise. Paul R Brass highlighted this positive functional aspect in his study of the Congress party in Uttar Pradesh. It was a two way process in case of the Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh, *viz.*, first, factionalism added to Congress's strength and second, dominant position of the Congress in absence of any formidable opposition made factionalism inevitable. Factionalism was a means for ventilating grievances related to class, religion, caste, regional sentiments etc.

2.3.2 Dysfunctional and negative functions

Factionalism may be conducive to durability and running of political system but not suitable for social change. First, the politicization of caste and community used as vehicle of factional rivalry is detrimental to nation building. By dividing caste groups, faction may weaken and prevent the articulation of demands of lower castes. Paul R Brass expressed that due to factionalism demands of the low caste groups in Uttar Pradesh did not always find effective expression in the Congress party; it was the elite proprietary caste interest that dominated⁴⁰.

Secondly, the vertical informal lines of communication provided by factionalism may not be conducive to the political party. As, they undermine the formal party structure, inhibit party growth or render party politics too secretive. Factionalism in Japanese party system turned into dysfunctional due to existence of such informal lines of communication⁴¹.

Thirdly, in case of ideological factions, strict adherence to ideological loyalty becomes dysfunctional for the party. Therefore, psychological satisfaction attained

⁴⁰ Paul R Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian state: The Congress party in Uttar Pradesh*, (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1966) : 243

⁴¹Totten, G. D. and Kawakami, T, "The Functions of Factionalism in Japanese Politics", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 38, (1996) : 121

by a leader or members of a faction is temporary and may change over time leading to more conflict in the party.

Fourthly, Prasanta Sen Gupta (1979) observes that factional conflicts which are extra-political, may be personal in origin are not amenable to ordinary political solutions. Thus, factionalism become dysfunctional for the party cohesion, and may even contribute to decline in electoral strength. This was evident in case of the AGP in Assam. Personal factional rivalry drained party's support base and its electoral performance since 1991. Such personal conflicts are real danger for the party management. During election such dis-satisfied and defeated factional leader may either run against the official candidate or may sabotage election from within the organization. Such affairs are frequently seen in less developed political system in Asian and African countries. Therefore, party management cover up factional conflict in the party organization and factionalism has gained the status of a taboo due to its disintegrative impact.

2.4 Three faces of factionalism

Francoise Boucek in his detailed case study research of factionalized parties in mature democracies identified three faces of factionalism. These are----cooperative factionalism, competitive factionalism and degenerative factionalism. This analysis is based on functional aspect of factional politics.

2.4.1 Cooperative Factionalism

Sometimes, factionalism is cooperative, integrative and consensus building. At times, political parties start as a coalition of disparate groups or fragments. Primordial loyalties and emergence of political elite along such affiliations are natural process in politics. Such political elites and followers belonging to separate political groups in society emerge as key actors during periods of political change, social movement etc. A factional structure may have a role to play in enabling the groups to retain their separate identities and membership while playing active role in consolidation of the political party. In the words of Boucek--

“By providing a structure of cooperation between separate intra-party groups, factionalism can diversify party appeals and accelerate the opinions and policy preferences of separate societal groups and mobilize separate memberships and communities of interests within a single organization, they can play a constructive role in building integrated parties.”⁴²

However, leadership in an environment of cooperative factionalism is expected to display judicious attitude to all factions operating within the party. Factional leaders and followers in such a party should also be committed to the collective democratic consolidation instead of seeking self interests. Factions with divergent aims and objectives operate as club and debating societies and add alternative perspective to official programme perpetrating a democratic culture in the party. Then what is the reason behind faction formation when separate group interests can go hand in hand. The answer rests in human psychology. Humans are social beings who try to fit in with the group. However, as individuals they have a natural desire to differentiate themselves from the mass. For politicians, factional affiliations can fulfill this need for identity. In some parties, political office is handed down along family ties; for instance in Japan. In such a party, group allegiances based on family ties and local networks of political patronage can be the driving force behind intra party factionalism. In fact, factionalism can be good for parties and for democracy as long as it facilitates cooperation otherwise intra-party competition threatens the party unity.

2.4.2 Competitive Factionalism

Factionalism and competition are the two sides of the same coin. Even in cooperative factionalism there are competitions, cleavages which are managed by the party machinery to the advantage of the competing forces. Factional completion is not necessarily bad thing; it can be difficult to manage. But competitive factionalism is characterized by particularistic factional interests which are deep seated personal issues and unmanageable within party organization. Competitive factionalism indicates polarization, fragmentation and tendency for split in an organization. In such a competitive environment, factions are dead against each

⁴² Françoise Boucek, “Rethinking Factionalism”, *Party Politics*, Vol.15, No.4 (2009) : 15

other rather than simply separate groups within the organization. Too much fragmentation complicates decision making and the enactment of coherent policy packages. This type of factionalism is destabilizing for the parties and for the government. Competitive factionalism exists in all liberal democratic and communist parties. It is competition with fellow party men for augmentation of power rather than with opposition parties. Such lack of unity results in defeat in the elections. Sometimes, factional cleavages are ideological or issue oriented. For example, the bank nationalization issue in 1969 in case of the Congress party in India, signing of European Union Treaty (1992) in case of the Conservative party in Britain etc. In Russia, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to formation of multiple competitive factions creating chaotic party system which made legislation in Russian *Duma* almost impossible⁴³. Such issue based fragmentation coupled with personal enmity characterizes political party structure in India. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) is a glaring example of competitive factionalism that suffered three vertical split within 20 years of its emergence.

One unique method of managing competitive factionalism in political party is invented by Christian Democratic Party (DC) in Italy and Liberal Democrats Party (LDP) in Japan. These parties have institutionalized factionalism. This means that factions are recognized and faction affiliation is effectively mandatory for the office seekers. The DC and LDP don't shy away from the fact of factional rivalry. But instead of it all factions are effectively represented in party executive bodies and in the government in proportion to their size. DC and LDP factional leaders controlled candidate nomination, distribution of campaign funding and government contracts. Therefore, joining a faction was the best way for the advancement of political career. Co-partisans having factional affiliations compete for the same pool of votes in the districts trying to gain for their respective factions as well as for their party. This kind of career structure of office holders prevented excessive fragmentation and instability because it tied politicians to their factions.

⁴³ Francoise Boucek, "Rethinking Factionalism", *Party Politics*, Vol. 15 No 4 (2009) : 20

Ambitious politicians were reluctant to leave their faction for fear of losing career and electoral benefits linked to factional membership.

In a nutshell, competitive factionalism though poses a challenge to political party alternately helps in election performance, policy making and build intra-party democracy. Boucek observes that-

*"Factions have the potential to broaden choices for voters and party followers by providing a mechanism of internal differentiation between leadership candidates and their respective agendas. Factions can also moderate party leader's policy stances and promote the nomination of moderate politicians in legislatures and governments. Moreover, a factional structure can empower party grassroots, activists, politicians and the rank and file by giving them a stake in party decision-making. Factions can provide group members with the means to communicate with their leaders and hold them to account.....By providing a method of elite circulation, factionalism can rejuvenate democratic politics in sub-competitive party system."*⁴⁴

To keep factionalism under control, leaders need to be vigilant and sympathetic towards the dissenting groups within their party. Competitive factionalism without proper safeguard can destroy party unity and electoral performance.

2.4.3 Degenerative Factionalism

This is the most pervert form of factionalism. Degenerative factionalism may destroy a party. Factions if unchecked can grow incessantly and create a risk of collective action dilemma inside the party. Self serving behavior of faction leaders is both the cause and effect of degenerative factionalism which deviates focus away from the general interest of the party. This may lead to decisional stalemate and instability in the government. In the USA and in Europe, factional system rested on complex network of client-patron relationship. Distribution of political patronage (spoils system) creates corruption and imperils the party machinery on the ground. Again, factional division of the spoils is unsustainable in the long run as state resources are limited. The Christian Democratic Party in Italy succumbed to degenerative factionalism. Its' system of factional distribution of nomination, patronage etc encouraged more fragmentation. In 1982 it had 12 institutionally

⁴⁴ Boucek, *op cit.*, p 22

recognized factions competing for the support of the delegates. Sometimes, two or more factions would form factional alliances which were proved unstable. Minor factions were seen repositioning themselves simply to be within the winning coalition and demanded payoffs in the next government. Thus factionalism derailed the reform minded politicians of the DC and particularistic interests ruled. Factional politics dictated the size and composition of Italian cabinet, unnecessary portfolios were created to satisfy factional leaders. The practice of exchanging private goods for votes became widespread. Top level appointment to government agencies, state holding corporations and public agencies were made strictly on the basis of factional affiliation. This factional capture led to amateurship in public administration.

Thus, degenerative factionalism signifies single minded pursuit of factional goals, leading to unaccountable governments, wastage of public resources, and the party becomes a value destroying brand⁴⁵.

India after independence, while adopting western liberal democratic structure, has inherited the factional politics too. Indian party system is competitive and multiple political parties at national and regional level vie for capturing political power. As such, all potential elements in society are exploited by these parties while competing for limited political space. This results in fragmentation in society and degenerative factionalism becomes the order of political life in India. In case of regional political parties, social factions cooperate on homogenous political agenda and initially seemed to have been working for the achievement of these avowed objectives. Gradually, cooperation turns into competition, leading to factional clash of interests and neck breaking competition. Thus, results in degenerative factionalism. Most of the political parties in India have displayed such a trajectory of factionalism after the Independence. However, there is nothing predetermined in politics. Through institutional reforms or astute leadership, it is possible for a party to move from a mode of intra-party competition into one of cooperation.

⁴⁵ Boucek, *op. cit.*, p 24

Table 2.1
Three faces of factionalism

	Cooperative	Competitive	Degenerative
Factionalism as a Process of	Partitioning under centripetal incentives.	Splitting under centrifugal forces.	Fractionalization/Segmentation from excessive focus on factional interests.
Factions are	Separate	Opposed	Self serving
Conditions for Existence of factionalism	Transition to Democracy. Party formation, splits, mergers party system realignment Consensus building.	Intra party conflict/dissent/rivalries. Polarized party opinion. Fragmentation inducing incentive.	Privatized incentives. Clientelism. Machine politics.
Function of factionalism	Aggregates separate groups; blurs cleavages; articulates sub-party group preferences and interests; facilitates party consolidation and district level electoral coordination.	Diffuses conflict internally; facilitates elite circulation; widens voter choice; moderates leaders and policies; empowers party followers. <i>Dangers:</i> Growth in number of factions; factional veto games; fragmented party vote.	Promotes rent seeking and the exchange vote; structures the division of the spoils; encourages factional jockeying; shifts focus away from party collective goals.
Outcomes	Intra-party harmony. Integrated party. Preservation of sub-group identities in 'big-tent' parties.	Intra party democracy; balance of internal power;	Factional capture; instability; decisional stalemate; wasted public resources; corruption → value-destroying brand. Potential party break-up or collapse.

Source: Francoise Boucek, "Rethinking Factionalism", *Party Politics*, Vol. 15 No 4 (2009) : 16

2.5 Solution to factional conflict

Factional politics is forbidden affair in the rigid party structure like the communist party. But, it is not so in a liberal democratic party. The very logic of open competition in liberal democracy acknowledges factionalism. As we have discussed earlier, intensity of factionalism may vary according to the social environment, leadership and organizational capacity of the party. Intense factional rivalry may even turn violent; one faction trying to exterminate the others from power politics. Quasi-democratic societies of Asia and Africa have witnessed such competitive and degenerative factionalism based on primordial loyalties. Therefore, party managers never regard factionalism as boon and try to hide it from media and public. Most of the political parties in developing nations do not regard factionalism even as a fact of life. Therefore, a scientific value free approach would be more helpful to focus upon group dynamics of political factions rather than gerrymandering the inadaptability and mal-effects of factionalism.

Yet, solution of factional conflict is an important aspect of study on factionalism. P N Rastogi (1975) highlights the deleterious effects of factional conflict that impairs the competitive posture of a party. He presented threefold modality for the solution of factional conflict. These are - First, bringing change to the political environment, Second, legitimization of opposition and dissent, Third, unstructuring (or restructuring) the faction situation.

2.5.1. Bringing change to the political environment

Factional conflict is the product of the contemporary environment and it is possible that change in the particular environment may be effected with human efforts. The effectiveness of these human efforts depends upon the intellectual and material resources available. Using these resources the course of the events may be changed in a direction favourable to the goals of the organization. Ultimately, the internal situation in the organization would be affected correspondingly reaffirming the faith in the leadership. The dissident elements would find it hard to garner support. As such, positive change in the environment that aggravates factional

conflict is first step towards resolution of factionalism. An example may be cited of Indian National Congress in 1969. At that time INC was reeling under intense factional conflict between the Syndicate (the old guards of the Congress) and the Indicate (supporters of Indira Gandhi). Serious economic difficulty and food shortage created the environment. This situation was eventually averted by the technological break-through known as the Green Revolution. A period of adjustment and development oriented administration followed. As such, improvement in economic scenario resulted in decline of conservative syndicate faction of the Congress party by the end of 1969.

2.5.2. Legitimization of opposition and dissent

The second modality for conflict resolution is legitimization of opposition and dissent. This means restructuring of a group suffering from factionalism in such a way that intra-group rivalry and dissent find legitimate recognition within the group. The Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, recognized factional affiliation and factional membership within the party. Nominations, cabinet formations, distribution of political patronages were also managed along factional line in the LDP. This solution has the advantage of preserving the separate identity of factions and avoiding the disruptive effects of factional conflicts. Freedom of criticism and dissidence, when institutionalized, serve as a safety valve mechanism. On national scenario, plurality of political parties may be interpreted as the institutionalization of opposition forces. Such a pattern stabilizes the mechanism for expressing dissent and promotes orderly social and political change⁴⁶.

2.5.3. Restructuring the faction situation

The third modality is unstructuring or restructuring a faction situation. The idea is to nip the factional situation in the bud. The unstructuring may be attempted immediately when a clash of interests is formed. Clash of interests, the starting point of factional conflict, may be solved through organizational mechanism like negotiation, mediation and arbitration acceptable to the contending sides.

⁴⁶ P N Rastogi, *Nature and Dynamics of Factional Conflict*, (New Delhi: Macmillan India, 1975), 99-100

Sometimes, politicians or party managers appeal to party men and common mass in the name of some real or imaginary external pressure in order to achieve harmony. This may be supplemented by highlighting the harm to the group as a whole through disharmony. Again, allocation of status in the party to potential leaders in order to insulate the conflict, rituals and ceremonies emphasizing common values, special agencies for the creation of public opinion pressure are safety valve devices of political parties that avert a faction situation. Creation of multiple crisis- crossing loyalties amongst the members is another time tested method. Under such conditions, cross pressures come into play and prevents intensification of factional hostility along any single line. Cross-cutting social relationship between major political parties and diverse social segments within the same party is of basic importance for political tolerance and stable democracy⁴⁷.

Resolution of factional conflict is complex as it involves personal ego and clash of interests. Hierarchy of needs motivates human being for supreme political power. As Abraham Maslow has put it; at the lowest level are physiological need, at the middle level are the need concerned with safety and security, at the apex, the ego need concerned with independence and self-actualization. Different individuals involve in the factional process according to the differential non-fulfillment of their basic need. Therefore, modalities for resolution of factionalism must take cognizance of this aspect and devise appropriate alternative behavior and associational pattern to deal with factional conflict.

⁴⁷ P N Rastogi, *op. cit.*, p 102



The trajectory of factional politics in the Asom Gana Parishad

3.1 The Assam Movement and genesis of the AGP

Asom Gana Parishad (hereafter AGP) is an offshoot of a six-year long mass movement in Assam (1979-1985). The movement led by the civil society in Assam is historic in its magnitude and effects on Indian politics. The movement was spearheaded by the All Assam Students Union (hereafter AASU) along with nine other socio-political and cultural organizations of Assam with an avowed objective of detection and deportation of foreign nationals and outsiders from Assam⁴⁸. An umbrella organization namely the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (hereafter AAGSP) was constituted for smooth running of the movement. Migration from other parts of India into Assam and illegal immigration from Bangladesh and Nepal reshaped the demographic composition of the State during the 20th century. Therefore, a fear among the Assamese speaking people becoming minority in their homeland spread like bonfire. Along with this, the measures of both the state and central government regarding the foreigners flared up the situation. There was an apprehension that the unabated immigration is like a 'Silent Invasion' into the socio-cultural heritage of Assam. The Movement which continued for six years is also known as the Assam Movement or Assam agitation against the foreigners. The Movement came to an end with the signing of Assam Accord on 15th August, 1985. As per the 'Memorandum of Settlement' between the leaders of the movement and Government of India, the Assam Assembly was dissolved and fresh election was declared.

⁴⁸ These nine organizations are All Assam Students Union (AASU), Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), Assam Jatiyatabadi Dal (AJD), Asom Sahitya Sabha, Asom Yuvak Samaj (AYS), All Assam Tribal Youth Association, All Assam Tribal Students Union, Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (PLP), Young Lawyers Forum, Guwahati (See *Asom Sukti Aru Annanya*, by Hiten Mahanta, *Julu-Tulu Prakashan*, Guwahati, p 3)

Map 3.1 Legislative Assembly constituencies in Assam



Table: 3.1
List of Legislative Assembly Constituencies in Assam

Sl. No.	Name of the LAC	Sl. No.	Name of the LAC	Sl. No.	Name of the LAC
1	Ratabari	44	Jania	87	Barhampur
2	Patharkandi	45	Baghbar	88	Samaguri
3	Karimganj North	46	Sarukhetri	89	Kaliabor
4	Karimganj South	47	Chenga	90	Jamunamukh
5	Badarpur	48	Boko	91	Hojai
6	Hailakandi	49	Chaygaon	92	Lumding
7	Katlicherra	50	Palasbari	93	Bokakhat
8	Algapur	51	Jalukbari	94	Sarupathar
9	Silchar	52	Dispur	95	Golaghat
10	Sonai	53	Gauhati East	96	Khumtai
11	Dholai	54	Gauhati West	97	Dergaon
12	Udharbond	55	Hajo	98	Jorhat
13	Lakhipur	56	Kamalpur	99	Majuli
14	Barkhola	57	Rangiya	100	Titabar
15	Katigora	58	Tamulpur	101	Mariani
16	Haflong	59	Nalbari	102	Teok
17	Bokajan	60	Barkhetry	103	Amguri
18	Howraghat	61	Dharmapur	104	Nazira
19	Diphu	62	Barama	105	Mahmara
20	Baithalangso	63	Chapaguri	106	Sonari
21	Mankachar	64	Panery	107	Thowra
22	Salmara South	65	Kalaigaon	108	Sibsagar
23	Dhubri	66	Sipajhar	109	Bihpuria
24	Gauripur	67	Mangaldoi	110	Naoboicha
25	Golakganj	68	Dalgaon	111	Lakhimpur
26	Bilasipara West	69	Udalguri	112	Dhakuakhana
27	Bilasipara East	70	Majbat	113	Dhemaji
28	Gossaigaon	71	Dhekiajuli	114	Jonai
29	Kokrajhar West	72	Barchalla	115	Moran
30	Kokrajhar East	73	Tezpur	116	Dibrugarh
31	Sidli	74	Rangapara	117	Lahowal
32	Bongaigaon	75	Sootea	118	Duliajan
33	Bijni	76	Biswanath	119	Tingkhong
34	Abhayapuri North	77	Behali	120	Naharkatia
35	Abhayapuri South	78	Gohpur	121	Chabua
36	Dudhnai	79	Jagiroad	122	Tinsukia
37	Goalpara East	80	Marigaon	123	Digboi
38	Goalpara West	81	Laharighat	124	Margherita
39	Jaleswar	82	Raha	125	Doomdooma
40	Sorbhog	83	Dhing	126	Sadiya
41	Bhabanipur	84	Batadroba		
42	Patacharkuchi	85	Rupohihat		
43	Barpeta	86	Nowgong		

Source: https://wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_constituencies_of_Assam_Legislative_Assembly as retrieved on 17th January, 2016.

In the wake of the changing political scenario, the leaders of the movement decided to form a political party enabling themselves to contest the forthcoming election in December 1985, so that the objectives of Assam Movement could be materialized. As such, the AGP as regional political party of Assam came into being during a three-day political convention (*Jatiya Abhibartan*) held in Golaghat, from October 12 to 14, 1985.

All the leaders of the AAGSP who played crucial role in the Assam Movement, came together to form the AGP on 14 October, 1985. Brindaban Goswami⁴⁹ as the convener of the preparatory committee, appointed by the AASU for the *Jatiya Abhibartan*, made every attempt to unite all the organizations and leaders who were active during the Assam Movement. Though there were differences between the AASU on one hand and Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad (hereafter PLP) on the other, regarding the Assam Accord, yet all the stakeholders of Assam Movement participated in the formation of the AGP. The Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal (hereafter AJD), and the PLP two important regional political parties active since 1978 onward merged with the AGP. However, one faction of the AJD chose to keep distinct identity and opposed its merger with the AGP under the leadership of Guna Gogoi.⁵⁰ The Plain Tribal Council of Assam (hereafter PTCA), Karbi Anglong People's Conference and Cachar Indigenous People's Forum promised full support but refrained from joining the newly formed regional party. A 38 member state committee was formed. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, former president of the AASU, became the President-in-chief in the apex body, along with another five senior leaders nominated as Presidents. Thus, the AGP adopted a Presidium system of leadership. The regional party emerged in the political scene of Assam with flying colors. It swept the Assam Assembly election held on 16th December, 1985, securing 64 seats and formed the Government in Assam. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the youngest Chief Minister ever in constitutional history of India at the age of 38.

⁴⁹ Brindaban Goswami, one of the former AASU leader played significant role in the Assam Movement. He became the Education Minister in the first AGP government in 1985 and the President of the party in 2001.

⁵⁰ Samir Kumar Das, *Regionalism in Power*, (New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1997), 5.

In the Lok Sabha election held on the same day AGP could bag 7 seats out of the total 14 in Assam.

Table 3.2
Performance of the AGP in the Assembly election of 1985

Name of the party	Election to Assam Legislative Assembly	Election to the Lok Sabha
AGP	64	7
Congress	25	4
UMF	17	1
PTCA	3	1
Congress (S)	4	1
CPI (M)	2	0
Independents	10	0
Total No. of Seats	126	14

Source: Niru Hazarika, "Asom Gana Parishad", *Indian Journal of Political Science*, Vol.49, No.1 (1988): 99

N.B: The AGP candidates fought the election as independents, because the party was yet to be recognized by the Election commission of India (ECI). So the vote% secured by the party in this election couldn't be determined.

One of the notable features of this election was the emergence of the United Minorities Front (UMF) with an objective of safeguarding minority interests in Assam. The ideology of the UMF was squarely opposite to the AGP. Again, it was evident from the result that the electoral base of the Left parties dwindled in Assam. As a whole, the emergence of the AGP meant the end of one-party dominance in Assam which was enjoyed by the Congress party since independence. Victory of the AGP was hailed as the triumph of regionalism. After the election the party was recognized by the Election Commission of India (ECI) as a state party with elephant as its electoral symbol. AGP enjoyed second term in office during 1996-2001. Precisely, the AGP added a new chapter in the wagon of democracy in Assam.

3.2 The organizational background of the AGP

Formation of the AGP was preceded by one of the big social movements in post colonial India, i.e. the Assam Movement. But as Samir Kumar Das (1997) has put, it

is misleading or deceptive to create the impression that the party was formed only after the movement had ended. The formation of the AGP was rooted in the very process whereby the movement was getting institutionalized during 1983-85. The Scholar referred this phase as 'incubation period' of the AGP⁵¹. The Assam Movement was led by a conglomeration of different socio-political and cultural organizations (the AAGSP) representing diverse sections of Assam. All of them agreed on one point that safeguard of indigenous people's interest can be ensured only by detection and deportation of the foreigners who threatened the cultural, linguistic and demographic milieu of the state. The illegal immigration aggravated since the Bangladesh war of Independence, when lakhs of Bangladeshis fled to India to escape from ruthless atrocities committed by the Pakistani army. As such, it was an international matter coupled with humanitarian concern to be settled by the Government of India. Bangladesh achieved independence in December 1971 as a result of India's military assistance. But the country reeled under political instability and economic crisis since 1975 after the killing of Bangabandhu Shaikh Mujibur Rahman, which led to the influx of illegal Bangladeshis into Indian Territory. Assam suffered the most due to this influx. Influential Assamese middle class started publicizing the fact that Assamese would become minority in the face of the incessant migration from outside. Since 1978, regional political parties like the AJD and the PLP became vocal on the issue of foreign nationals. During the by-election of Mangaldoi Lok Sabha constituency⁵² the matter was taken up in the vernacular media. Ultimately, a common platform to spearhead a movement was built in a meeting at Kanoi College at Dibrugarh on August 27 1979. The All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad or AAGSP came into existence. The meeting was attended by the leaders of the AASU under Bhrigu Kumar Phukan⁵³, the General Secretary

⁵¹ *ibid.*, p 9

⁵² The by-election for the Mangaldoi Parliamentary constituency was held after the death of Hiralal Patowary, MP from the Janata Dal. For the by-election, the electoral roll was updated and the concerned officials noticed many doubtful names in the electoral roll. The issue was very contentious and it was found that an alarming figure of 45,000 foreigners got infiltrated into voter list (according to the statement of the then Chief Election Officer S.L.Shakdher). This by-election was the starting point of the Assam Movement for detection and deletion of illegal voters from electoral roll and expulsion of foreigners from Assam.

⁵³ Bhrigu Kumar Phukan was the general secretary of the AASU throughout the Assam Movement and became Home Minister in the first AGP government in 1985

of the organization. The PLP was represented by Atul Bora and Pabindra Deka⁵⁴, Prasenjit Brahma represented the Progressive Plain Tribal Council (PPTC) and Nagen Saikia represented the Asom Sahitya Sabha, the greatest literary organization of Assam. Dilip Rajkhowa from Nagaon represented the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (hereafter AJYCP). Haren Sharma, leader of the AJD was also present on the occasion. In the meeting, a unanimous decision was taken to commence a movement on the core issue of three Ds-Detection of foreigners, Deletion of their names from voter's list and Deportation of foreign nationals from Assam. Atul Bora, Bhriku Kumar Phukan, Prasenjit Brahma and Nagen Saikia were nominated as convener of the AAGSP. After a long deliberation all the delegates agreed upon the National Register of Citizens (hereafter NRC) of 1951 as the basis for detection of foreigners⁵⁵.

As such, the Assam movement was a result of well thought out plan of intellectuals, academicians and politicians of Assam in response to the contentious issue of illegal migrants and induction of their names in the voters' list. The movement was supported by a large section of people in Assam. It was not a student agitation alone though the AASU provided the organizational structure to the movement. Similarly, the AAGSP as the apex body of the movement formed its organizational wings all over Assam. However, in the Barak valley dominated by the Bengali speaking people the movement had very little support. Several employees' unions of central and state government departments, government undertakings extended support to the movement in the Brahmaputra Valley. Some of the prominent employees' associations which supported the movement were the Sadau Asom Karmachari Parishad (All Assam Employees Association), the All Assam Central and Semi Central Employees Association, the trade unions of the

⁵⁴Atul Bora and Pabindra Deka were the general secretaries of the PLP since its inception in September, 1977. Both joined the AGP in 1985 and held important ministerial berth in the first AGP government. Atul Bora is a veteran leader of the Assam Movement. There is another Atul Bora who was president of the AASU and joined the AGP in the 1990s. He is now heading the party as its President. Since there are two persons with the same name in AGP, so we would refer to the former as senior Atul Bora who is senior in terms of age in the party. The other one would be referred as junior Atul Bora whenever both the names occur in same reference.

⁵⁵ Atul Bora, *Abirata Sangram*, (Guwahati: Maa Prakashak Gosthi, 2007), 22-24

refineries in Assam, Oil India Limited etc. Women organizations like the All Assam Tribal Women Union, the Jagrata Mohila Porishad, the Mula Gabharu Santha and other women organizations were very active during the movement. Participation of women in large scale was a special feature of this movement. All these factors and the mass appeal of the core issue made the Assam Movement a popular upsurge. The AGP as an offshoot of this mass movement could garner same support from sizable section of indigenous people in Assam especially in the Brahmaputra valley.

Table 3.3
Constituting organizations and leaders of the AAGSP during the Assam movement

Type of organization	Name of the organizations	Leaders representing the organization	Role in the AGP
Student organization	AASU (All Assam Students' Union)	Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, President, AASU	Chief Minister and MLA from Kaliabar and Barhampur
		Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, General Secretary, AASU	Home Minister and MLA from Jalukbari
		Bharat Narah	Minister, MLA from Dhakuakhana
		Nagen Sarma, Adviser, AASU	Minister, MLA from Nalbari
		Lalit Rajkhowa	Minister, MLA from Teok
		Digen Bora	Minister, MLA from Botodrowa
		Jainath Sarma, Convener, Volunteer Force, AAGSP	Minister, MLA from Sipajhar
		Arun Kumar Sarma	Member of Parliament from Lakhimpur
		Nagen Sarma	Minister, MLA from Nalbari
		Pradip Hazarika	Minister, MLA from Amguri
	AJYCP (<i>Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad</i>)	Prabin Gogoi, President, AJYCP	Minister, MLA from Khumtai
		Robin Dutta (Later replaced by Chandra Mohan Patowary)	Minister, MLA from Dharmapur
		Rita Choudhury	Didn't joined the AGP
	All Assam Tribal Student Union	Bisheswar Bodo	
	Akon Rabha	MLA from Dudhnoi	
Political party	PLP	Nibaran Bora, President PLP	Didn't joined the AGP
		Dr. Ananada Borbora, Vice President	Didn't joined the AGP
		Atul Bora	Minister of the PWD,

Political party	<i>(Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad)</i>		MLA from Dispur
		Krishna Gopal Bhattacharjee	Remained as well-wisher
		Pulakesh Barua	Speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly, MLA from Barkhetri
		Pobindra Deka	MLA form Patacharkuchi
		Thaneswar Bodo	Minister, MLA from Rangia
	AJD (<i>Asom Jatiyatabadi Dal, Girin Baruah faction</i>)	Malay Baruah	
		Mukul Borkotoky (later replaced by Biraj Kumar Sarma)	Minister, MLA from East Guwahati
		Dilip Rajkhowa	
		Arup Bordoloi, Secretary, AJD	
	AJD (Nagen Hazarika faction)	Pranab Kumar Das	
Prasanna Deka			
PPTC (Progressive Plain Tribal Council)	Prasenjit Brahma		
Youth Association	AYS (<i>Asom Yubak Samaj</i>)	Bhabagiri Raichoudhury (Vice President, AYS)	
		Ananata Kumar Sarma (General Secretary, AYS)	
	<i>Lachit Sangha, Bongaigaon</i>	Biswa Bihari Das, Asst. Secretary	
	All Assam Tribal Youth League	Pranabondhu Kachary, Joint Secretary	
Professional association	Junior Doctor's Association	Kamala Kalita	Minister, MLA from Chaygaon
	Young Lawyers Forum	Hemkanta Sarma	
		Hitendra Nath Goswami	Minister, MLA from Jorhat
Women organization	All Assam Tribal Women Association	Rekhrani Das Bodo	Minister, MLA from Barama
		-do-	
	All Assam Mahila Samannayrakkhi Samiti		
	<i>Jagrata Mohila Parishad</i>	Abha Bora, President	
	<i>Mula Gabhoru Santha</i>	Kumudini Gogoi	
	Other Prominent Women Leaders	Niru Mahanta	
Jyotsna Sonowal, from Dibrugarh University		MLA from Sadiya	

		Renupama Rajkhowa, Teok	MLA from Teok (in a by-election after death of Lalit Rajkhowa, her husband)
		Indira Baruah, Tezpur	Got married to Bhrigu Kumar Phukan
		Jayashree Goswami, Gauripur	Got married to Prafulla Kumar Mahnata and became MP to the Rajya Sabha
Trade Unions and Employees Associations	<i>Sadai Asom Karmachari Parishad</i>	Khanindra Chnadra Das	
		Charan Deka	
	All Assam Central and Semi-central Employees' Association	Kamal Chandra Nayak	
	Assam Secondary School Teachers and Employees' Association	Khagen Bayan, Vice President	
Cultural and literary association	<i>Asom Sahitya Sabha</i>	Nagen Saikia	MP to the Rajya Sabha
		Jatin Goswami (replaced by Prafulla Chandra Bhattacharjya)	
		Kumar Kishor, Guwahati	
	All Assam Tribal League and Plain Karbi Aadorbar	Rotikanta Teron	
Other prominent intellectuals and civil society members		Bijaya Chakravarty, Mangaldoi Gana Sangram Parishad	MP from Mangaldoi Parliamentary constituency
		Birendra Kumar Bhattacharjee, Profesor, Gauhatari University	
		Deba Prasad Barooah, Professor, Gauhati University	
		Paragdhar Chaliha, Principal, Jaysagar College	MP from Jorhat Parliamentary constituency
		Muhiram Saikia, Professor Nagaon College	MP from Nowgong Parliamentary constituency
		Gunin Hazarika, Professor, Kaliabar College	MLA from Kaliabar
		Girin Baruah, Professor, Puranigudam College	MLA from Nagaon
		Lakhinandan Bora, Assam	

Source: Atul Bora (2007) *Abirata Sangram*, Maa Prakashak Gosthi, Guwahati and various interviews with the AGP leaders.

*Several names could not be included due to lack of documentary evidence and lack of space. In fact all social-political and civil society organizations of the Brahmaputra valley were either participants or sympathizers of the AAGSP during the Assam movement.

3.2.1 Contradiction among the leaders of the Assam Movement

However, there were ups and downs in the trajectory of the movement and the office bearers of the AAGSP changed due to some precarious reasons. Several senior leaders of the movement were expelled from the AAGSP as well. The central executive of the AAGSP expelled Jatin Goswami, representative of the Asom Sahitya Sabha on allegation of sabotaging the movement. Nibaron Bora, a veteran socialist leader of Assam since 1950s and an ideologue of Assam Movement, was also shown the exit path. Among the prominent ethnic organizations of Assam, the Bodo Sahitya Sabha and the All Bodo Students Union (hereafter ABSU) did not join the AAGSP. Karbi Students Union (hereafter KSU) and All Assam Tea Tribe Students' Union (hereafter AATTSU) were skeptical about joining the movement too. These tribal organizations were not given due importance by the leaders of the movement. Instead of wooing the tribal leaders to the movement, the AASU leadership formed three separate tribal organizations, namely All Assam Tribal Student Union, All Assam Tribal Youth Union and All Assam Tribal Women Association on 7 September, 1980 at a conference held in Guwahati Commerce College. This move was vehemently opposed by the tribal leaders. Therefore, critics of the movement like Dilip Bora, Hiren Gohain, Amalendu Guha and others criticized the movement as a manifestation of chauvinistic attitude of Assamese middle class. There were contradictions among the AAGSP leaders also. Specially, ideological and personal difference could be seen between the AASU office bearers and the leaders of the PLP and the AJD. These facts will be discussed in the following chapters. The point is that the AGP inherited differences and factions which had germinated in the Assam Movement.

3.3 Roots of factional conflict in the AGP

Attitude towards factional politics in India, in general, is negative. Indian states have adopted liberal democracy in theory and practice. The Constitution of India has provided us freedom of thought, speech and expression. Therefore, formation of contradictory opinion in a political party is necessarily a feature of internal democracy of a liberal political structure. But Indian political system and Indian society at large has not been able to imbibe the democratic culture of dissent. Therefore, factional politics is a taboo in Indian political system. Factionalism in India is rampant and often leads to degeneration of the party. The lacuna is in the political culture and nature of political development in the country. Factionalism in India is self serving that lead to instability in the party organization.

There are three types of factionalism as we have discussed in the previous chapter. First, it may be cooperative that harmonizes diverse interests and heterogeneous elements. The six-year long Assam Movement is a testimony to this fact, when as many as nine organizations officially participated and several pressure groups, trade unions, social organizations, intellectuals, social activists, writers and civil society workers extended active support. Despite having ideological differences, the participating organizations like the AJD, the PLP, the AJYCP and the AASU etc., came together for a common cause. Gradually, competition for supremacy among leaders started within the AAGSP, which was an umbrella organization of all participating sections in the Assam movement. Who would get more popularity in public domain during the movement was primary objective of the leaders. All the leaders were almost equal in status, age and they aspired for the same political power. They had same type of mass appeal and represented the same Assamese speaking population though diverse in ethnicity, language, caste and religion. This competition for supremacy became self serving after the party was formed after the movement on 14th October, 1985. The first AGP government was sworn in on December 25, 1985. Even on the day of outh taking one influential student leader who got ministerial berth in the new government said in despair 'I am second to

none⁵⁶. This was just the tip of the iceberg. Very soon rivalry among the leaders got acute turn and factional politics emerged in the AGP. Factionalism affected the performance of the AGP government and weakened the organizational structure of the regional political party.

In a nutshell, factionalism in the AGP was institutionalized during the Assam Movement. During the movement days, nature of factionalism was cooperative and somewhat competitive that added to the strength of the movement under the condition of severe criticism from the anti-movement intellectuals and the efforts of the Indian state to suppress the movement. But after the Assam Movement, the new regional party, as an offshoot of the movement could not handle the factional conflict. It aggravated day by day and ultimately led to a vertical split in the party in 1991.

There have been a great deal of discussions in academia, media and in public about the success and failure of the AGP as regional political party though these discussions were barely unbiased. The AGP as observed from close quarter depended upon its popular support for its success and succumbed to its internal contradictions at the time of its failure. The cheer mass support landed the ship of the AGP in the port of success in the Assembly election in December, 1985. At that time, the organizational strength of the AASU and the AAGSP (The AASU maintained its separate identity throughout the Assam Movement despite being a constituting part of the AAGSP) was blessing for the new regional party. But while being in power, the AGP could not widen its support base. Factionalism in the organization and in the Government tottered the strength of the party. Therefore, it is one of the principal objectives of this study to unearth the roots of factionalism in the AGP. In a nutshell, the lack of ideological underpinning, lack of diversity and vision in leadership and organizational shortcomings led to internal contradictions within the party and resulted in factionalism in the AGP.

⁵⁶ Samir Kumar Das, *op cit.*, p 5

3.3.1 Ideology of the AGP and factionalism

The preamble of the constitution of the AGP declares that protection of national identity and integrity of the Assamese community amidst diversity in the state of Assam is the motto of the party. Like any other liberal political party in India, the AGP also proclaimed its faith in secularism, socialism and democracy. Interestingly, the party promised to establish a 'classless society free of any exploitation' too. The objectives of the party as enshrined in its constitution are as follows:

- a) To protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of the country, with loyalty to Indian Constitution and faith in secularism and democracy.
- b) To establish Assam as strong and powerful state with political equality, economic progress and social justice within the Indian union through decentralization of democracy by amending the Indian Constitution on the line of federal structure.
- c) To develop and establish a self sufficient economy of Assam through development of manpower and proper utilization of mineral forest and water resources and to enlarge industrial base and avenue of employment in the state.
- d) To recognize the Assamese society with understanding tolerance and brotherhood among the communities by removing the mistrust among the people that arises on the basis of caste, creed, religion and languages etc.
- e) To ensure right of the people of Assam by politically organizing the people irrespective of caste, creed, religion, languages etc.

The AGP as a regional political party declares in its objectives to protect the regional interest of the people of Assam. At the same time, it expresses faith and loyalty to Indian Constitution and promises to protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India.⁵⁷ That is why Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, the Chief Minister of the AGP government once said, 'AGP is a regional party with nationalist outlook'.

During the heyday of the Assam movement, it was noticed that top brass of the leaders were willing for a negotiated settlement of the foreigners issue with the

⁵⁷ The Constitution of the AGP, as published by Hitendra Nath Goswami, the general secretary of the party, Guwahati.

Center. One extremist section of the movement felt that any negotiated settlement with the Center immediately would not suffice to fulfill the objective of the struggle. This section was always skeptical about the much hyped 'constitutional safeguard' for the Assamese. The extremist faction of Assam movement later strengthened itself as the United Liberation Front of Assam (hereafter ULFA).

There was another faction within the Assam movement, a coterie of veteran politicians of Assam, like Nibaran Bora, Ananda Barbara, Arup Bordoloi, Bisheswar Bodo, Krishna Gopal Bhattacharyya and others. These leaders maintained a measured distance from the student leaders of the AASU and AJYCP. At the time of signing the Assam Accord, the PLP and the AJD leaders opposed the AASU. They demanded that first the Illegal Migration (Determination by Tribunal) Act, 1983 should be repealed in order to make effective the provisions of the Accord. Hiten Mahanta, a journalist of Assam writes about what happened on 14th August, 1985, the day of signing the Accord in New Delhi. The Assam movement leaders got divided into two factions while in a discussion with the Central Government. One faction led by the elder and veteran PLP leaders opposed signing the Accord in haste. They feared that unless the IM(DT) Act is repealed by the Govt. of India, detection and deportation of foreign nationals would be impossible. Leaders of the All Assam Tribal Youth Union and the Assam Young Lawyers Forum upheld the PLP stand on this issue. But the other faction, comprising mainly the AASU leaders, was in favour of signing the Accord immediately, sidelining the IM(DT) Act issue. There was fierce debate over the matter between Bisheswar Bodo from All Assam Tribal Youth Association and Bhriku Kumar Phukan from the AASU. Phukan shouted in anguish saying there will be no Accord if IM(DT) is not accepted. Because, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was keen to sign the Accord on August 14, 1985, so that he can announce it as an achievement of the central government on Independence Day speech on the next morning. Ultimately, not being able to conform to the terms of the AASU leaders, Pabindra Deka and Thanesar Bodo from the PLP, Bisheswar Bodo and Laba Ram Rabha, President and Secretary of All Assam Tribal Youth Association and Hemkanta Sarma from the Assam Young Lawyers Forum had to leave Delhi without signing the Accord.

Thus, some crucial issues set apart the articulation and interests of the the leaders of the Assam Movement that resulted in formation of factional groups in the AGP.

Table 3.4
Factional breakup in the Assam movement

Basis of faction	Factional identity	Affiliations	Strategy and purpose	Effects
Attitude towards the center during the movement	Moderates	Student leaders of the AASU, political leaders of the AJD, members of literary and cultural organization of the AAGSP	Negotiated and amicable settlement with the center	These leaders formed the AGP and ruled Assam winning Assembly election in 1985
	Extremists	Members of the PLP and AJYCP, members and well-wishers of the ULFA ⁵⁸	Uncompromising attitude on ideological point/ Revolutionary tactics against the center	Took the path of insurgency after 1985
Attitude towards Memorandum of Settlement to end the movement	Pro Accord	The AASU leaders	Signed the Assam Accord on the midnight hours of 14 August, 1985; compromised with the IM (DT) Act for an immediate settlement	Assam Accord Could not be properly implemented due to IM (DT) Act
	Against Accord	The PLP, the AJD, the Assam Lawyers Forum and Tribal organizations of the AAGSP	Demanded repeal of IM (DT) Act before signing the Assam Accord. Wanted to delay signing of the Accord so that all the clauses and its pros and cons may be discussed thoroughly.	Factional division in the PLP and the AJD over the issue of Assam Accord/ Influential ethnic leaders remained aloof

Source: Personal interviews and literature review on the Assam Movement

The Assam Accord was signed without repealing the IM (DT) Act on the wee hours of 14 August at 2.45 am⁵⁹. The AGP, after occupying power in Assam, have kept on

⁵⁸ Golap Barua *alias* Anup Chetia, General Secretary of the ULFA and Rajib Rajkonwar *alias* Arabinda Rajkhowa, who became the Chairman of the ULFA were active members of the AAGSP. They were present in a number of state level meetings of the AAGSP held in the Basic Training College of Nagaon on December 20, 1981 and in the Tezpur Conference on November 28, 1982. (As mentioned in 'Abirata Sangram' by Atul Bora, Maa Prakashak Gosthi, Guwahati, Assam, p 176, 177)

⁵⁹ Hiten Mahanta, *Asom Sukti Aru Annanya*, (Guwahati: Julu Tulu Prakashan, 2012), 21

blaming the IM (DT) as the stumbling block of implementation of the Assam Accord until it was struck down as null and void by the honorable Supreme Court on 12 July, 2005 in response to a PIL filed by Sarbananda Sonowal⁶⁰. The gist of the discussion is that the AGP was a product of political exigency that weakened the ideological foundation of the party resulting in factionalism.

The AGP neither had revolutionary attitude for social change nor could foster socialist agenda as enshrined in its constitution to establish social justice and classless society. The AGP could not forward full-proof plan for overall socio-economic development as was expected. People's desire for radical change in socio-political structure, empowerment of the ethnic communities and disadvantaged sections through economic progress and democratic decentralization did not materialized as expected during the governance of the AGP. Factional rivalry in the party revealed just a few months after the government formation in 1985.

Another contentious ideological issue of Assam movement was the issue of base year for expulsion of foreigners from Assam. The AASU and the AAGSP had demanded the NRC of 1951 as the basis for detection and deportation of the foreigners from Bangladesh. But Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Home Minister Jai Singh proposed March 25, 1971 as the deadline to solve the issue. On this point, a tag of war continued on discussion table between the Central Government and leaders of the movement. Discussions started on 2 February, 1980 and there were 17 formal talks with no practical result. Center first started talk with the AASU leaders only. Later, the leaders of the AAGSP as a whole were also invited to discussion table in March 1980. Atul Bora (2007) observed that the Center was following divide and rule policy by inviting the AASU and the AAGSP separately for discussion. As a result, difference of opinion grew between the AASU and the AAGSP. The AASU wanted a halt in agitation while discussion was going on and

⁶⁰ Sarbananda Sonowal acted as the President of the AASU in the 1990s. He joined the AGP later and became Member of Parliament from the Dibrugarh Lok Sabha constituency. In 2011, Sonowal left the AGP to join the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and became President of the party later. Presently, Sonowal is the Chief Minister of Assam since 24 May, 2016 and is leading the BJP government in the state.

the other leaders of the AAGSP wanted to continue agitation and discussion simultaneously.⁶¹

The base year issue created heated controversy in Assam. Several academicians and literary persons specially the left-oriented intellectuals of Assam including Hiren Gohain, Nirupama Bargohain, Homen Bargohain and others suggested 1971 as the base year for settlement. Sarat Chandra Singha, Ex Chief Minister of Assam wrote,

“Those who supported 1971 were treated as traitors and consequently faced social boycott and personal attack. Those who supported 1951 were so called nationalist patriots”⁶².

Practically, it was not feasible to detect all foreigners who came to Assam after 1951 because most of them assimilated with the environment of Assam or were on the verge of assimilation. But the hardcore supporters were not willing to concede the reality and the agitation continued for six years which paralyzed the society and economy of Assam. It is an irony that the AASU leaders signed the Assam Accord on August 15, 1985 endorsing the central government’s position on base year. Had this been accepted in 1982, the Assam Movement would have come to an end there itself. There would have been no IM (DT) Act of 1983, no Nellie massacre and no loss thousands of youth who succumbed to violence during that period. Ethnic diversity and religious harmony of Assam would have been intact. The debate over the issues of indigenous people and Assamese people would not have surfaced. However, these are hypothetical assumptions. The fact is that these ideological issues have continued to hang on in the socio-political scenario in Assam till today.

3.3.2 Organizational structure of the AGP and factionalism

Organizational strength of the AGP was built brick by brick during the Assam Movement just like the Indian National Congress had organizational roots in India’s Freedom Struggle. Students’ organizations like the AASU, the AJYCP and other forerunner regional political parties like the PLP, the AJD etc., constituted the support base for the AGP. Therefore, just after two months of its inception the AGP

⁶¹ Atul Bora, *op cit.*, P 60

⁶² Hiren Gohain and Dilip Bora, eds., *Asom Andolan :Pratishruti Aru Falashruti* (Guwahati: Banalata,2001)

could sweep the Assam Assembly election of 1985 winning 64 seats. Formal organizational makeover was done after the swearing in ceremony of the new government. This fact evidently indicates towards the strength and the popular support the party enjoyed initially. But as the time progressed the strength turned into a weakness which all the AGP workers have acknowledged. The Ministers in the AGP led government in Dispur who were also holding important portfolios in the party organization. They could hardly spare time to contribute for organizational build up of the party. Thus, 'one man one post' principle as enshrined in the constitution of the party was not maintained in practice. The constitution of the AGP stated:

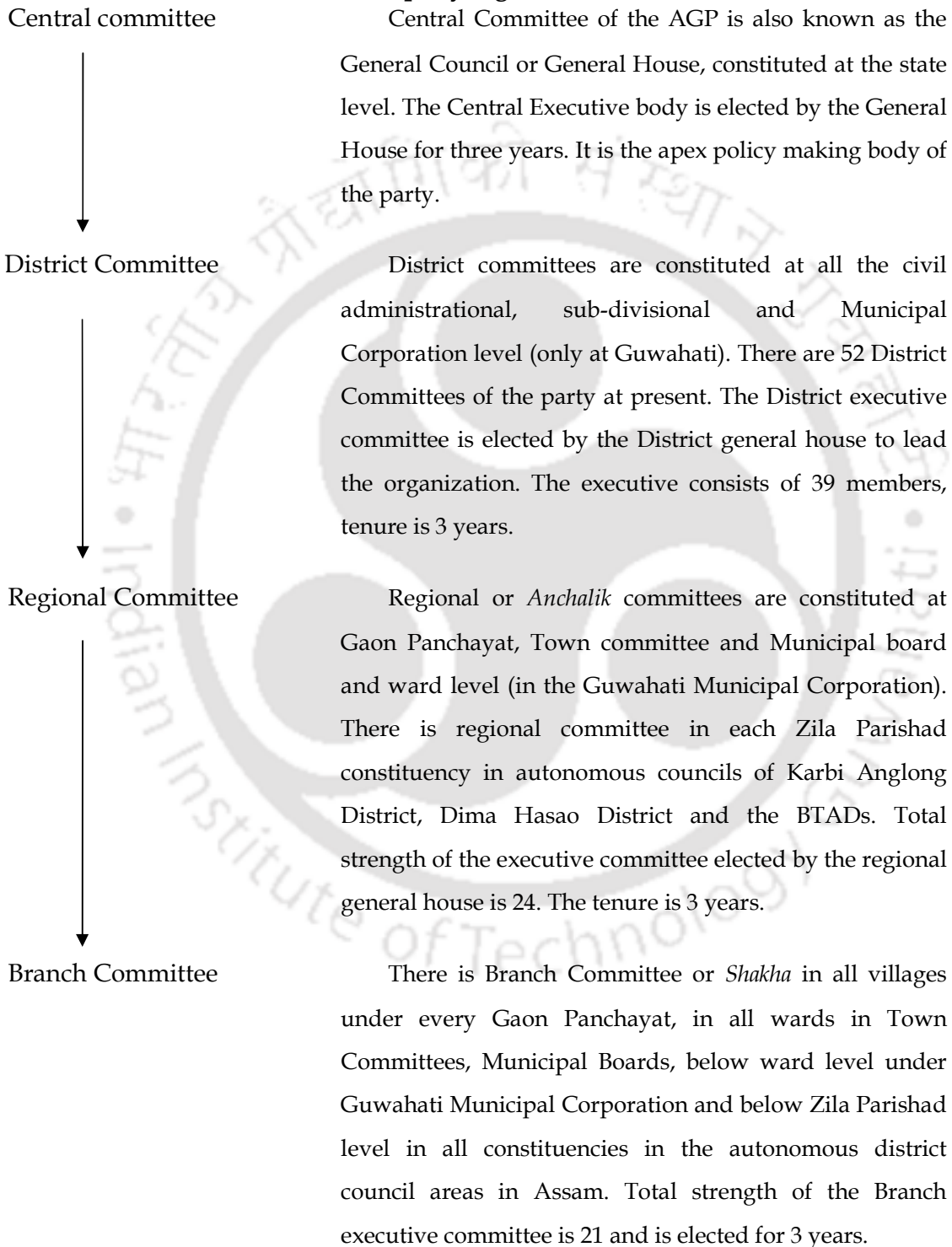
*"Office bearers including the president of the party shall have to relinquish the office of the party if he/she assumes the ministerial office. In the same way one must relinquish the office of the party if he/she assumes the office of the mayor, dy. Mayor, Chairman and Vice-chairman of municipal board, Chairman of the town committee, Chairman/President of Zilla Parishad, President of Anchalik Panchayat and President of Gaon Panchayat. If such office bearer does not relinquish the post within one month of assuming other office, his/her party post will automatically be liquidated."*⁶³

But, all the AGP ministers in 1985 and also in 1996 held important portfolios in the party organization. The Chief Minister and the Home Minister themselves were the President and General Secretary of the party respectively. The District committees and *Anchalik* (Regional) committees were formed but Block Committees, Constituency Committees were never constituted. Some of the office bearers at the District and *Anchalik* level lobbied for certain individual interests at the central level and utilized their position for self-interest for seeking political and economic patronage. The grass root level workers and well-wishers of the party suffered at

⁶³ Article 27, the Constitution of AGP, retrieved on May 17, 2016 from <http://www.asomganaparishad.org/web/party-constitution.php>.

the political brinkmanship of the leaders. The AGP has adopted four tier of organizational structure. The organizaional tree of the AGP is given below:

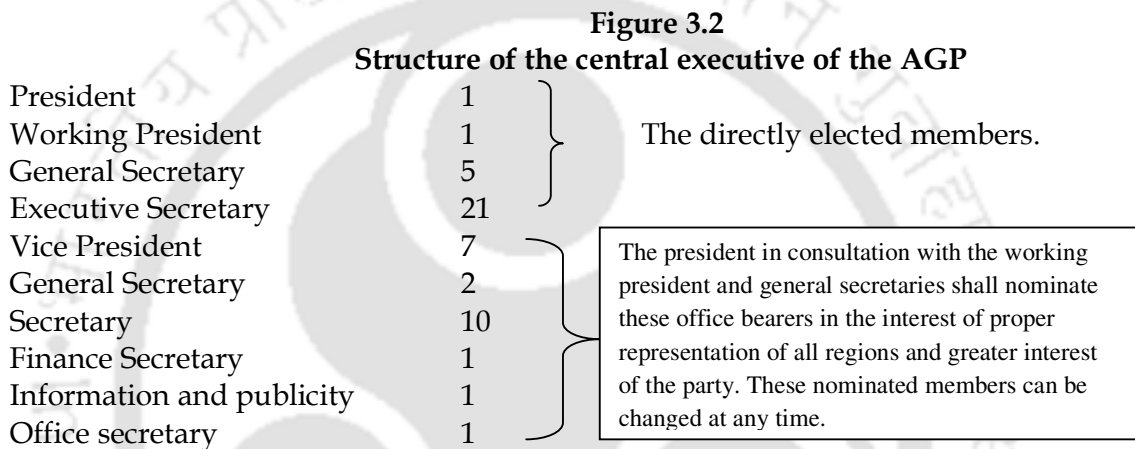
Figure 3.1
Different tiers of party organization of the AGP



Source: The constitution of the AGP

The AGP organizes its general conference after every three years. The first general conference after the formation of the party was held in Mangaldoi on January 18-20, 1988. The election for the central executive is held in the general conference. The complete list of general conferences and the elected office bearers is given in the Appendix V.

The structure of the central executive committee is as follows:



Source: The constitution of the AGP

The President of the AGP can nominate special invitee to central executive who does not have voting power. At least 6 executive meetings must be convened in a year. The general house meeting is convened once in a year. All the resolutions and decisions of the central executive committee have to be endorsed by the general house.

As such, organizational structure of the AGP is well knit and strong on pen and paper. The majesty and broad base of the AGP organization has been the source of its wide support base in all nook and corners in Assam. In addition to the three levels of party structure the constitution of the AGP has provided for four additional committees to be formed through indirect election. These are shown below:

Figure 3.3
Additional committees in the organizational structure of the AGP

Name of the committee	Purpose of the committee
Booth Committee	One Booth Committee in each polling booth under a legislative assembly constituency consisting of 11 members is proposed to be formed at least 6 months before the election to keep close relation with the voters and to make strategy for strengthening the party ahead of the elections.
Block Committee	One Block Committee in each development block is proposed to be constituted for three years to keep watch on development programme at block level. This committee will protest against corruption, politicization of development programmes and form public opinion against anomalies.
Constituency Committee	One Constituency Committee covering one legislative assembly constituency area is proposed to be formed ahead of the elections to Assam Assembly to strengthen the organizational base and help the party candidate to win election.
Zonal Committee	At each Lok Sabha constituency level one Zonal committee is to be formed for contesting in the parliamentary election.

Source: The Constitution of the AGP

However, there are incidents of communication gap between different levels of the organization. The party maintained internal democracy yet grassroots worker's grievances were sometimes not taken into consideration at the upper level. One district office bearer from Dibrugarh said in an interview that organizational structure of the AGP is weak because all geographical regions are not adequately represented in the central executive committee. He was of the opinion that organizational failure has led to lack of publicity regarding the achievements that the AGP government had brought to the people of Assam. He suggested for new recruitment drive among the young generation, frequent political workshop and appointment of full time party worker like the left parties in order to build up organizational structure from the grass roots.⁶⁴

Squabble among the leaders at different levels of organization were seen a few days after the formation of the AGP. The Golaghat political convention (October

⁶⁴ Jogesh Bikash Chetia, Personal interview, February 16, 2015, Dibrugarh, Assam

12-14, 1985) decided to have a presidium type of leadership like the CPI politburo for the AGP. A collegium of presidents accommodating all the stakeholders of the Assam Movement was formed to lead the party. But that cooperative spirit did not feature in the AGP constitution framed later. The former AASU leaders in the AGP rejected the presidium system of leadership. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the sole president of the AGP. Thus, a personality cult emerged in the regional political party. Moreover, as we have discussed earlier, the bar imposed by the constitution of the party in assuming two offices simultaneously i.e., party office and ministerial office in the government, was amended in the subsequent general house meeting. The motive behind the bar was to enable the concerned members devote full time either for party work or for government work. But this strategic practice of functional specialization is neglected by the AGP leaders. In the words of Krishna Gopal Bhattacharyya, former PLP leader and active member in the AAGSP,

“This practice of assuming both the government and party offices was detrimental for the growth of the AGP. Initially, few party workshops were organized to gear up the party at grassroots, regional and District level, but that have gradually stopped leaving the AGP workers without any political training.”⁶⁵

As such AGP’s role as a catalyst for social reconstruction derailed and political activities were limited to winning elections.

It is interesting to note that factional politics in the AGP remained as phenomena among the top brass of leaders. It did not seep into the grass roots. There were three occasions in the history of the AGP when the party faced vertical split, first in 1991 when the Natun Asom Gana Parishad (hereafter NAGP) was formed, second in 2000 when the Trinamul Gana Parishad (hereafter TGP) was formed and third during the formation of the AGP (Progressive) in 2005. The AGP workers at the grassroots were disappointed due to the factional activity of the central committee leaders. The district committees got divided and the breakaway factions contested elections against each other resulting in defeat of both. This indicates that original AGP vote bank got divided between the two factions that eventually benefited the

⁶⁵ Krishna Gopal Bhattacharyya , Personal interview, December 26, 2014, Gauhati University.

opposition parties in Assam. National political parties reaped the benefit on all these occasions. The division of AGP vote bank is described in the following table.

Table 3.5
Factional division of AGP vote bank and support base

Assembly election	Party	Votes polled in %	Seats contested	Seats Won
1991	AGP	17.93	121	19
	NAGP	5.45	85	5
	INC	29.35	125	66
2001	AGP	20.02	77	20
	TGP	-	19	01
	INC	39.75	126	71
2006	AGP	20.39	100	24
	AGP (P)	2.51	93	1
	INC	31.08	120	53

Source: Election Commission of India, Statistical report on general election of 1991, 2001 and 2006 to the Assam Legislative Assembly.

3.3.3 The AGP support base and appeal of the party

The AGP was a regional party formed to represent the Assamese middle class interests that took shape during the Assam Movement. But the party leaders recognized the demographic diversity of Assam. The leaders of the AGP, ahead of the election voiced their pledge to protect minorities and all Indian citizens living in the state. Because of the fact that the minority vote bank is key to electoral success in Assam, the AGP manifesto in 1985 included protection of the minority and ethnic interests in Assam as an objective of the party. As a result, AGP could garner support from the tribal communities and minorities. Amidst cheer support in the Brahmaputra valley and by dint of the hard work of the AASU and the AAGSP branches all over Assam, the AGP could bag 64 seats in the Assam Assembly. Later two independents from Cachar and Karbi Anglong joined the AGP led government. The Congress tally was reduced to 25. The PTCA, Karbi People's Conference and Cachar Indigenous People's Conference along with the newly formed United Minority Front (UMF hereafter) fought the election independently. The AGP had the clear mandate and formed the government in Assam. In this way, the AGP could display political maturity by accommodating

various leaders from religious and ethnic minorities. Sahidul Alom Choudhury who won the election from Algapur constituency as independent candidate joined the AGP. There were Mishing, Rabha, Karbi, Bodo and linguistic minority representatives in the AGP legislative party, some of them held important portfolio in the AGP ministry too. All these increased the secular credentials and support base of the party. However, there was fear in some quarters, specially among the immigrant Muslims of the Brahmaputra Valley regarding the objectives of the AGP. Sirajuddin Ahmed, a shopkeeper and a victim of the Nellie massacre remarked, *"If voting for the AGP meant that they would not die, they would do so in the rest of their lives."*

The AGP leaders during the election campaign and afterwards tried to sympathetically address this fear. Aatur Rehman, senior AGP leader and MP from the Barpeta constituency said,

*"Muslims in Assam are like a shy horse. They want to come over to us but cannot decide right away."*⁶⁶

No doubt, there was communal polarization in this election. Sekhar Gupta a senior Delhi based journalist predicted that implementation of Assam Accord was uncertain in the face of changing political scenario in Assam.⁶⁷ The UMF with its promise to safeguard the minorities and opposing the Assam Accord could win in 17 Assembly constituencies amidst the AGP wave. The Assamese middle class saw the attitude of top AGP leaders as minority appeasement. Very soon factional rivalry erupted in the party over the issue of minority vote bank.

3.4 Leadership of the AGP and factionalism

Leadership of the AGP consists of the activists and managers of erstwhile Assam Movement. Current and ex-office bearers of the AASU, the AJYCP and other student organizations of Assam were assisted and guided by senior political activists and party men of the PLP, the AJD, the PPTC, etc. The core of leadership was at the behest of the AASU and the AAGSP leaders during the movement and it was only change of guard for them in the newly formed political party. Prafulla

⁶⁶ Sekhar Gupta, "Assam: Coming of Age," *India Today*, January 5, 1986.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

Kumar Mahanta and Brigu Kumar Phukan the President and General Secretary of the AASU became the founder President and General Secretary of the AGP respectively. Atul Bora who came from PLP background, became the other General Secretary according to the AGP constitution. Almost all the leaders of the newly formed political party were peers in the University. Their background was similar and all were student leaders. They contested election in 1985 from the hostels where they have been staying as student. As such the student leaders were lacking in administrative experience. The senior leaders like Nagen Saikia, Paragdhara Chaliha, Muhiram Saikia, Bijaya Chakravarty, Dinesh Goswami were elected to the parliament. So, the AGP government in the state was run by amateurs.

3.4.1 Ideologues of the AGP

The ideological impetus for the AGP was provided by the university and college teachers, journalists of Assam and literary persons of the Brahmaputra valley. Some prominent names were Debo Prasad Barooah, Basanta Deka, Binoy Kumar Tamuli, Nagen Saikia, Krishna Gopal Bhattacharyya, Gunin Hazarika, Girindra Nath Barua, Bijaya Chakravarty, Nibaran Bora, Kirtinath Hazarika, Ajit Sarma, Dinesh Chandra Goswami, Muhiram Saikia, Paragdhara Chaliha and many others who were academicians and intellectuals of Assam. Some became members in the steering committee of the AAGSP and others remained as the guiding spirit throughout the movement till the formation of the AGP. Among the academicians Nagen Saikia, Muhiram Saikia and Paragdhara Chaliha were elected to the Indian Parliament as AGP representatives. Gunin Hazarika, Thanoswar Bodo and Girindra Nath Barua became MLA in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Other inspirational figures like Debo Prasad Barooah, Basanta Deka and Binoy Kumar Tamuli remained as sympathizer and think tank of the AGP. Krishna Gopal Bhattacharjee, a former PLP leader remained in academics in the Gauhati University. Dinesh Chandra Goswami, former Congressman and leader of the AJD, who joined the AGP, was elected to the Lok Sabha from the prestigious Gauhati constituency as AGP representative. Goswami's contribution as Union Law Minister in the VP Singh cabinet at the center during 1989 to 1990 is still applauded.

Kirtinath Hazarika, the editor of *Dainik Asom* (an Assamese vernacular daily published by Assam Tribune group) continued as adviser to the AGP leaders. His role in conflict mitigation in the internal matters of the party was known to all.

3.4.2 The 'big four of Assamese nationalism' in 1970s

Four significant intellectuals of Assamese nationalism in the 1970s, whose writings and speeches in popular media helped to build up consciousness among the masses were- Nibaran Bora, Nesar Ahmed, Girin Baruah and Nagen Hazarika. Nibaran Bora was a veteran socialist leader famous since the refinery movement in 1956. Bora's writing on the foreigners issue created uproar among the indigenous Assamese. This growing sentiment among the Assamese and the fear of becoming minority due to illegal immigration was taken up by the PLP and the AJD for election campaigning during the Assam Assembly election of 1978. Nesar Ahmed established the AJD in August, 1977 demanding true federal structure and full autonomy under the Indian union for Assam. These demands were adopted by the AJYCP later on which was established in 1978. Subsequently, the AJD was divided into two factions, one led by Girin Baruah and the other by Nagen Hazarika. On the other hand, Nibaran Bora founded the PLP in 1978 and was the President of the party since the beginning. Both Girin Baruah and Nibaran Bora was very active participant in the Assam Movement. It was through the eloquence and articulation of Nibaran Bora in the public meetings that the people of Assam could realize the importance of the movement and the issues related to it. In the course of the movement, the AASU leaders suspected Nibaran Bora of having a close relation with some of the Congress leaders. Once, Bora met Zail Singh, the then Home Minister of Central Government during his visit to New Delhi. Eventually, the central executive of the AAGSP expelled the veteran leader. When the AGP came to power in 1985, Atul Bora and other former PLP leaders tried to send Nibaran Bora as Member to the Upper House of Indian Parliament. But the AASU leaders in the central executive of the AGP turned down the proposal.⁶⁸ As such, the veteran socialist leader was debarred from serving the AGP. Other three important

⁶⁸ Atul Bora, *op cit.*, p 142

ideologues of Assamese nationalism viz., Nessar Ahmed, Girin Baruah and Nagen Hazarika remained aloof from active politics.

3.4.3 Tribal and ethnic leaders in the AGP

The AGP was fortunate to enjoy the support of maximum ethnic tribal communities after its formation. Even during the Assam Movement tribal leaders actively participated and assumed to leadership position. These leaders were founder of the party and got elected to the Assam Assembly. The following chart vividly describes the fact:

Table 3.6
AGP leaders representing various ethnic communities in Assam

Ethnic community	Representative of AGP	Elected in
Mishing (5)	Bharat Chandra Narah, MLA from Dhakuakhana	1985, 1991
	Padmeswar Doley, MLA from Majuli	1985, 1991
	Phoniram Tayeng, MLA from Jonai	1985
	Naba Kumar Doley, MLA from Dhakuakhana	2011
	Ganesh Kutum, MLA from Gahpur*	1985, 1996
Bodo (5)	Thaneswar Bodo, MLA from Rangia	1985, 1991, 1996
	Bhaben Narzary, MLA from Tamulpur	1985
	Rekharani Das Bodo, MLA from Barama	1985, 1991, 1996
	Durgadas Bodo, MLA from Panery	1985
	Suren Swargiyari, MLA from Sapaguri	1985, 1991
Rabha (2)	Akon Chandra Rabha MLA from Dudhnoi	1996
	Paniram Rabha, MLA from Barama	1991
Sonowal Kachary (2)	Jyotsna Sonowal, MLA from Sadiya	1985
	Sarbananda Sonowal MLA from Moran	2001
Adibasi & Tea Tribe (5)	Binod Gowala, MLA from Sarupathar	
	Naren Tanti, MLA from Mariani	1985
	Barki Prasad Telenga, MLA from Thaora	1985
	Bhadreswar Tanti, MP from Kaliabar	
	Dipen Tanti, MLA from Lahowal	1985

Karbi (2)	Samsing Hanse, MLA from Diphu*	1985
	Holiram Terang, MLA from Boithalangsu*	1985
Ahom (10)	Prabin Kumar Gogoi, MLA from Khumtai	1985, 2006
	Deba Kumar Bora, MLA from Titabar	1985
	Chandra Arandhara, MLA from Mahmara	1985
	Bhadreswar Burhagohain, MLA from Sonari	1985
	Pradip Gogoi, MLA from Sibsagar	1985
	Dilip Kumar Saikia, MLA from Dhemaji	1985, 1991, 1996, 2001
	Kiran Kuamr Gogoi, MLA from Moran	1985
	Kusumbar Tairai Gogoi, MLA from Naharkatiya	1985
	Bhaben Baruah, MLA from Chabua	1985
	Tanu Konwar, MLA from Nazira*	1985
Koch Rajbangshi (5)	Dalim Roy, MLA from Golakganj	1985
	Phani Bhusan Choudhury, MLA from Bangaigaon	1985, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2011, 2016
	Mahendra Mohan Rai Choudhury, MLA from Kolaigaon	1985, 1996
	Kesharam Bora, MLA from Bihpuria	1985, 1996
	Atul Chandra Konch, MLA from Tingkhang	1985

Source: Souvenir, 9th Central Committee Meeting, AGP, May16-17, 2012, Guwahati.

*Not members but supported the AGP government from outside

As such, the AGP legislative party represented most of the ethnic indigenous communities in Assam. Thus, the party's regional identity as an umbrella organization became stronger and its support base widened. The picture of the AGP as the party of Assamese Middle Class elites representing the upper caste landed interests, depicted by left intellectuals stands wrong here. As a regional

party, the AGP could encompass diverse interests of the Assamese society at least in the Brahmaputra valley.

3.4.4 Women leaders in the AGP

Women played crucial role during the course of the Assam Movement. They were the forerunner in all peaceful processions, *hartals*, oil blockades etc. There were few women student leaders as well. Indira Baruah from Tezpur, Jayashree Goswami from Goalpara, Jyotsna Sonowal from Sadia, Rekharani Das Bodo from Barama, Renupoma Rajkhowa from Teok and Rita Choudhury from Nalbari played important role in leading the Assam Movement. Senior women leaders like Bijoya Chakravarty, Niru Mahanta, Abha Bora, Kumudini Gogoi etc., were the flag bearers of the movement. Academicians like Niru Hazarika, Anuradha Dutta, Renu Devi of Gauhati University were very active participants. Large-scale women participation was a significant feature of the movement. Women as volunteers did remarkable work in those days. More than seventy women became martyr during the movement. Important women organizations that played active role were the Mula Gabharau Santha, the All Assam Tribal Women Association, the Jagrata Mahila Parishad, the All Assam Women Coordination Committee, etc. But after the formation of the AGP women leaders were not offered organizational responsibilities. Only two women were elected on AGP tickets to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1985. They were Rekharani Das Bodo from Barama LAC and Jyotsna Sonowal from Sadiya LAC. Bijoya Chakravarty and Jayashree Goswami Mahanta were elected to the Upper House of the Indian Parliament later. Women leaders could assume leadership role neither in central committee nor in District Committees. Only one woman, Lakhyahira Mili was nominated to the Central Executive in 1985. Other women leaders remained as general members in the AGP. Need of a women wing in the AGP was felt in 1988 when the first conference of the Mohila Parishad (Women wing of AGP) was held on 4, 5 and 6 February in Bangaigaon. A strong executive committee of the Mahila Parishad was

set with Rekharani Das Bodo as the President, Bijoya Chakravarty and Jyotsna Sonowal as General Secretaries⁶⁹.

3.4.5 Leading personalities of the AGP

Most of the AGP leaders started their public life as student activist. Prominent personalities in the first AGP government were drawn from either the AASU or AJYCP. It was the AASU which led the movement in 1972, demanding implementation of Assamese medium in the higher educational institutions in Assam. Pulakesh Barua and Prasanna Narayan Choudhury were President and Secretary of the AASU respectively at that time. Other important student leaders of that era were Bijoya Chakravarty from Jorhat, Atul Bora from Kaliabor, Brindaban Goswami from Tezpur, Pradip Dewan, Pabindra Deka from Tihu, Tazmul Haque from Dhubri, Lalit Chandra Rajkhowa from Teok, Nagen Sarmah from Tezpur etc. These former AASU leaders during and after the National Emergency (1975-1977) came to active politics and formed regional political parties like the PLP, and the AJD with a view to highlight burning issues of Assam at national level. The most appealing issue was that of illegal immigration into Assam. The Mangaldoi by-election in 1979 was a watershed event in politics of Assam when the foreigners question spread like bonfire. The rest is history. This was also the period of political development when the second generation of student leaders of the AASU and the AJYCP emerged. All these student leaders and their predecessor, who became politicians later, founded the AGP. A brief biographical sketch of some prominent personalities of AGP is given below; factionalism in the AGP moved around these power politicians.

i) Prafulla Kumar Mahanta

Prafulla Kumar Mahanta of Nagaon was made president of the AASU in the Sibsagar conference of the student organization held on 7-10 March, 1979. Eventually, the Assam movement or anti foreigner's movement started on 9

⁶⁹ Quin Ozha, "Anchalik Rajnitit Mohilar Bhumika" (Role of women in regional politics), *Souvenir*, 9th Central Committee Meeting of AGP, May16-17, Guwahati (2012)

August, 1979 and Mahanta remained as the president during the course of the Movement till 9 October, 1985. He along with Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, the General Secretary of the AASU directed the Assam movement. Being the President of the AASU, Mahanta also exercised power and influence in the AAGSP. After the formation of the AGP on October 14, 1985 Mahanta became the founder President of the party and under his leadership the new regional party occupied power in Assam. Mahanta became the youngest Chief Minister in the country. Both Mahanta and Phukan were complementary to each other. Phukan had the expertise of an able administrator and Mahanta was the mass leader of the Assam Movement.⁷⁰ But, there is a proverb regarding power relations; viz., 'power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely'. So the personal relationship between Mahanta and Phukan deteriorated after they assumed the post of Chief Minister and Home Minister respectively in the first AGP government. The Chief Minister, Mahanta had got personal difference with Home Minister Bhrigu Kumar Phukan over some administrative issues. Phukan was regarded as the second in command in the AGP ministry. This difference in perspective took the form of factional politics between the two leaders that led to first split in the AGP in 1991. This split caused the AGP to sit in the opposition bench and Congress under Hiteswar Saikia's leadership came to power in 1991.

In 1996, the AGP again assumed power in Assam and Mahanta being the President of the party became the Chief Minister for the second term. During this period the AGP government faced multiple challenges. For example the ULFA and the Bodo insurgency reached intense level; factionalism in the party, allegation of corruption against the top leaders including Mahanta and the charges of secret killing during 1998 to 2000 period made the government machinery unstable. Mahanta had conflict with senior party leaders like Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, Atul Bora, Jatin Mali, Digen Bora and many others over the above issues. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan after being expelled from the AGP patronized a new political party namely the Asom Jatiya Sanmilian (hereafter AJS) in 1998. Atul Bora and Pulakesh Barua formed

⁷⁰ Mukul Barkataki, Personal interview, Guwahati, August 23, 2016.

another party on 8 August, 2000 namely the Trinamul Gana Parishad (TGP) after they had been suspended from the AGP. This was the second split in the AGP. During both the splits, Mahanta was president of the AGP. He quit the top post in the AGP in the immediate aftermath of the party's defeat in the Assembly election of 2001. Then he found himself sidelined in the party due to an extra-marital scandal that unfortunately crept in his life. He again contested party election for the post of President in 2004 but was defeated by Brindaban Goswami. Factional politics between Mahanta and Goswami intensified. During Goswami's tenure Mahanta was expelled from the AGP in July, 2005 for anti-party activity. Thereafter, Mahanta floated a new party as the AGP (Progressive) along with his loyalists in the AGP. This was a vertical split in the AGP for the third time. Several District committees faced split along the factional line resulting in political debacle of the AGP in 2006 assembly election.

Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his associates merged with the AGP on October 14, 2008 during the President-ship of Chandra Mohan Patowary. Mahanta became AGP president once again on 27 April, 2012 defeating Padma Hazarika. In the parliamentary election of 2014 AGP performed very poor and failed to win any seat in Lok Sabha. Mahanta took the responsibility of this defeat passed on the responsibility of the party president to Atul Bora (Junior). As a whole, Mahanta has proved to be a seasoned politician and has served state of Assam since the days of Assam movement. He has been elected for the seventh consecutive term to the Assam Assembly in 2016.

ii) Bhrigu Kumar Phukan (Birth 25 April, 1956-Death 20 March, 2006)

Bhrigu Kumar Phukan became the General Secretary of the AASU in the Sibsagar Conference on 7-10 March, 1979. He along with Prafulla Kumar Mahanta led the Assam movement. Phukan, a native of Sibsagar, belonged to an aristocratic Assamese family. He was very active in student politics in Gauhati University and was an important leader in the AAGSP. He became Home Minister in the first AGP ministry in 1985 and exercised equal power with the Chief Minister Mahanta.

Later factional rivalry between the two leaders occurred over some administrative issues. The Chief Minister in a Cabinet reshuffle relieved Phukan of the Political Department to render him powerless. Phukan and his associates became angry and formed of the Natun Asom Gana Parishad (NAGP) in 1991 looking for new political fortune. In 1993, the AGP and the NAGP got united again, but Phukan and his faction remained unsatisfied, unable to find respect in the party. He played active role in the election of 1996, but Chief Minister Mahanta did not give him any ministerial portfolio. Mahanta faction was shrewd enough to alienate Bhrigu Kumar Phukan from the party affairs of the AGP. Feeling demoralized and cheated, Phukan became remorse and physically down. He along with his followers formed a political party named Asom Jatiya Sanmilen (AJS) on 22 January, 1998. He contested the Assembly election 2001 from Jalukbari as Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) nominee and lost to Himanta Bishwa Sarmah of the Congress. He formed good rapport with PA Sangma, and became president of the state unit of NCP in Assam. During the tenure of Brindaban Goswami as the president of the AGP, Phukan came back to the party again and contested Lok Sabha election of 2004 from Guwahati constituency. Gradually Phukan's health deteriorated and he took his last breath on March 20, 2006 at the age of 49.

iii) Brindaban Goswami

Brindaban Goswami was the president of the AASU during 1974-75. Since then he has been very vocal on Assamese nationalist issues. He was associated with various social works and known for his clean image as public leader. He was the key man behind the *Jatiya Abhibartan* (National Convention) of Golaghat on October 12-14, 1985 when the AGP as a party came into being. Goswami assumed the post of Education minister in the first AGP government. In the course of time, He and the then Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta developed personal dislike for each other on some ideological issues. Later he along with Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, Dinesh Ch. Goswami, Pulakesh Barua and others came out of the AGP and gave birth to the NAGP in 1991. In 1993 with the reunion of AGP-NAGP, Brindaban Goswami also came back to the AGP. He played crucial role in the victory of the

party in the Assembly election of 1996. But in the subsequent Ministry formation, his name was not considered by the Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. Since then Brindaban Goswami maintained a low profile in the party. When Mahanta had to quit the post of President of the AGP in the aftermath of the defeat in Assembly election of 2001, AGP's rank and file found no other person suitable for the top post of the party except Brindaban Goswami. Goswami was AGP's president for a long 7 years. Under his leadership the Lok Sabha election of 2004 and Assembly election of 2006 was fought. But the party under his leadership failed to capture power due to factionalism and lack of proper strategy. The Mahanta loyalists in the party again became strong and ousted Goswami from his position quite unceremoniously in a special Central Executive Committee meeting in the Uddeshna Hall at Guwahti held on September 21, 2008. However, Goswami didn't left the regional party afterwards and continued to serve the regional party.

iv) Atul Bora

Atul Bora, a contemporary of Brindaban Goswami, was associated with student politics since the movement for Assamese medium in 1972. He along with veteran socialist leader Nibaran Bora formed the Purbanchaliya Lak Parishad (PLP), a political party based on the ideology of regionalism in 1978. The PLP made foreigner's question an election issue in Assam Assembly election 1978. When the Assam Movement started in 1979, Atul Bora along with his party joined the AAGSP. He was made the convener of the AAGSP and guided the movement. In between, he had difference with the AASU faction of the AAGSP over strategy and process of the Movement. He was expelled from the AAGSP on February 8, 1985 because Bora refused to follow the AASU diktat. Later the PLP led by Atul Bora, Thaneswar Bodo and Pabindra Deka opposed the signing of the Assam Accord in haste and highlighted some lacuna in the Accord. Ultimately, the PLP faction had to give way to the AASU pressure and joined the AGP in the Jatiya Abhibartan at Golaghat. Atul Bora after winning election from the Dispur constituency joined the ministry as the PWD Minister in the first AGP government in 1985. He could act

like an adviser to the Chief Minister Mahanta on account of his seniority and experience.

But things fell apart during the second term of the AGP government in 1996. Atul Bora started openly criticizing the Chief Minister Mahanta, over issues of Letter of Credit (LoC) corruption scandal. He was very critical and vocal against the misdeeds of some of his colleagues which annoyed the Chief Minister. During the parliamentary election of 1998, Bora charged Mahanta of initiating dynasty politics in the AGP. He opposed the decision of the Central Executive to nominate Jayashree Goswami Mahanata, wife of Prafulla Kumar Mahnata as the candidate from Nagaon Lok Sabha constituency in the forthcoming parliamentary election. Mahanta in a retaliatory step sacked him from the PWD department without any notice which hurt the personal ego of Bora. Atul Bora resigned from Mahanta cabinet on May 18, 1998. Factional rivalry between Atul Bora and Prafulla Kumar Mahnata increased and eventually Bora was suspended from the party. He along with Pulakesh Barua formed a new party in 2000; namely the Trinamul Gana Parishad (TGP) and contested the Assembly election 2001 separately. Premadhar Bora won as TGP candidate from the Bihpuria constituency. As a whole Atul Bora was an important leader of the AGP particularly and an ardent preacher of Assamese nationalism in general. His party TGP got merged with AGP on October 14, 2008. Gradually, the AGP's stature as viable political alternative in Assam diminished and Atul Bora joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2014.

These founder members of AGP were involved in factionalism in the AGP and took the leadership role in respective factions. Therefore, for the sake of analysis we shall refer to factional politics in the AGP by the name of these factional leaders; like Prafulla Kumar Mahnata faction, Bhriugu Kumar Phukan faction, Brindaban Goswami faction or Atul Bora faction. Followers and members of the factions changed with the changing situation but the leaders remained unchanged. Bhriugu Kumar Phukan, Brindaban Goswami and Atul Bora got involved in factional politics against Prafulla Kumar Mahnata faction. Prafulla Kumar Mahnata could

exercise loyalty and command over some of the AGP leaders throughout. Other factional groupings were formed primarily to fight the hegemony of the Prafulla Kumar Mahnata faction in the AGP.

3.5 Pattern of factional politics in the AGP

Paul R Brass (1966) observed that factionalism emerges when self regarding interests of leaders and followers of political party get preference ahead of other regarding interests of the party. In such a situation, the party concerned survives on distribution of political patronage. Position of the leader depends less upon their personal ability rather demagogic qualities prevails and the patron-client relationship formed between the leader and his followers become the basis of his power. If we look at the factional pattern in the AGP the indication of Paul R Brass is found to be true. The AGP as a party was constituted to materialize the dream and aspiration of the Assamese, to quell the fear in their mind that in the face of the incessant migration from outside, the Assamese people will be minority in their homeland. Assam is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural state, distribution of political patronage benefitting all diverse interests is a challenge here. The AGP leaders, in the initial period, faced this dilemma of selection of beneficiary. Very soon party office bearers and party MLAs put up allegations against the Cabinet Ministers in the Government, indulging in favoritism and nepotism. The growing activities of the ULFA became another issue which was contentious. How to deal with the ULFA was the question that set apart Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahnata and Home Minister Bhriku Kumar Phukan. Consequently two opposite factions emerged.

There were some structural bonds like regional sentiment, ties of friendship and kinship, reciprocal obligations that helped to create the factional groups. The AGP was moving towards a multi factional pattern of politics with Education Minister Brindaban Goswami and PWD Minister Atul Bora too maintaining a small faction each within the party. The bonhomie and legacy of Assam movement was gradually forgotten; friends turned into foes. Multi factional pattern is significant feature of disorganized and individualistic politics. In such a factional pattern,

leaders act like demagogue trying to get attention of the voters and media. Followers and supporters of factions change allegiance according their convenience. The AGP leaders lavishly demonstrated such factional attitude. Brindaban Goswami faction merged with Bhriku Kumar Phukan faction and Atul Bora had maintained equidistance from the Mahanta and Phukan factions. As a result factional pattern of the AGP in 1990s looked like bi-factional. Factionalism in AGP was not ideological but personal. All the leaders of the AGP were like peers who knew each other's strengths and weaknesses. As such, the leaders belonging to different geographical locations acted like small factions having followers in their constituencies. This was unique in case of the AGP. This was a major weakness of the party making it vulnerable to manipulation and sabotage during the time of elections. The tendency to factionalism continues in the AGP since the beginning till today.

3.5.1 From cooperative to competitive factionalism

As we have traced the root of factionalism in the AGP to the Assam Movement, its nature and impact was very much functional and positive initially. The AAGSP was like an ethnic coalition that led the movement. As we have discussed earlier, there were differences among the leaders of the constituting organizations of the AAGSP which took the shape of factions. For example, the PLP faction, the AASU faction etc. Within the AASU, there occurred some differences over ideology after the Nellie massacre in 1983. Leaders like Nurul Hussain and Nekibur Zaman and other minority leaders criticized the central leaders of the AASU for their hesitation to condemn the massacre. These minority leaders even came out of the AASU and formed separate student organization. In spite of these facts, the coalition character of the movement helped to widen its scope and increased the secular credentials. The AGP was greatly benefited by this secular image of the leaders during the Assembly election of 1985. Towards the closure of the movement factionalism in the AAGSP intensified. The two main factions of the AAGSP, the PLP faction led by Atul Bora and the AASU faction led by Mahanta and Bhriku Kumar Phukan debated over issues like IM (DT) Act, provisions of the Assam Accord etc. Atul

Bora, in spite of the opposition from the AASU, called for Assam *bandh* on August 14, 1984 for which he was expelled from the AAGSP. Biraj Kumar Sarma was made the convener of the AAGSP. The PLP faction did not sign the Assam Accord and criticized the AASU leaders for their thoughtless venture to end the movement abruptly for selfish gain. The PLP believed that with the IM(DT) Act in effect in Assam, detection and deportation of foreigners from the state is impossible. So, Assam Accord is merely eyewash and lacks legal legitimacy.

It was the effort of Brindaban Goswami, who as the convener of the *Jatiya Abhibartan* on 12-14 October, 1985 at Golaghat could persuade all the stakeholders to the movement and made possible the formation of the AGP. Thus, factionalism at the very outset of the AGP was positive and functional, inculcated a rational thinking. It was cooperative factionalism in the interest of the Assam and its people. These factional groups while retaining their separate identities and membership played active role in consolidation of the new political party. The AJYCP, Asom Sahitya Sabha, women and ethnic organizations, regional political parties in Assam played crucial role in the formation of the AGP and democratization of Assamese society. This had diversified the political appeal of the AGP. Leadership of the nascent party also spoke about ethnic and minority rights and their safeguard.

In such a cooperative factional pattern, family ties and local network of political patronage is the driving force. But in case of the AGP, the episode of cooperative factionalism was short-lived. Distribution of political value along the local and personal network made the AGP leaders unpopular. Competition started among the cabinet colleagues to satisfy their respective local needs. There was allegation of corruption against some cabinet ministers. Chief Minister Mahanta had to reshuffle his ministry and dropped 12 ministers at one go on October 22, 1988. This phase is characterized by competitive factionalism. Opposition parties specially the Congress had got new verve due to the internal competition and political wrangling in the AGP.

3.5.2 From competitive to degenerative factionalism

Gradually, competition intensified in the party, government reduced to standstill, insurgent activity and its magnitude increased. Consequently, the AGP government could not complete its tenure and was dismissed by the center on 27 November, 1990. Presidents' Rule under article 356 was imposed in Assam. Bhriku Kumar Phukan faction promptly rose to mark it as a failure of the Chief Minister Mahanta and demanded his resignation from the post of the President of the AGP. The rivalry intensified and one faction blamed the other of indiscipline. In the course of time, Bhriku Kumar Phukan, Brindaban Goswami, Pulakesh Barua, Dinesh Ch Goswami, Bijoya Chakravarty and others formed the NAGP and claimed to be the real AGP as most of the veteran leaders were with them. Thus, factionalism resulted in defeat of regional forces in the Assembly election of 1991 and the Congress ascended to power. This phase signifies degenerative factional politics in the AGP. Factionalism when turned into degenerative form marginalizes the party organizers and true supporters, just like the Gresham's principle: Bad principles drive out good principles out of the market. The AGP leaders single-mindedly pursued their factional goals and even sacrificed general interest of the party and the State. Naturally, public administration suffered and even deteriorated. Frankly speaking in the words of Francoise Boucek, the AGP became a value destroying brand. Degenerative factional politics have been the hall mark of AGP's internal politics because of which regionalism as a political force in Assam has lost its ground today.

3.6 Conflict mitigation machinery in the AGP

The AGP also lacked arbiter politicians, men of respect within the party, who could mediate among the factional groups and solve the differences. Indian National Congress party immediately after the independence enjoyed the service of Jawaharlal Nehru as the arbiter of factional conflict in the states. Even today the high-command structure of national political parties has proved to be boon in case of factional politics. The AGP does not have high-command structure. It appears that all are leaders in the Central Executive Committee, no one is a follower. No

one has the moral and positional authority to command. Leaders of the AGP proudly say, 'people of Assam are our high-command'. But the people of Assam are helpless eye witness to factional politics in the AGP. There were senior politicians like Nibaran Bora, Ananada Barbara, Nesar Ahmed and even within the AGP Nagen Saikia, Muhiram Saikia, Paragdhara Chaliha, Thanesar Bodo, Bhadrakar Buragohain and Bijoya Chakravarty who could have played the arbiter role to quell the factional conflict in the AGP. But most of these politicians were either sent to Delhi as Member of Parliament or were not allowed to negotiate in party affairs. Nibaran Bora, the veteran socialist leader was not even allowed to be a member in the party. Former PLP man Atul Bora tried to bring Nibaran Bora into the AGP but denied by the former AASU faction in the AGP⁷¹. Had there been any measure for 'good office' or 'mediation', the AGP could have recognize all the factions institutionally and make arrangement for effective representation of those in party structure and in the cabinet. Legitimization of opposition and dissent is an age old tactic of conflict resolution. This method was adopted by some political parties like the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan. But the ego of the AGP leaders prevented such a mitigation of factional conflict. Political culture of Assam was also not advanced so as to adjust conflicting interests on the same platform. The party failed to recognize that factionalism in liberal democratic political environment is natural and is not a taboo. The negative attitude towards factionalism among the leaders also made things worse in the AGP.

However, it's true that efforts were made to solve the degenerative factional conflict in the AGP. Kirtinath Hazarika, editor of the Dainik Asom, (Assamese daily newspaper), Ajit Sharma, the owner of the Dainik Janambhumi (Assamese daily newspaper) who were man of respect in the corridors of power during the tenure of the AGP tried to bring Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhriku Kumar Phukan to negotiation table⁷². The effort succeeded initially. Intellectuals and academicians of Assam who knew the importance of the AGP have not only

⁷¹ Atul Bora, *op cit.*, p 142.

⁷² Krishna Gopal Bhattacharyya, Personal interview, Gauhati University, January 25, 2015.

warned the factional leaders about the deleterious effects of factionalism but also tried to put forward solution formula. Host of news papers and academic articles marked with constructive criticism of internal politics in the AGP is a testimony to this fact. It was the efforts of academicians like Debo Prasad Barooah, Hiren Gohain and Paragdhara Chaliha that the reunion of AGP-NAGP became possible in 1993. Yet a permanent conflict mitigation tool could not be installed in the AGP.



Dynamics of factional politics in the Asom Gana Parishad

Chapter 4

4.1 The Initial shades of factionalism

The Asom Gana Parishad emerged out of a social movement, empowered by civil society of Assam. Various civil society organizations including ethnic associations, cultural groups, literary bodies, employees' associations, women associations and student associations participated and steered the movement. The movement was against the policies of Government of India regarding the foreign nationals present in Assam primarily coming from Bangladesh and Nepal. As such, anti-India sentiment and wave swayed length and breadth of Assam during the movement. At this point, it may be mentioned that there were two factions within the Assam movement: one was moderate while the other turned extremist. The moderates looked for amicable settlement of the dispute with the center within the framework of the Indian constitution. But the extremists adopted revolutionary tactics against the center and displayed uncompromising attitude. The moderates later formed the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) after the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1985. The extremist faction, not being satisfied with the MoU or the Assam Accord resorted to guerrilla warfare and demanded independence from the Indian union. These aspects are already discussed at length in the previous chapter.

Thus, the Assam Movement sowed the seeds of factionalism among movement leaders and also rank and file because it was not controlled or shaped by the civil society *per se* and hence it was not a 'people power revolution'. The concept of 'people power revolution' came from the Philippines bloodless democratic movement in 1986 that ousted the Ferdinand Marcos's tyrannical regime. The movement was a display of unity with courage and faith of all Filipinos to prevail democracy in the country. The 'people power' movement renewed the people's power, strengthened the meaning of democracy and restored the democratic

institutions of government in the country of Philippines. The Assam Movement was also a people's movement for solution of the problem of illegal foreigners. National and International media highlighted the magnitude of the movement. But the movement hardly strengthened substantive democracy in Assam. There was visible power struggle within the leadership and there were incidents of oppression on the minorities as well. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) which claims to have inherited the legacy of the Assam movement succumbed to factional rivalry soon after it assumed power in Assam. In this chapter we are going to describe the dynamics of factionalism in the AGP and its impact upon the society and politics of Assam.

4.1.1 Power and personality cult as the determinant of factionalism in the AGP

The leadership of the AGP was mostly drawn from middle class families of Assam. The student leaders after a series of political conventions and deliberations with the intellectuals, politicians and civil society personalities, who were supporters of the Assam movement, formed the party with a view to implement the Assam Accord and to fulfill the middle class aspirations. The leaders of the AGP came into prominence and became popular during the Assam movement. Large scale peoples' participation and faith of the people gave them charismatic status and power. Some leaders were worshipped by the followers as saints. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhriugu Kumar Phukan, the AASU President and General Secretary respectively were such personalities. Later on these two leaders became archrivals in the power struggle within the AGP.

i) Brindaban Goswami and Atul Bora

Other two personalities of the AGP who had personal differences were Brindaban Goswami and Atul Bora (Senior). Both were former AASU leaders and became Education minister and PWD minister respectively in the first AGP government. Atul Bora under the banner of the Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad (PLP) played active role during the Assam Movement. He called Brindaban Goswami a betrayer in his autobiographical book "*Abirata Sangram*", because Bora sought help from

Goswami regarding formation of a regional political party in 1978 and Goswami's response was not to his satisfaction. Since then personal relations of these two former AASU leaders deteriorated. Atul Bora was the man behind the formation of Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad (PLP), a regional political party in 1978. This political party took up the foreigners issue during the Assembly election of 1978. Brindaban Goswami, on the other hand, brought various socio-political organizations on a common platform during 1984-85 through various political conventions. Eventually, the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) emerged as a common regional political party. Atul Bora was left with no other option but to join the new party. He was one of the contenders for the post of Chief Minister too. The PLP got divided on the issue of the merger with the AGP. A faction led by Guna Gogoi abstained from joining the AGP. Atul Bora during the initial years vetoed Brindaban Goswami's ambition to become the president of the AGP. With the support of Atul Bora, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the President of the party and Chief Minister of the newly elected government.

The personality clash within the top brass of leadership in the AGP had started the initial shades of factional politics. Indiscipline arising out of factional rivalry characterized the party. All the leaders who later became MLAs and ministers refused to maintain the parliamentary tradition of collective responsibility and seniority.

ii) Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan

As mentioned earlier, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan became archrivals in the power struggle in the party. Both the leaders had equal status in the party and were contenders for the post of Chief Minister. At some occasions during the Assam movement, Bhrigu Kumar Phukan displayed more organizational abilities while he was the secretary of the AASU. After the formation of the AGP at the political convention of Golaghat on the 13-14th October, 1985, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the chief president of the AGP. Initially, the Golaghat convention had decided to keep a presidium system for the newly constituted party. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Brindaban Goswami from the

AASU, Thaneswar Bodo from the PLP, Binod Goswami and Biren Bodo from the AJD were included in the presidium. But the constitution of the party, drafted later, kept the provision for only one president. In this way, the idea of collective leadership was not given due importance by the framers of the constitution which angered other leaders who were of equal status within the party. Bhriku Kumar Phukan had the desire to become the Deputy Chief Minister in the first AGP government. Atul Bora, senior leader and colleague of Phukan, wrote in his book '*Abirata Sangram*' about it. Phukan was made the Home Minister and worked like the second in command in the cabinet. Personality clash between Phukan and Mahanta, the two stalwarts of the AGP was not hidden. There were several attempts to overthrow Mahanta from power, who very cleverly staved off such attempts⁷³. Phukan was never trusted by Mahanta and all the major portfolios held by the former were taken away, indirectly asking him to resign from the cabinet. At one time both Mahanta and Phukan resigned from their respective positions in the cabinet just after six months of the oath-taking. It was through mediation of Kirtinath Hazarika, one of the prominent journalists of Assam and Ajit Sharma the owner of the Dainik Janambhumi the dispute was patched up temporarily but not settled.

The Presidents' rule was imposed on Assam on 27th November, 1990 due to lawlessness and threat to the constitutional set up. After that factional politics in the AGP got momentum. On 21st March, 1991, in an open letter, Bhriku Kumar Phukan, the then General Secretary of the AGP, Pulakesh Barua, former Speaker of the Assembly, Brindaban Goswami, the Vice-President of the party and other important functionaries leveled serious charges against the ousted Chief Minister Mahanta. The signatories of the letter called Mahanta a weak leader and administrator, responsible for the dissolution of the AGP Government and imposition of Presidents Rule in Assam. They accused him of betrayal of trust and corruption and asked him to resign immediately. Mahanta, as alleged by the dissidents, without the consent of the cabinet accepted the Governors proposal to

⁷³ *The Assam Tribune*, Editorial column, March, 22, 1991

impose Armed Forces Special Powers Act declaring the upper Assam as disturbed area, which caused the people to suffer during the Presidents Rule. Thus, it is clear that the AGP did never function as a team and factionalism ripped off the credibility of the regional political party.

The Prafulla Kumar Mahanta faction dominated the central executive committee of the AGP and the committee on 23rd March, 1991 gave a clean chit to Mahanta. The general body meeting on 25th March, 1991 also expressed full faith on Mahanta's leadership and branded the charges leveled against him as 'revengeful, conspiratorial and false'⁷⁴. Bhriku Kumar Phukan resigned from his party post of General Secretary. Mahanta denied all allegations against him while Phukan cleared his stand that there will be no compromise unless Mahanta steps down. He said that the pro-changers are ready to work as ordinary members of the party and demands Mahanta's resignation only. He alleged that for the last five years he had been humiliated by Mahanta⁷⁵. Things deteriorated further amidst allegations and counter allegations. On 5th April, 1991 Bhriku Kumar Phukan and his allies formed a parallel body of the party and the AGP was vertically split into two parties. The new party was known as AGP (Reconstituted) and later renamed itself as Natun Asom Gana Parishad (NAGP). In the Assam Assembly election of 1991, AGP could win 19 seats and NAGP bagged 5 seats only. The power of AGP as a formidable force got divided. But the common people of Assam wanted a strong and united regional force. Therefore, at the behest of some influential civil society members, both the AGP and NAGP got united in 1993. But the factional rivalry between Mahanta and Phukan continued. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the Chief Minister again in 1996 after becoming the president of the AGP in the Lakhimpur general conference. But Bhriku Kumar Phukan was offered neither any ministerial berth nor party portfolio. Phukan in a gloomy state of mind left the AGP in 1998 and looked for new political career. He formed Asom Jatiaya Sanmilani which could not cater much attention of the people. In 2001, he became Vice president of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) on request of veteran leader P.A. Changma.

⁷⁴ *The Assam Tribune*, March, 26, 1991

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

Phukan returned to the AGP during the presidential tenure of Brindaban Goswami in 2004 and fought the parliamentary election on the Party ticket from Guwahati constituency. He was defeated by Kirip Chaliha of the Congress (I). Eventually, Bhriku Kumar Phukan, succumbed to his depression and illness and died in 2006.

iii) Atul Bora and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta

Atul Bora was senior to Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. He enjoyed a commanding position in the AGP. During the factional struggle in 1991, he asked Mahanta to step down from the post of party president in the greater interest of the party vide a letter⁷⁶. Bora was a founder of the Purbanchaliaya Loka Parishad (PLP). This regional political party formed in 1978 was a pioneer of the foreigners' issue in Assam. The PLP was a constituent of the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and took part in the Assam Movement. Though Bora had some differences with the AASU leaders regarding the provisions of the Assam Accord, yet he and his followers merged with the AGP in October 1985. Atul Bora became the General Secretary of the party and PWD Minister in the first AGP government. Calling upon Mahanta, to sacrifice his post of president in the greater interest of the party unity, Bora virtually favored the demand of the anti-Mahanta faction led by the other general secretary Bhriku Kumar Phukan. However, in a statement, Bora reminded Mahanta that people don't want the party to break-up⁷⁷.

Later on, Atul Bora tried to unify the two breakaway factions of the AGP. This time the mantle of leadership was shouldered by veteran leader and academician Paragdhara Chaliha. A committee for negotiation with the NAGP regarding the unification was formed by the executive council of the AGP. The members were Paragdhara Chaliha, Atul Bora, Digen Bora and Bharat Chandra Narah (Narah eventually joined the Congress). Negotiation that started on 19th September 1994 was quite cordial. Brindaban Goswami, Dinabandhu Choudhury and Ramendra Narayan Kalita participated as the NAGP representatives⁷⁸. The meeting was

⁷⁶ *The Assam Tribune*, March, 28, 1991

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Atul Bora, *Abirata Sangram*, (Guwahati: Maa Prakashak Gosthi, 2007), 103

organized at Hatisheela of Chandrapur, a place near Guwahati. Accordingly, both the parties arrived on an informal agreement for unification, one post of executive president was proposed to be created vide constitutional amendment for the NAGP and the post of chief president as decided would remain with the AGP. But the agreement failed as Bhrigu Kumar Phukan and Brindaban Goswami demanded post of the president for the NAGP. Meanwhile, Pulakesh Barua, the president of the NAGP who was very keen for unification, left the NAGP and joined the AGP. The unification process halted due to the hesitation of the NAGP leaders. Basically, Brindaban Goswami and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan never trusted Atul Bora and might have sensed ulterior motif behind his pro-active initiative for unification. The temperament and big-brotherly attitude of Bora did not do much good to gain popularity within the party. Bora is unlikely to forget that Phukan had a role in his expulsion from the AAGSP during the Assam Movement. Again, Phukan was aware that Mahanta on Atul Bora's advise divested Phukan of most of the important portfolios he held in the first AGP Government. Moreover, almost every policy course including the one relating to the Bodo problem, that Phukan initiated as Home Minister, was opposed by Bora⁷⁹. In this way, Bora proved to be a close ally or adviser to Prafulla Kumar Mahanta in the eyes of Phukan and Goswami.

However, unification of both the political parties, the AGP and the NAGP was made possible through mediation of some intellectuals of Assam, including Hiren Gohain, professor of Gauhati University. Atul Bora's effort to be the hero by unifying the breakaway parties died premature. Atul Bora's habit of raising internal party matters in the public through media was resented by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. In fact, Bora nursed ambition of becoming the Chief Minister or the party president. He made it public that he vehemently opposed Mahanta over the issue of Rs. 200-crore Letter of Credit (LoC) scandal. Once, Bora stated in an interview to a Guwahati daily that he had the competence to be the Chief Minister and would not shrink that responsibility if he would be called upon to take it up⁸⁰.

⁷⁹ Barun Das Gupta, "The Number game in Assam" , *Frontline*, Vol.15, No.12, June 06-19, 1998

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

After the unification, the NAGP leaders specially Bhrigu Kumar Phukan was marginalized deliberately and not given due status in the party. The second term of AGP in power from 1996 to 2001 was marred with more corruption charges, scandals and crisis of governance. Phukan carried on a campaign against Mahanta. As a result, Phukan was suspended from the party and Atul Bora emerged as the Chief Minister's principal political rival. He opposed Mahanta's decision to field his wife Jayashree Goswami Mahanta as the AGP candidate in the Nowgong constituency for the Lok Sabha election in February, 1998. When Jayashree finished third and all the AGP candidates were defeated in all constituencies, Bora stepped up his campaign to replace Mahanta. The dissidence intensified on May, 1998 when Bora flew to Delhi with Phukan. The Mahanta faction claimed that Atul Bora got financial help from Rajendra Prasad Bora, the prime accused in the LoC scam case who then was allegedly trying to get Mahanta charge-sheeted in the case. Atul Bora even contacted the officers of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) which was investigating the LoC scam. On May 16, when Atul Bora was still in Delhi, Mahanta effected a reshuffle of his Council of Ministers and changed the portfolio held by Bora. He was shifted from the Public Works Department (PWD) to the Forest Department. Bora, who returned from Delhi on May 18, announced that he would resign from the ministry because Mahanta had 'insulted and humiliated' him by changing his portfolio. Posters denouncing Mahanta were displayed at the press conference at Bora's residence. Present alongside him were Jatin Mali, the then Education Minister, some MLAs and former Ministers of AGP and Transport Minister Pradip Hazarika. Next day, Mahanta sacked Jatin Mali. Atul Bora faction claimed that they had support of 21 of 63 current MLAs of the AGP (the one third of the total number required for a split to be recognized under the Anti-Defection Law). The Mahanta faction reiterated that they continue to enjoy a majority⁸¹.

Very soon, it became clear that the prominent dissident leaders including Bhrigu Kumar Phukan and Brindaban Goswami were not willing to accept Bora as Chief Minister in place of Mahanta. They therefore, looked for an alternative leader and

⁸¹ *ibid.*

announced the name of Thaneswar Bodo. But Bodo is known to be one of Mahanta's most loyal ministerial colleagues. Hence he expressed disgust at the factionalism in the AGP and refused to become the leader of the dissidents. In fact, Mahanta was clever enough to win over the members of the Atul Bora faction one by one. Only Pulakesh Barua was with him till last when Atul Bora was suspended from the AGP. Bhriku Kumar Phukan had already been suspended by the Mahanta faction and he founded the Asom Jatiay Sanmilan (AJS), a separate political party on 22nd January, 1998⁸². Brindaban Goswami was unwilling to join hands with Atul Bora either for lack of trust upon Bora or for other reasons, as written by Atul Bora in his autobiographical essay⁸³. The popular Assamese weekly, '*Sadin*' expressing grave concern about the factional politics in the AGP described Chief Minister Mahanta as 'arrogant', Atul Bora as 'rebellious' and Digen Bora as 'backbiter'. Atul Bora and Pulakesh Barua, the suspended AGP leaders formed a separate political party named 'Trinamul Gana Parishad' (TGP) on 8th February, 2000. In the Assam Assembly election of 2001, TGP fielded 19 candidates and Premadhar Bora came victorious from the Bihpuria constituency⁸⁴.

iv) Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Brindaban Goswami

The post of president of the AGP became the bone of contention between Brindaban Goswami and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. Brindaban Goswami never came to the forefront of leadership during the Assam Movement. He led the AASU during 1972-74 periods as the president of the student organization. During the movement, he was regarded as one of the principal ideologues. He was very close to academicians like Basanta Deka, Binoy Kumar Tamuli and others who were the beacon light of the movement. After signing of the Assam Accord, Goswami headed the eleven member 'convener committee' formed by the AASU to organize the political conventions. In the second political conventions held in Golaghat on October 13-14, 1985 the AGP as party came into being. Thus, Goswami played a crucial role in the formation of the AGP and nursed a will to become the President

⁸²Atul Bora, *op cit.*, p 129

⁸³ *ibid.* p 122

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p 131-132

of the party. At that time, Deba Prasad Barooah the professor in Political Science Department of the Gauhati University, Assam was at the helm of decision making in the AASU. The AASU leaders decided that as Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was the President of the AASU, the post of President of the AGP should go to him.

In the Golaghat convention the Presidium system was adopted and Goswami's name was included as one of the five presidents in the Presidium. But this system of collective leadership was not placed in the constitution of the AGP written afterwards. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta remained as the chief president. Therefore, Goswami had to content with the post of Vice-President. He was made the Education Minister in the first AGP Ministry. But the Chief Minister did not consult him while deciding to nominate Deba Prasad Barooah as the Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University. The decision was approved in the cabinet while the Education Minister was away⁸⁵. During the first tenure of the AGP, as Atul Bora was close to Prafulla Kumar Mahanta; consequently Goswami allied with Bhriku Kumar Phukan faction. In this way, Brindaban Goswami and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta sat in opposite factions in the AGP. In 1986, during the agitation of the Bengali community against the government decision to implement the Official Language Act in Assam, Brindaban Goswami visited Silchar and held a discussion with the Bengali civil society of the Cachar district over the language issue. Goswami was received cordially. Chief Minister Mahanta also wanted to visit Barak valley. But Goswami asked him not to visit Karimganj immediately. In spite of the verbal warning from Goswami, Mahanta visited the valley amidst the agitation. On his arrival at the Barak valley, Mahanta did not receive much attention from the Bengali community like that the Education Minister got from the public in Silchar. Mahanta was shown black flag and in one occasion the police had to resort to firing resulting in death of a person. It must be mentioned that the circular to implement the Assam Official Language Act was released by the Education Department during Mahanta's visit to the valley which flared up the situation.⁸⁶ Therefore, relationship between the Chief Minister and the Education Minister deteriorated.

⁸⁵ D.P. Barooah, Personal interview, Guwahati, February 27, 2013.

⁸⁶ Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Personal interview, Guwahati, May 16, 2017.

The issue was published in local dailies and even discussed in the Assam Legislative Assembly. Political analysts viewed this as the starting point of cold war for personal image and supremacy within the party consequently resulting in factionalism. All these incidents were purely personal and had nothing to deal with ideology of the AGP. Atul Bora and Brindaban Goswami had exchanged several letters over some issues of transfer of school teachers and PWD officials from their respective constituencies. Former AGP leader Jainath Sarmah has the opinion that

"The main reason behind factionalism and rivalry between the leaders in the AGP was transfer and posting of officers close to the MLAs and Ministers."⁸⁷

Brindaban Goswami was very close to the AASU leadership and the AASU would have preferred either him or Bhrigu Kumar Phukan at the top most post of the AGP. But Prafulla Kumar Mahanta enjoyed popular support. He and Phukan were the mass leaders of the Assam Movement. Mahanta was chosen as the President of the AGP as he had held the post of president of the AASU. There was none who could challenge Mahanta from becoming the Chief Minister too. But, very soon the AASU started alleging Mahanta as corrupt and incapable leader. The student organization's campaign against the Chief Minister was perhaps not unknown to Brindaban Goswami and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan. All these happenings widened the rift between the Chief Minister Mahanta and the Education Minister Goswami. The political bickering led to disastrous non-rule and breakdown of the constitutional machinery in the state. Presidents' Rule was imposed in the state on 27th November, 1989 and factional politics intensified. The Bhrigu Kumar Phukan faction demanded resignation of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta from the post of President of the party. The Mahanta faction, on the other hand claimed that the demand was revengeful.

Eventually, the AGP faced the first vertical split in April 1991. The breakaway faction, led by Brindaban Goswami and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan formed Natun Asom Gana Parishad (NAGP). During the Assam Assembly election 1991, both the AGP and the NAGP faced humiliating defeat. Mahanta ultimately stepped down

⁸⁷ Zoi Nath Sarma, Personal interview, Guwahati, January 3, 2014.

and handed over the charge of the President to Thanesar Bodo. After then Paragdhara Chaliha became the President of the party in the 2nd general conference in January, 1992. During the presidency of Paragdhara Chaliha, the NAGP got united with the AGP in 1994. The unification brought political success to the party in the Assembly election of 1996. But Brindaban Goswami was offered neither ministerial berth nor respectable position in the party organization. This was the time when Atul Bora rose to the occasion and had a stiff fight with Chief Minister Mahanta over the issues of the LoC scandal. The Personal image and power of Mahanta declined a lot due to the charges of LoC scam, secret killing and indiscipline of his colleagues in the government. Had Brindaban Goswami joined hands with Bora, they could have toppled the Mahanta Ministry in 1998. But Goswami did not take recourse to such politics, because he was not in a position to accept Atul Bora as the Chief Minister. It was foregone conclusion that the AGP would lose the Assembly election of 2001. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta had to quit his job of party president amidst personal controversy of bigamy. Brindaban Goswami became party president in 2001 and remained so till 2008. Under his leadership the AGP won two Lok Sabha seats in 2004. He was declared as the future chief ministerial candidate of the party. The party could regain popular support and media attention as well during his tennure. In the meantime, Goswami managed to expel Prafulla Kumar Mahanta from the party for six years in 2005 as the latter was challenging Goswami's leadership. Mahanta along with his loyal followers formed a separate political party, namely the AGP (Progressive) in 2005. In the Assembly election of 2006, the AGP could win only 24 seats. While trying to keep away the Mahanta supporters, the Brindaban Goswami faction made strategic mistake in ticket distribution and some potential candidates of the Mahanta faction were denied a ticket. Goswami also failed to enter in seat sharing agreement with the anti-congress parties before the election. Even after the election, the AGP leadership showed reluctance to form a coalition government. It was sheer leadership failure of Brindaban Goswami. Dissidence occurred against him and he was ousted quite unceremoniously from the post of party president in 2008. The architect of this revolt against Goswami's leadership was Prafulla Kumar Mahanta

who continued to influence the internal politics of the AGP from outside. Chandra Mohan Patowary, one of the known loyalists of Mahanta became the new president. Mahanta's AGP (P), Atul Bora's TGP and Pabindra Deka's PLP all three break away factions joined the AGP again on October 14, 2008 the 23rd birth anniversary of the party. Sanjib Baruah mentioned this in his article in the Indian Express as 'homecoming season' for Mahanta⁸⁸.

4.2 Friends turn Foes: The age of competitive factionalism in the AGP:

Antagonism for ideology or enmity for self aggrandizement

Hiren Gohain, noted academician and intellectual of Assam, is of the opinion that ideological difference is not the factor behind factionalism in the AGP⁸⁹. The leaders of the party unanimously believed in regionalism and the party came to power with a promise to safeguard the Assamese nationalist interest, to save the future generations from becoming minority amidst continuous immigration from other parts of India and illegal immigration from Bangladesh and Nepal. Krishna Gopal Bhattacharjee, professor of Gauhati University is also of the same opinion that there was no ideological difference between the top leaders of the AGP. He said that creation of multiple power center and lack of high command became the key factor behind the factional groupings⁹⁰. The power centers were mainly controlled by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Bhriugu Kumar Phukan, Atul Bora and Brindaban Goswami. These leaders had personal desire to control the party. Differences arise over allocation of party tickets for elections, seat sharing with the alliance partners on couple of occasions and ministry formation. However, roots of these differences were generated during the Assam Movement itself. Who gets more prominence in public domain, respect and influence in public than others became a personal objective of the leaders during the movement? Naturally, a competitive environment prevailed for power and influence. Even some veteran

⁸⁸ Sanjib Baruah, 'Homecoming season', *The Indian Express*, October 20, 2008.

⁸⁹ Hiren Gohain, Personal interview, Guwahati, May 9, 2016.

⁹⁰ Krishna Gopal Bhattacharjee, Personal interview, Guwahati, May 26, 2015.

leaders and supporters of the movement, who held independent opinion other than that upheld by the student leaders, were expelled from the AAGSP⁹¹. For example, Nibaran Bora, a prominent socialist leader of Assam since 1950s, was a staunch supporter and ideologue of the movement. He was expelled because the AASU leaders suspected him of having close relationship with Congress party leaders at the center⁹². The leaders of the Assam Movement could not tolerate any opposition. After the Nelie incident, some Muslim student leaders within the AASU, urged that the leadership should condemn the massacre, which was not done. Ultimately, the Muslim student leaders were suspended from the AAGSP on the allegation of being anti-movement⁹³. The PLP leader Atul Bora was also expelled during the movement from the AAGSP, who had some difference with the AASU leadership. These differences were about the tactics and process of the movement and had nothing to do with ideological aspect of regionalism. In this way, the leaders got involved in competition for personal power and influence. Whoever had difference with the leadership was expelled from the AAGSP or castigated as anti-Asamese. Thus, the movement acquired a 'fascist character', as a number of intellectual and liberal minded personalities argue.

As many as 90% of the AGP leaders at the central committee and almost 100% of the District level office bearers feel that personal enmity and rivalry among the top leaders created factionalism in the AGP. There were some evidences that the young student leaders who assumed power in Assam in 1985 succumbed to some outside influence which created trust deficiency and misunderstanding among them. Bhriku Kumar Phukan, once during an official visit to Mizoram met Hiteswar Saikia, the former Congress Chief Minister of Assam, who was then the Governor of Mizoram⁹⁴. By then, Bhriku Kumar Phukan's personal enmity with Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was established; and Saikia, as a Congressman was known for his anti-movement stand and actions during the Assam Movement. Saikia became the

⁹¹ AAGSP or All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad was an umbrella organization of all student and youth organizations, literary and cultural organizations that steered the Assam Movement.

⁹² Sri Nibaran Bora met Zail Singh, the Union Home Minister in Delhi.

⁹³ Prominent Muslim leaders who were expelled were Nekibur Zaman, Nurul Hussain etc.

⁹⁴ Abu Nasar Said Ahmed, Personal interview, Guwahati, January 5, 2014.

Chief Minister of Assam from the Congress party after the controversial Assembly election in 1983 which was boycotted by the AASU. Apart from meeting Phukan at Rajbhaban in Mizoram, Hiteswar Saikia had developed close relationship with Mahanta too. It is known from reliable source that Saikia while in his sick bed blessed and advised Mahanta in private and gave him his personal diary in 1996⁹⁵.

This fact indicates the involvement of the opposition leaders from the Indian National Congress in factional rivalry between Bhrigu Kumar Phukan and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. Ramendra Narayan Kalita, sitting MLA from Guwahati West Assembly constituency told that Phukan did not crave for the post of Chief Minister and that he was ready to declare that in writing. But Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his followers would always see Phukan as the rival candidate and try to block his political career. As such, it was neither ideology nor any issue that became the cause of factionalism in the AGP. There was competition among the leaders for power and personal gain. In order to foster this self-regarding interest the factional leaders sought some basis for selection of their followers. Caste, regional sentiment, old friendship etc worked as the basis for factional grouping.

4.2.1 Caste as determinant of factionalism

Caste has not been a module of political articulation in Assam like that in the North Indian States. But in 1991, the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta faction tried to brand the Bhrigu Kumar Phukan faction as an upper caste faction⁹⁶. He even indirectly alleged that the Phukan faction opposed his efforts to implement welfare measures for the SC and ST people in the state. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan in reply to such allegation said that Mahanta was at the root of all tribal unrest in the state. However, most of the upper caste Brahmin leaders of the AGP aligned with Bhrigu Kumar Phukan and the leaders having other caste affiliations, like kalitas, kayasthas grouped in Prafulla Kumar Mahanta faction. Hiren Gohain said that the Brahmin leaders in the AGP thought that Bhrigu Kumar Phukan would have

⁹⁵ Dipanka Hazarika, Personal interview, Guwahati, February, 2012.

⁹⁶ *The Assam Tribune*, March 26, 1991.

proved a better administrator and Chief Minister⁹⁷. But there were exceptions too, who preferred Prafulla Kumar Mahanta as leader. Gohain has also said that Bhrigu Kumar Phukan had very good rapport with the tribal leaders of Assam. He was a close friend of Upendra Nath Brahma⁹⁸. Other tribal leaders like Paniram Rabha, Israel Nanda remained loyal to Bhrigu Kumar Phukan till his last. On the other hand, he was a little bit of introvert in nature and party man found it difficult to get an easy access to him. On the contrary, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta provided easy access to everyone. So, Mahanta was more popular in the rank and file of the party⁹⁹. As such, it is a pertinent question whether caste was a factor behind factionalism in the AGP or not. However, almost all the AGP leaders who were interviewed during this research refuted such a possibility which could be inferred even today. According to them, the leaders of the AGP were not caste leaders. They were the product of the Assam Movement and the Movement was not a caste based agitation though it had a significant class character. Caste affiliations of the leaders became secondary in view of the larger socio-political interest of the Assamese people. Yet, middle class sentiments and interest prevailed during the course of the movement. The AGP inherited this legacy of middle class interest. Moreover, occupational pattern and livelihood pattern in Assam is not caste based. No caste or community is resorting to specific occupation like agriculture, fishery, dairy farming or business. The factional leaders of the AGP did not represent such a particular caste or community. Most of them had middle class background. Paul R Brass, in his study of factional politics in the Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh reveals the caste based factional power of Chaudhury Charan Singh. He belonged to the Jat community which cultivated 30 percent of the land in the Meerut district. He had made the Jat way of life his political creed. When, Chaudhury Charan Singh resigned in 1959 due to a personal clash with the Chief Minister Sampurnanand, "it was taken as an insult to the caste" and anti-Congress feeling

⁹⁷ Hiren Gohain, Personal interview, Guwahati, 9 May, 2016.

⁹⁸ Upendra Nath Brahma, also known as the father of the Bodo nation, spearheaded movement for autonomy for the Bodo people. Under his leadership All Bodo Student Union came into prominence and they uttered the slogan, 'devide Assam fifty fifty'.

⁹⁹ Krishna Gopal Bhattacharyya, Personal interview, Gauhati University, Guwahati, May 26, 2015.

became high among the Jats¹⁰⁰. But, factional leaders in the AGP could not command such caste loyalty. Though, some Brahmin leaders extended support to Bhrigu Kumar Phukan's faction, yet it cannot be termed as caste based faction. The Brahmin caste is not dominant in Assam anyway. And to brand a faction as caste based faction, it should be closely tied up at the grass root level, which was not the case with the factions in the AGP.

In terms of class affiliations, all factions in the AGP represented Assamese middle class interests and claimed to be the real AGP. But the semi-tribal, semi-feudal society of Assam and the limitations of colonial legacies made the transformation of the Assamese middle class and *Asamiya* nationality distorted. As Monirul Hussain (1993) has written:

*"The colonial rulers had deliberately encouraged national hostility and exclusiveness and made Assam a highly plural province with serious unevenness. The Asamiya nationality remained weak, underdeveloped and small, with the people not having much confidence in their own destiny. The horizon of the Asamiya nationality very significantly did not expand much in spite of the massive increase in Assam's population, and was largely confined to the social groups of pre colonial Assam."*¹⁰¹

The Asom Gana Parishad could not surpass these limitations and the factional politics among the leaders was also confined within the limited political space offered by the *Asamiya* middle class and *Asamiya* nationality. If we assume for the time being that the Brahmins favoured the Bhrigu Kumar Phukan faction, then who were the other caste groups that patronized the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta faction? It may be argued that being a Kayastha, Mahanta got the support of the Kayasthas and the Kalitas, but these caste Hindu groups alone can't effect a political equation in Assam. Even, Brahmin leaders like Nagen Sharma of Nalbari, Jainath Sharma of Sipajhar, Girin Baruah of Nagaon were with Prafulla Kumar Mahanta faction. Interestingly, David Ledger, Dinabandhu Choudhury, Ramendra

¹⁰⁰ Paul R. Brass, *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress party in Uttar Pradesh* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1966), 141.

¹⁰¹ Monirul Hussain, *The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology and Identity*, (New Delhi: Manak Publications, 1993), 51.

Narayan Kalita, Bhaben Bharali and many other non-Brahmin leaders were in the Bhriku Kumar Phukan faction. Brindaban Goswami, one of the leaders in Phukan's faction opined that they had to oppose Mahanta for his misdeeds and ideological drift. It is true that the Phukan faction brought some ideological questions against Mahanta. These issues are dealt in detail in the following paragraphs. In a nutshell, factionalism in the AGP cannot be termed as caste based faction or ideological faction.

4.2.2 Culmination of Competitive factionalism: Formation of NAGP in 1991

The ultimate conclusion of factionalism in the AGP was split in the party in 1991. The factional struggle during the first tenure of the AGP in governance damaged the coherence of the party; faith of the leaders in party ideology seemed superficial. When the AGP government was dismissed on 27th November, 1990 and President's Rule was imposed on Assam, common people breathed a sigh of relief. Just after the formation of the AGP government ethnic tribes pushed their demand for autonomy and insurgent activities increased manifold. The AGP government neither could satisfy the middle class national sentiments of the Assamese linguistic community nor uplift the socio-economic conditions of the ethnic communities. The leadership relations around vicious personal issues reached at the nadir.

The leadership crisis in the AGP took a new turn on 21st March, 1991 when a number of senior party functionaries and Rajya Sabha members wrote an open letter to the party president Prafulla Kumar Mahanta demanding his resignation. The letter was released to the press. This was the most vigorous attack on Mahanta's leadership with serious allegations of betrayal of trust and corruption. Former cabinet colleagues of Mahanta, Bhriku Kumar Phukan and Brindaban Goswami took the lead backed by senior Rajya Sabha members of the AGP. On the next day, Mahanta while denying these allegations in a press meet was seen visibly shaken. But he could gain control of the situation within the party through his informal channels-old boy network. Leaders like Digen Bora, Maidul Islam Bora, Bharat Chandra Narah came forward for his rescue. The political maneuvering at

the district level paid dividend and trust was reposed on Mahanta's leadership in the AGP general body meeting on 25th March, 1991. Even the general body directed the central executive committee to draw disciplinary action against the dissidents. Everybody knew that factional crisis in the AGP had deepened further. Five prominent leaders of Bhriku Kumar Phukan faction resigned from their party posts and charged that the party general body meeting was unconstitutional as it violates the section 7(4) of the party constitution. According to this clause each district unit has to send four elected members. Besides, Current MLAs and MPs, the central executive members, the district presidents and secretaries can attend the general body meeting. There is no provision under the party constitution for former MLAs and MPs to attend the general body meeting. Significantly, the party meeting was attended by about 300 of the 350 people and all the former MLAs and MPs were present. Briefing the newsmen on the outcome of the meeting party spokesmen Bharat Chandra Narah and Maidul Islam Bora said that the general body condemned the anti-party activities. The Phukan faction was on a no compromise mood unless the party president Mahanta steps down. The dissident leaders informed the media that instead of discussing the charges (the corruption charges and the Governor's report on proposal to declare Upper Assam as disturbed area) the central executive meeting absolved Mahanta of the charges. Therefore, it has become difficult for them to work together in the AGP¹⁰². The AGP central executive committee under the influence of Mahanta faction issued show cause notice against six prominent leaders and asked them to clarify within fifteen days why disciplinary actions would not be taken against them under section 12 of the party constitution for violating party discipline. The central executive also accepted the resignation of the five leaders from their party posts. The six prominent leaders who were given 'show cause notice' were Bhriku Kumar Phukan, Brindaban Goswami, Dinesh Goswami, Bijoya Chakravarty, David Ledger and Dinabandhu Choudhury. They decided to ignore the notice and decided to hold a state level AGP workers convention at Guwahati to garner support. Meanwhile, Atul Bora the other general secretary of the AGP and some senior leaders of the AGP advised

¹⁰² *The Assam Tribune*, March 26, 1991.

Mahanta to resign in the greater interest of the party¹⁰³. Hemanta Barman, member of the AGP general body from Nalbari district claimed that several members from different districts walked out of the March 25 meeting in protest when the body reposed faith on Mahanta. The letter of Atul Bora written to President Mahanta asking him to resign was also not displayed to the members of the general body¹⁰⁴. On 3rd of April, the executive council of the AGP expelled former speaker of the Assam Assembly, Pulakesh Barua and former minister Ramendra Narayan Kalita. Six other members were also suspended; they were Bhriugu Kumar Phukan, Brindaban Goswami, Dinesh Goswami, Dinabandhu Choudhury, Bijaya Chakravarty and David Ledger.

Table 4.1
Comparative strength of the bhriugu Kumar Phukan faction and Prafualla Kumar Mahanta faction in 1991

Phukan faction	Mahanta faction
1. Bhriugu Kumar Phukan, General Secretary & MLA	1. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, President & CM
2. Dinesh Goswami, Lok Sabha Member	2. Digen Bora, former Minister
3. Brindaban Goswami, Vice President & MLA	3. Bharat Chandra Narah, Publicity Secretary
4. David ledger, Senior leader	4. Maidul Islam Bora, former Minister
5. Dinabandhu Choudhury, party whip & MLA	5. Gunin Hazarika, former MLA
6. Bijoya Chakravarty, Rajya Sabha Member	6. Girin Barua, former MLA
7. Pulakesh Barua, former Speaker & MLA	7. Kamala Kalita, former Minister
8. Ramendra Narayan Kalita, former Minister & MLA	8. Kumar Deepak Das, former MLA
9. Paniram Rabha, MLA	9. Chandramohan Patowary, former MLA
10. Hiteswar Deka, MLA	10. Phanibhusan Choudhury, former MLA
11. Kamakhya Charan Choudhury, MLA	11. Birendra Prasad Baishya, former MLA
12. Bhadreswar Tanti, Lok Sabha Member	12. Utpal Dutta, former MLA
13. Badan Baruah, MLA	13. Basanta Das, former MLA
14. Abhijit Sarmah, MLA	14. Prabin Kumar Gogoi, former MLA
15. Jyotsna Sonowal, MLA	15. Dilip Saikia Sonowal, former MLA
16. Tanka Bahadur Rai, MLA	16. Surendra Nath Medhi, former Minister

Source: Data collected during personal interviews with the AGP leaders.

¹⁰³ *The Assam Tribune* 28th March, 1991

¹⁰⁴ *The Assam Tribune* 29th March, 1991

Some senior leaders, namely Atul Bora, Chandra Arandhara, Paragdhara Chaliha, Ataur Rahman, Thaneswar Bodo, Nagen Saikia, Bhadreswar Buragohain, Deba Bora and many other maintained neutrality in the factional conflict. These leaders tried to persuade both the factions for a settlement. When it failed and eight prominent dissident leaders were either expelled or suspended from the AGP, the Phukan faction had done away with the parent organization. A new parallel body came into being on 5th April 1991 with a new executive headed by the former speaker Pulakesh Barua as the president and claimed to be the actual central executive of the AGP. In the representative meeting attended by almost 300 delegates from all the districts, the new executive took a decision to remove Prafulla Kumar Mahanta from the post of party president and suspended him from the primary membership of the party. Thus, the Bhriku Kumar Phukan faction came to be known as Natun Asom Gana Parishad, in short NAGP. The 27 member new executive consisted of the following members:

Table 4.2

The central executive of the NAGP (a breakaway faction of the AGP)

President	: Sri Pulakesh Baruah
Working President	: Sri Bhriku Kumar Phukan
Vice Presidents (4)	: Sri Dinesh Goswami : Sri Bhadreswar Tanti : Sri Bimal Gogoi : Sri Kamakhya Charan Choudhury
General Secretaries (4)	: Sri Brindaban Goswami : Sri David Ledger : Smt Bijoya Chakraborty : Sri Poran Gohain
Treasurer	: Sri Dinabondhu Choudhury
Office Secretary	: Sri Ratul Barua
Member (Total 15*)	: Sri Ramendra Narayan Kalita : Smt. Jyotsna Sonowal : Sri Abhijit Sharma

*the complete list of members is unavailable¹⁰⁵. But some neutral persons had taken side with the parent organization of the AGP which was dominated by the Mahanta faction.

Dinesh Goswami, former Union Minister of Law and Lok Sabha Member declared that they would approach the Election Commission for recognition and allotment of the “Elephant” symbol and would also inform the National Front government at the center about the developments in the AGP and solicit the support of the Front. On the next day (i.e. the 6th April, 1991) Prafulla Kumar Mahanta denied of any split in the party and alleged that a third political front based in Delhi was behind the developments in the AGP. The parallel body is an outcome of anti-party activity of some senior members who were trying to confuse and divide the party workers and followers¹⁰⁶. In the press statement released by the AGP, the party warned the dissidents that their actions were fraught with disastrous consequences. Giving instances of rebellion by Binoy Kumar Tamuli and Pabindra Deka, the statement said that these two were heading small splinter groups only after leaving the AGP. The new faction will also face such untimely death and fade away from the political arena, the statement of the AGP predicted.¹⁰⁷

Figure 4.1
Political cartoon on factionalism in the AGP



Source: The Assam Tribune of 30th March and 7th April 1991 respectively.

¹⁰⁵ *The Assam Tribune* 6th April, 1991

¹⁰⁶ *The Assam Tribune* 6th April, 1991

¹⁰⁷ *The Assam Tribune* 7th April, 1991

The editorial dated 7th April, 1991 of the Assam Tribune, the premier English daily in Assam observed that “The split in the AGP is formalized.” It described the split as unfortunate and against the interest of the people who believed in regionalism. The city committee of the AGP tried to bring about a compromise between Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan. The AGP workers gheraoed Phukan and tried to put pressure upon him for a settlement. But other leaders of Phukan faction specially Pulakesh Barua ruled out any possibility of a compromise. He urged that the workers who wanted unity must take a stand on the issues and allegations against Mahanta, which are yet to be cleared. He questioned why the city committee kept meaningfully silent when eight senior leaders of Phukan faction were suspended and humiliated by the Mahanta camp? Thus, Pulakesh Barua as the President of the parallel body expressed apprehension about such unity move and ultimately such settlement did not get materialized.

The parallel body of the AGP had taken some political resolutions in view of the forthcoming Assembly election on 7th April, 1991. These were as follows:

1. Autonomy and right to self determination for the people of the State over its resources in order to improve the economic conditions of the people of Assam. (To give it a concrete form the resolutions passed at the Mangoldoi general conference of the AGP was discussed in detail)
2. Review of Centre-state relations under a federal framework by amending the constitution. It was resolved that state should be empowered to handle all other subjects except defense, communication, external affairs and currency.
3. Constitution of an impartial public commission for inquiring into the reported atrocities by the security forces under the Operation Bajrang on the people of Assam. A legal cell to be set up at Gauhati High Court headed by Saroj Sen to provide legal aid to the victims of atrocities. Other members of the cell were Bhadreswar Tanti, Krishna Dewan and Ramendra Narayan Kalita.
4. A central medical aid cell would be set up at Guwahati.

These resolutions were calculated move by the new parallel body to showcase the anomalies done during the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta regime and to revive the lost faith of the people of Assam on regional politics. As such, this phase of factional politics can be termed as competitive factionalism. Both the factional groups tried to garner public support and loyalty of the party workers. Old regional issues and agenda were put to the public domain in order to legitimize their move by the new body which started to become popular in media as Asom Gana Parishad (Reconstituted) or AGP(R). On the contrary, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta stepped down from party leadership on 8th April, 1991 and Thaneswar Bodo, the Vice-President was made the acting president in a central executive meeting. Mahanta asserted that he had taken the step not under pressure but for the sake of the party's unity. The central executive also nominated Nagen Saikia, the Rajya Sabha MP of the AGP as the vice president, Nagen Sarma as acting general secretary and Dilip Saikia Sonowal as finance secretary. Directions were issued to elect new District Committee and Anchalik Committee between 5th May to 20th May, 1991. The acting president Thaneswar Bodo in a statement expressed that "the door is open for the dissidents"¹⁰⁸. He and Atul Bora, the former PWD Minister, initiated a mediation process. Simultaneously, both the factions led by Pulakesh Barua on one hand and Thaneswar Bodo on the other started consolidating their workers and supporters at the grassroots. These consolidating efforts of the opposite camps of the AGP created confusion among the voters and well-wishers of the AGP, since, AGPs support base neither changed nor increased. The same sets of Assamese speaking voters were targeted by both the factions and ultimately the vote bank got divided.

On the next day, Pulakesh Barua, President of AGP (R) rejected the temporary resignation of Mahanta as "irrelevant" and further accused him of attempting to cover up the two serious charges against him. The charges were:

1. Mahanta indulged in corruption and illegally distributed almost 30 lakhs of rupees earned from lottery revenue in his constituency of Nagaon and Barhampur. It was sheer display of political opportunism.

¹⁰⁸ *The Assam Tribune*, 9th April, 1991.

2. Mahanta secretly approved of the Governor's proposal to declare the upper Assam as disturbed area and to impose Armed forces Special power Act in Assam which resulted in army atrocities in the rural areas of Assam.

The AGP representative meeting convened on April 5, 1991 had reconstituted the party and expelled Mahanta from the primary membership. Hence, the temporary resignation of Mahanta after he had been expelled was an "irrelevant issue", Barua said. Mahanta's faction questioned the legality of the representative meeting in the Court. But the petition was rejected. So the newly constituted AGP is legitimate legal entity¹⁰⁹. After much political and legal battle, AGP (R) had to change its name to Natun Asom Gana Parishad (NAGP) and decided to contest the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in 1991. Their plea for allotment of the Elephant symbol to them was rejected by the election commission and asked the AGP (R) leaders to change the name of the party. It was viewed as victory for the Mahanta faction whereas Pulakesh Barua defended that their symbol of two leaves symbolizes freshness as against the weak and over burdened elephant symbol of the AGP. Accordingly, The NAGP adopted a new flag and the election symbol of two leaves and a bud. The new party fielded candidates in 85 Assembly and 9 parliamentary seats. All these development signified that the personal ego and individual interests of the factional leaders widened the gap and made the split inevitable. Multiple factional leaders and power centers emerged in the AGP which compromised the general will of the people. The general will of the people was that all the regional leaders must unite. At the moment when factional politics reached the peak, social situation in Assam became explosive due to the heavy crackdown of the security forces on the ULFA militants in the rural areas. The failure of the AGP leadership to put a united stand for the sake of Assamese nationality was viewed by many as betrayal of trust. The Congress party was ready to cash on the disintegration of regional political leaders and in the ensuing election of 1991 the AGP was urooted from the power.

¹⁰⁹ *The Assam Tribune*, 1991.

4.3 Factionalism after the Assembly election of 1991

The Indian National Congress party came to power in Assam with a thumping majority in the Assembly election of 1991. The party won 66 seats with a share of 29.35 % votes polled. The Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) for the first time could enlist win in 10 seats with a share of 6.55% vote polled, specially in the constituencies dominated by the Bengali linguistic minorities in the Barak valley and Dhubri. The Indian National Congress was the ultimate winner after the breakup of the AGP vote bank in Brahmaputra valley. The maladministration during 1985-1990 and internal squabbles in the regional party have already weakened the AGP vote bank. The split of the party put the death nail on the coffin.

After the split in the AGP, command of party leadership remained literally with Thaneswar Bodo but real power was exercised by Mahanta. Mahanta was elected as the leader of the AGP legislature party after the Assembly election of 1991. Some senior leaders specially Atul Bora was not pleased at this development. Bora on 28th June 1991 said that he would have preferred Thaneswar Bodo as the leader of the AGP legislature party and it would have fostered unity among the opposition parties on the floor of the Assembly. Bora even disassociated himself with the party's declaration of Mahanta being 'unanimously' elected. Newspaper reported that the AGP's legislature party meeting was marred with some unpleasant scenes and hinted on more factional rivalry in the party¹¹⁰. Atul Bora declared,

"We lost a number of seats in the Assembly election of 1991 because of the fact that party's poll banners had photos of the former Chief Minister printed on them".

In his own constituency of Dispur he had asked his supporters to remove Mahanta's picture from all poll posters and other materials¹¹¹. Bora had protested policy of glorifying a single leader in the AGP. He said AGP is not an individual based party but one which believes in collective leadership.

¹¹⁰ *The Assam Tribune*, 29th June, 1991. Biraj Kumar Sarma and Utpal Dutta, two of the Mahanta loyalists were present in the meeting. The acting president Thaneswar Bodo asked them to leave the meeting because they were neither elected MLAs nor central observers, hence no business in the AGP legislature party meeting. But other Mahanta loyalists present in the meeting had intervened and asked Bodo to allow them to attend the meeting. This angered Atul Bora who stormed out of the meeting in a huff.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*

Thaneswar Bodo remained AGP president till 7th January, 1992. In the 2nd general conference of the party held in Guwahati from 7th to 9th January, 1992, veteran academician and former Lok Sabha member Paragdhara Chaliha became the president. He tried to lead the party in a befitting manner and made efforts to unite both the breakaway factions. Everybody realized that it won't be possible to win elections in future unless both the parties reunite. The vernacular media turned it into a public opinion. Paragdhara Chaliha, Thaneswar Bodo, Atul Bora and all the senior leaders agreed on the fact. But no substantial move for the unification was taken till 1994. In the middle of 1994, AGP formed a small committee for this purpose comprised of Paragdhara Chaliha, Atul Bora, Digen Bora and Bharat Chandra Narah.

4.3.1 Unification of the breakaway factions: The AGP and the NAGP

Atul Bora took special interest in the unification of the AGP and the NAGP. At his instance, formal talk started between a three member committee of the AGP with three NAGP envoys namely, Brindaban Goswami, Dinabandhu Choudhury and Ramendra Narayan Kalita on 19th September, 1994. The meeting was held at Hatishila in Chandrapur near Guwahati. It was agreed upon that a new post of working president would be created for the NAGP and the post of president will remain with the AGP. But Bhriku Kumar Phukan who was present in the meeting declined the proposal and demanded the post of president for the NAGP, which was turned down by the AGP representatives. The reunification talk started again when AASU general secretary Samujjal Bhattacharyya and others mediated with a greater aim of defeating the Congress in the forthcoming Assembly election. On request from the AASU, Hiren Gohain agreed to be the mediator. After a series of talks, it was decided in an informal way that in the next general conference Mahanta would be the president and Phukan the working president of the AGP. But Mahanta faction led by Digen Bora was very strong and this group was unwilling to welcome the NAGP. But the pressure of the AASU and public opinion was in favour of unification.

Hiren Gohain observes that

*“Mahanta adopted the delay tactic and bye time to consolidate his position in the district committees. Once that objective is achieved, Mahanta would express his inability saying the grassroot workers did not want unification. Phukan often felt perturbed and humiliated in such tactful ploy of Mahanta.”*¹¹²

Paragdhara Chaliha as the president of the AGP played a constructive role and was in favour of unity. Even some NAGP leaders were also desperate to merge with the AGP again; e.g., Pulakesh Barua, the president of the NAGP joined the AGP in a hurry which further weakened the NAGP. Finally, both the factions negotiated at the Khanapara Veterinary Guest house and decided that Paragdhara Chaliha shall continue as the president and Bhriku Kumar Phukan would be the working president for the time being. Hitesh Deka, Ramendra Narayan Kalita from NAGP and Hiten Goswami, Sahidul Alom Choudhury and Dilip Saikia Sonowal from the AGP participated in this meeting¹¹³.

Atul Bora later exclaimed that the agreement of unification was not reached on equal terms and NAGP would have to play subsidiary role in future. Media had highlighted the reunion of two old friends, Phukan and Mahanta. It was peculiar that the unification of the two political parties was never given importance in the AGP circle¹¹⁴. Efforts continued to give the unification a final shape in the third general conference at Lakhimpur on 27-29 October, 1995. Both the parties, the AGP and the NAGP were present in the conference in full strength. As per the understanding, Mahanta became the president of the party and Bhriku Kumar Phukan was supposed to have been given the post of working president. But a strong lobby led by Atul Bora, Digen Bora and Biren Baishya didn't let it happen. Paragdhara Chaliha was presiding over the conference. The post of working president was not even created in the general council. None of the NAGP leaders were accommodated in the central executive committee. This amounted to public

¹¹² Hiren Gohain, Personal interview, Guwahati, May 9, 2016.

¹¹³ Mrinal Talukdar, *Assam after Independence*, (Guwahati: Nanda Talukdar Foundation, 2017), 328.

¹¹⁴ Atul Bora, *Abirata Sangram*, (Guwahati: Maa Prakashok Gosthi, 2007), 105, 106.

humiliation of the the NAGP leaders along with Bhriku Kumar Phukan and Brindaban Goswami. The main aspect of the AGP and NAGP unification shattered, because the AGP leaders always considered counterparts in the NAGP as obstacles and impediments for fulfillment of their personal ambitions. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, after becoming the president paid a deaf ear to these affairs of his supporters. In fact, despite the unification, leaders of the AGP and the NAGP had never come closer and internal strife continued in the AGP.

Despite the fact, the party riding on the media hype and popular support participated in the Assembly election of 1996. Bhriku Kumar Phukan took special initiative to form a grand coalition of AGP, CPI, CPI (M) and ASDC. The support of Jamiyat Ulema-e-Hind and the UPPA led by Abdul Muhib Mazumdar helped the coalition to bag the minority votes in Assam. The role of Sahidul Alom Choudhury was very much crucial in obtaining the minority the minority support to the AGP. People of Assam too wanted to get rid of the maladministration of the Hireswar Saikia government. During this period, counter insurgency operations of the scurrility forces and the carrot and stick policy of the government towards the autonomy movement of the Bodos and the secessionist movement of the ULFA made the common people suffer. Ethnic clashes between the Bodos and the Adibasis increased, both religious and the linguistic minorities faced oppression. Obviously, people wanted to get rid of this Hobbesian state of affairs and voted the AGP led coalition into power. In the Assembly election held on April 27, 1996 the AGP led front got 68 seats. Voting percentage was 78.92%, an increase of almost 5% (74.67% in 1991), a record that reflected the peoples support for the AGP. Two of the NAGP sitting MLAs, viz., Badan Barua of Hajo and Hiteswar Deka of Kamalpur were denied a ticket because Nurul Hussain and Moidul Islam Bora of the Mahanta faction were strong contenders to the respective seats. Being the party president, Mahanta was the sole contender for the Chief Minister's post. The new AGP ministry took the oath on 15th May, 1996.

4.4 Impact of competitive factionalism on the AGP

The idea of collective leadership was in vogue since the Golaghat convention of 1985 when the AGP as a regional party emerged. In the proceeding of central executive meetings held on 28 and 29th October, 1985 there was mention of collective leadership. The six member collegium of presidents was formed in Golaghat to steer the party. As per the central body resolution the collegiums of presidents will make rules for construction of district level organization of the AGP¹¹⁵. The AGP was formed with one chief president and five other presidents. The AGP leadership as appeared in the proceeding of central executive meeting¹¹⁶ was as follows:

1. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Chief President
2. Thaneswar Bodo President
3. Binod Goswami -do-
4. Biren Bodo -do-
5. Brindaban Goswami -do-
6. Ataur Rahman -do-

There were five vice presidents and three general secretaries. The general secretaries included Bhrigu Kumar Phukan from AASU, Atul Bora from PLP and Biraj Kumar Sarma as the convener of AAGSP. The complete central executive was the most powerful body which included all the prominent leaders of the Assam Movement. But factional rivalry made the idea of collective leadership obsolete and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta remained and functioned as the only President of the AGP. The first general conference at Mangaldoi on 18th to 20th January 1988 consolidated power of the Mahanta faction in an obvious way. Brindaban Goswami and Thaneswar Bodo were made vice presidents. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan and Atul Bora remained as general secretaries.

It is reported that Brindaban Goswami wanted to become the President of the new party in the political convention at Golaghat on 13th and 14th October, 1985.

¹¹⁵ Proceeding of central executive meeting of the AGP on 28-29 October, 1985, page 8

¹¹⁶ Proceeding of the central executive meeting of the AGP held on 22nd December, 1985 in the Nehru stadium guest house, page 41

Goswami and Dineswar Tasa became the conveners of the political convention and were regarded as the chief architects of the new regional political party. However, his wish to become the president was not fulfilled. The convention made Prafulla Kumar Mahanta the president. That was opposed by Atul Bora on behalf of the PLP. To avoid an awkward situation, the collegiums system was proposed and accepted. But the AASU faction of the AGP rejected the collegium system and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the President of the party¹¹⁷.

From the very beginning, dominant AASU leaders, politicians of the AJD and the PLP, youth leaders of the AJYCP were at the helm of leadership in the AGP. But groupism and lack of administrative knowledge crippled the party as well as the government. The leaders who had good hands on the mastery of social movement were proved disgusting administrators. Besides, with no inner party discipline, the AGP was riding high on the motions of the Assamese people. Within two months of its formation, the party had to prepare for the Assembly and parliamentary elections in December 1985. The organizational structure, the constitution and rules were yet to be framed. Therefore, ticket distribution for the election was too chaotic. Everyone seemed to have been vying for a party ticket. The presidents and general secretaries had to hide themselves from such contenders. Premkanta Mahanta¹¹⁸ wrote that as soon as the date of election was declared by the election commission, ex-student leaders, pseudo leaders tried to get party ticket in an inconsiderate manner. Ticket distribution became a childish affair without any consideration of seniority, experience and knowledge. Competition among the top leaders began to ensure ticket for their own supporters in the assembly constituencies in order to stay in the fray for the top posts in the government. It was a matter of surprise to see the otherwise inexperienced student leader's

¹¹⁷ Mrinal Talukdar, *Assam after Independence*, (Guwahati: Nanda Talukdar Foundation, 2017), 313.

¹¹⁸ Mrinal Talukdar remarks in his book '*Assam after Independence*' advances the opinion, "The Assam history can never forget Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharyya and Premkanta Mahanta. These two senior police officials, jeopardizing their professional careers, transformed Assam's foreigners' issue into a national problem." Bhattacharjee was an IPS officer who was dismissed from the service for actively supporting the Assam Movement." Premkanta Mahanta was an APS officer who was a sympathizer and organizer of the movement. For details please consult '*Betrayal of North East: The Arrested Voice*' (2015) by Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharyya, Manas Publications, New Delhi.

reckless strive in power politics. All the leaders became candidates in their respective home places. Some of them even resorted to inglorious influence and use of force. The final candidate's list could not be prepared in the party head office. But Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan had to make it hiding in a house owned by Dizen Phukan, an Assamese businessman in Naamail, away from Guwahati. Premkanta Mahanta, an experienced IPS officer of Assam cadre applied for party nomination from the Sootea constituency which was denied to him. Mahanta, who was a passionate supporter of the Assam Movement and an architect of the anti-foreigner struggle, was not even called for election campaigning for the party. He describes his deep anguish in his heart for not being able to play a role for the party which was virtually his brainchild. At last, he voluntarily started campaigning at North Lakhimpur and other places. He did not get an invitation to the oath taking ceremony of the first AGP government. Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharyya, the other senior police officer of Assam, who was a torchbearer of the Assam Movement, was also not invited¹¹⁹. In the evening of 24th December 1985, the day of oath taking ceremony, Biraj Kumar Sarma, MLA of East Guwahati constituency brought out a protest rally in Uzanbazar area because he was not given a ministerial berth. All these internal squabbles and power mongering, indiscipline and childish attitude of the AGP leaders forecasted the future of the new born regional party. The competition for power continued unabated till 1991 and culminated in the split in the party. Actually the AGP was formally split into three parts- the AGP, the NAGP and Jatiya Swatantra Manch. Earlier, Chandramohan Patowary had criticized Chief Minister's proposal to shift the capital of Asam to Kaliabor or any other place in middle Assam for administrative convenience. Patowary was paid the price of criticizing Mahanta. He was dropped from the cabinet along with 11 others in the first ministry reshuffle in 1988. There were other reasons of personal difference between the two as well. Ultimately, he had to quit the AGP and formed another party named 'Jatiya Swatantra Manch' with Reboti Phukan and Pranab Phukan. Patowary won in 1991 from Dharmapur constituency as a candidate of the Manch.

¹¹⁹ Premkanta Mahanta, *Raj Bhogonor Pora Kol Thokaloike*, autobiography, Guwahati , 118-121.

The split and personal differences weakened the opposition unity and the AGPs role as constructive opposition in Assam Assembly was very poor. The Hiteswar Saikia regime was marred with fratricidal conflict between the ULFA and SULFA, ethnic conflict in the Bodo-Adibasi, Karbi-Dimasa regions. The counter insurgency operations and the draconian laws of TADA created serious human rights violations. The minorities were the worst sufferers. But AGP camp was still meditating over their internal factionalism. Mass media played the role of opposition in Assam. And it was the blessings of mass media that AGP could dream of coming to power again in 1996.

4.4.1 The 'prisoner's dilemma' in the AGP: fate of the party

Hiranya Bhattacharyya writes,

*"No efforts were made to organize the party at the grass root level with the result that dedicated cadres capable of sustaining the party during the lean period did not surface at all. The leadership of the party has been monopolized by the same set of leaders till date whereas other political parties have been trying to induct new and young blood into their respective ranks."*¹²⁰

The party could not capitalize on the large-scale popular support and emotional attachment of the ordinary people of Assam. Factionalism was looked down upon by the people as self-serving and against the regional interest of Assam. As the party had to face the general election immediately after its formation in 1985, the organizational set up remained incomplete. Even the constitution of the AGP was not final till the first general conference at Mangaldoi from 18th to 20th January, 1988. The framers of the party constitution did not pay attention to the collegium system of leadership as per the Golaghat political convention. AGP constitution made the provision for only one president. The collective leadership system would have been fruitful in curbing personality cult in the party. The selection process of the first central executive was also undemocratic. As Premkanta Mahanta writes,

"The list of members for the central executive was prepared in haste and was simply read out in the Golaghat convention. No discussion on nomination of able and experienced members to the central

¹²⁰ 'Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharyya. *Betrayal of North East: An Arrested Voice*, (New Delhi, Manas Publications, 2015), 231.

executive committee was initiated. The dissident voices were subdued and the list got approved. Thus, autocracy and fascist tendencies prevailed from the beginning in the AGP."¹²¹

The first party workshop-cum-political seminar was held on 26-29 April, 1986 at Guwahati. All the important issues like party ideology, implementation of the Assam Accord, party organization and its relation with the government, implementation of the election promises etc., necessary for the ruling party was scheduled to be discussed in the workshop. It was very much fruitful for the party cadres. But the practice was discontinued and leaders convened workers conventions only when there was a need to consolidate factional strength and power. Some senior leaders and central executive members visited Andhra Pradesh to acquire practical knowledge of organization building from the Telegu Desham Party (TDP). All these efforts went in vain when factional rivalry and contradictions started growing in the AGP. Second best attempt for consolidating party organization was made in the first general conference at Mangaldoi. However, there was continuous stir about the organizational weakness of the AGP. The editorials of the *Gana Batori*, the weekly party mouthpiece published from the head quarter of the AGP are a testimonial to it. The *Gana Batori* appealed to the MPs and also to the current MLAs to engage in party organization¹²². The party organization and activities were limited to the Central Committee, District and the Anchalik (Mandal) committees only. After the election most of the Central committee members became MLAs, Ministers or Chairmen to government corporations and boards. So the central committee has become relatively weak. The system of 'one person one post' if implemented in the government and the party organization then AGP as a party would have perhaps been stronger. In most cases at the district level the presidents and secretaries were engaged in more than one post of profit at local level. Ganabatari, the weekly mouthpiece of the party viewed that

"The office of profit did jeopardize the party organization. Most of the District offices of the AGP were not opened daily. Moreover, the district level functionaries came to the central office only to

¹²¹ Premkanta Mahanta. *Raj Bhogonor Pora Kol Thokaloike*, autobiography, 119.

¹²² *Gana Batori*, 16-30 April, 1987.

advocate for transfer and posting of some officers, or to accomplish some selfish personal matters. If things would be running like this way, the AGP as cadre-based party would never grow; its support base diminished.”¹²³

These editorials of the party mothpiece itself depict the state of affairs in the AGP after it assumed power in Assam. No responsible person shouldered the responsibility of building the organization. Some devoted leaders, who were ideologically grounded and wanted to serve the Assamese national sentiment, viz. Krishna Gopal Bhattacharyya, Binoy Kumar Tamuli, Debadutta Barkataki, Chanakya Das, Narayan Sarma and the like bestowed selfless service to the party. Soon they got disillusioned at the power bickering among the ministers and leaders. The factional leaders wanted to gobble the top party posts in order to exercise absolute control during election, ticket distribution and ministry formation. Even when the party was not in power the ‘Prisoner’s dilemma’ continued to haunt the party leadership and made the organization to suffer.

4.5 Factionalism and crisis of governance in Assam

Hiranya Bhattacharyya writes,

“Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, from the president ship of the AASU, was catapulted to the topmost seat of power in the state without any administrative experience at his command.”¹²⁴

The AGP Ministers showed no regard for the seasoned bureaucrats too. Experienced administrator like Jatin Hazarika was shunted off from the post of Home Secretary. The senior officials were also seemed to maintain a measured distance from the ministers for their arrogance. As a result, the objectives of good governance to fulfill people’s aspirations received a setback. Leaders like Paragdhara Chaliha, Dinesh Goswami, Muhiram Saikia, Nagen Saikia, Aatur Rahman were experienced and seasoned politicians. But they were elected to the Lok Sabha and not allowed to take part in the governance in Assam.

¹²³ *Gana Batori*, 16-31 May, 1987.

¹²⁴ Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharyya, *Betrayal of North East: An Arrested Voice* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2015), 230-231.

There were four power centers in the first AGP government. Occasionally, Atul Bora sided with Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Brindaban Goswami supported Bhriku Kumar Phukan in their factional rivalries. As a result, the AGP had become a battlefield for some immature and indisciplined leaders and the government as well as the party had to suffer the political consequences. Bhriku Kumar Phukan held the Home department, Political Department and General Administration. Very soon Mahanta realized the importance of keeping the Political Department in his hand. In 1988 in the name of a ministry reshuffle, curtailed the Political Department from Bhriku Kumar Phukan which angered the Home Minister. He shifted his official residence to the DGP quarter at Panbazar. Mahanta and Phukan completely mistrusted each other and even did not hesitate to upset each other. Mahanta faction blamed Home Department under Bhriku Kumar Phukan for the ULFA problem and the Bodo agitation. The cordial relations of several ministers with the ULFA cadres also made the situation worse. Police was not allowed to act with a free hand. The Director General of Police, Nishinath Changkakoti directly approached the Chief Minister Mahanta seeking instructions, without informing the Home Minister Phukan. In deep anguish Bhriku Kumar Phukan resigned as Home Minister on August 2, 1988. Mahanta after receiving Phukan's resignation letter tendered his own resignation writing to the party general secretary Atul Bora. Atul Bora sensing a grave danger to the government mediated between the two rival leaders and persuaded them to withdraw their resignations.

On 7th September, 1988, the president of the Kamrup District Student's Union, Hrishikesh Goswami came up with corruption charges against several AGP ministers. These allegations were not baseless and rattled the AGP government. Chief Minister Mahanta conducted first ministry reshuffle very soon and dropped 12 ministers and included 7 new faces subsequently. Surprisingly, most of the new faces were close associates of Mahanta and some dropped ministers included supporters of Bhriku Kumar Phukan¹²⁵. The list is given below:

¹²⁵ Basanta Deka, Personal an interview, Guwahati, 8th January, 2015

Table 4.3
The first reshuffle of the AGP ministry in 1988

Ministers dropped	Factional affiliation	Ministers included	Factional affiliation
Digen Bora	P.K.Mahanta faction	Zoiinath Sarma	P.K.Mahanta faction
Lalit Rajkhowa	-do-	Deba Kumar Bora	-do-
Nagen Sarma	-do-	Gunin Hazarika	-do-
Biraj Sarma	-do-	Ganesh Kutum	-do-
Chandramohan Patowary	-do-	Dilip Kumar Saikia	-do-
Pabindra Deka	Independent	Durgadas Bodo	-do-
Dwipen Tanti	Independent	Holiram Terang	Independent (PDF)
Pradip Gogoi	Independent		
Kamakhya Charan Choudhury	B. K. Phukan faction		
Abhijit Sarma	B.K. Phukan faction		
Ramendra Narayan Kalita	B. K. Phukan faction		

Source: Various interviews with the AGP leaders

The above list is tentative and the factional affiliations are time specific. The factional members changed their loyalty from time to time. For example Chandramohan Patowary was expelled by the Mahanta factions from the party later due to his alleged anti-party activity. Pabindra Deka, another important leader of the party, sat on a hunger strike against Mahanta in mid 1990s. Deka was also expelled who returned to Purbanchaliya Loka Parishad (PLP). Mahanta Ministry was reshuffled six times during the five year tenure which signified internal dissention and demand from the agitating MLAs of the party. The number of ministers was expanded to 32 in January, 1990. This time Prafulla kumar Mahanta succeeded in inclusion of Rekharani Das Bodo, Biraj Kumar Sarma, Thaneswar Bodo, Girin Barua, Utpal Dutta, Kamala Kalita and Kumar Deepak Das in his ministry. These members of the AGP legislature party were hardcore supporters of Mahanta. In this way, his grip over the party and the government became firm. Home Minister Bhrigu Kumar Phukan did not attend the outh-taking ceremony of the new ministers. On the next day, Chief Minister openly brought allegations against Phukan in a press meeting, that he never got any support from the Home Minister since the day of forming the government. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan also

countered the allegation that he was not prepared to be a part of the misdeeds of the Chief Minister¹²⁶.

As such internal bickering in the AGP resulted in indiscipline and inefficiency or vice-versa. Mrinal Talukdar (2017) identified three reasons for the unrest and controversies during the first AGP rule¹²⁷.

- Internal strife in the party
- Increase in the ULFA's strength
- Violent movement of the Bodos

Newspapers headlines filled with stories of corruption, salacious conduct, nepotism, personal misconduct and intra-party rivalries of the AGP leaders. The 'Letter of Credit' scandal involving the misappropriation of more than four hundred crore rupees from the public exchequer had shaken the civil society. The personal property and luxury of the ministers and the MLAs grew astonishing.

Meanwhile, the law and order situation was gradually going out of control. The business houses in Assam regarded ULFA as the B team of the AGP. ULFA went on a full scale extortion spree, murder and kidnapping etc. The climax came when Surendra Paul, a tea baron and a close relation of Lord Swaraj Paul, was assassinated. Paul's murder caused widespread panic in the non-Assamese business houses. The central government got anxious as the insurgents were running parallel government in rural Assam. The RAW had executed a rescue operation of the tea industry executives from Doomdooma in upper Assam and took them secretly to Guwahati Airport on 8th November, 1990 without taking the AGP government into confidence. Thus, the Union Home Ministry was convinced that the Assam government was acting soft towards the ULFA. Eventually, the Chandra Shekhar government came under pressure from the Congress and dismissed AGP government on 27th November, 1990. Presidents' Rule was imposed on Assam and military operations started to contain the ULFA insurgency. At this point, allegations and counter allegations between the

¹²⁶ Mrinal Talukdar, *Assam after Independence* (Guwahati: Nanda Talukdar Foundation, 2017), 322.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, 317.

Mahanta and Phukan faction started blaming each other responsible for the aberration and governance crisis. The central executive of the party was filled with Mahanta supporters led by Digen Bora. Bhriku Kumar Phukan and other senior leaders demanded Mahanta's resignation which was not materialized. Instead, the dissidents were suspended from the party. The Phukan faction led by Pulakesh Barua and Brindaban Goswami formed parallel central executive body of the AGP on 25th March, 1991 and the party was formally split into two groups. This was a vertical split as all the district committees of the AGP had got divided.

4.6 Factionalism and electoral performance of the AGP

The party stalwarts and well-wishers attributed poor performance of the AGP in the Assembly election of 1991 to the division of votes. AGP could not win a single seat in the Lok Sabha election too, whereas in 1985 the party sent 7 members from Assam to the lower house of the Indian parliament. Most of them were senior leaders of the party. Two MPs of the party adorned important position in the Council of Ministers during the V P Singh government. Dinesh Goswami as the Union Law Minister did perform efficiently. It must be mentioned that during his tenure in the V P Singh cabinet, Goswami initiated the much coveted reforms in the election process of India. T N Seshan, in the capacity of Chief Election Commissioner of India actually materialized his dream later. The split in the AGP divided the voters. The AGP could win 19 seats and the NAGP had 5 seats. The party lost almost 19 seats with a very narrow margin. The following two tables will elaborate the consequence of factional politics in the AGP.

Table 4.4
Performance of the AGP in the Assembly election of 1985

Name of the party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Forfeited Deposit	Votes Polled %	Vote % in Seats contested
AGP*	---	66**	---	---	---
INC	125	25	46	23.23%	23.41%
PTCA	28	3	16	3.62%	16.34%
CPM	39	2	25	4.48%	14.10%

Source: Election Commission of India

*The AGP was not yet recognized by the Election Commission of India (ECI). The ECI data shows both the parties as Independents that also included the UMF members. They bagged 61.50% of the votes polled.

**The AGP actually won 59 seats. Four independent MLA joined the AGP after the result. They were Samsing Hanse, Sahidul Alom Choudhury, Sirajul Haque Choudhury and Kharsing Ingti representing Diphu, Algapur, North Karimganj and Howraghat respectively. On the other hand, Holiram Terang of PDF representing Boithalangso and independent Padma Koiri representing the Biswanath constituency became associate member of the AGP. Later Girin Barua and Dalim Roy increased the number to 66 winning by-elections from Nagaon and Golakganj constituency.

Table 4.5
Electoral performance of the AGP in the Assembly election of 1991 after the split

Name of the party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Forfeited Deposit	Votes Polled %	Vote % in Seats contested
AGP	121	19	57	17.93%	18.60%
NAGP	85	5	76	5.45%	8.06%
INC	125	66	28	29.35%	29.35%
BJP	48	10	29	6.55%	16.88%

Source: Election Commission of India

The above comparison shows that AGPs performance in the Assembly election dwindled in 1991 in comparison to that in 1985. The party organization virtually collapsed due to factionalism. The leaders were unaware about the support base and conditions at the grass roots. The district level committees were also got divided resulting in the dismal show both in the Assembly and in the Parliamentary election in 1991. The following table reveals the fact.

Table 4.6
Manifestation of factional politics in electoral performance of the AGP
(Comparison of Parliamentary elections of 1985 and 1991)

The Election to the 9 th Lok Sabha, 1985		The Election to the 10 th Lok Sabha, 1991	
Lok Sabha constituency	Name of the winning candidate	Lok Sabha constituency	Name of the winning candidate
Nowgong	Muhiram Saikia	Nowgong	Muhiram Saikia

Lakhimpur	Gakul Saikia		
Jorhat	Poragdhar Chaliha		
Kaliabor	Bhadreswar Tanti		
Mangaldoi	Saifuddin Ahmed		
Gauhati	Dinesh Goswami		
Barpeta	Ataur Rahman		
Total 7 (Seven)		Total 1 (one)	

Source: Election Commission of India

In the election to the 10th Lok Sabha AGP could bag only one seat with a share of 17.62% votes in the seats contested. The party contested in all 14 seats and forfeited security deposit in 6. The biggest beneficiary from this poll debacle was Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) This national party could increase its votes share considerably in 1991 and won two seats in the Barak Valley. However, the Barak valley had never been a strong hold of the AGP, but increase in BJPs support base in the Brahmaputra valley rang the alarm bell for the AGP.



The degenerative factionalism in the Asom Gana Parishad

Chapter 5

5.1 Second episode of the AGP government in Assam

The verdict of the Assembly election 1996 increased the popular expectation for the AGP. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was elected the leader of the AGP legislative party and became the Chief Minister. By this time, there were three to four leaders in the AGP legislative party equally powerful. Mahanta could hardly forget the help he got from Atul Bora, Digen Bora, Birendra Prasad Baishya and Nagen Sharma in the Lakhimpur general convention to become the president of the party and to keep the NAGP leaders away from leadership. Yet Mahanta using his position in the party and in the government controlled the both. The factional pattern during this period was unifactional, only one faction operated in the AGP. The sporadic revolt of some senior leaders during this period was characterized by personal frustration. The Mahanta faction consolidated their position in the party with deliberated and lethal strategy against the opponents.

The NAGP leaders were never welcomed to the party with open mind. The unifaction was a truce made only to win the Assembly election became clear immediately. Further, the NAGP camp became weak due to various reasons. The untimely death of Dinesh Goswami was a death blow to the anti-Mahanta faction. Former parliamentarian, Bijoya Chakravarty left her former colleagues and joined the BJP. Pulakesh Barua, former president of NAGP started to follow Atul Bora's dictum and remained silent. Three sitting MLAs of NAGP, viz. Paniram Rabha of Barama (ST), Hiteswar Deka of Kamalpur and Badan Barua of Hajo were denied tickets in the election of 1996. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan and Brindaban Goswami could not do much for them. Dinabandhu Choudhury of Sarukhetri, Jyotsna Sonowal of Sadiya, Abhijit Sharma of Jorhat and Tanka Bahadur Rai of the NAGP camp could not contest in the elections because Mahanta supporters were strongly pressing for ticket in the respective constituencies. In this way the dream of people

of Assam who wanted to see substantial change in the socio-political and economic scenario was shattered. After the election, factional rivalry increased manifold, neither Bhrigu Kumar Phukan nor Brindaban Goswami became ministers as Mahanta faction refused to offer respectable ministerial berth to them. Only Ramendra Narayan Kalita amongst the former NAGP leaders found a place in the council of ministers.

All these consequences of factionalism had impact on the society and politics of the state. The second AGP government also failed to maintain stability in the state. Journalist Parag Kumar Das¹²⁸, executive editor of *Asomiya Pratidin* (Assamese daily newspaper) was assassinated on 17th May, 1996 only two days after the swearing in of the new government. Assam plunged into fratricidal conflict and 'unified command structure'¹²⁹ started to control the law and order in the state. Ethnic clashes and separatist movement among the tribal were increasing. Corruption was on higher scale than the previous government. The AGP government never got any respite from all these. Chief Minister Mahanta was accused in the LoC scandal. Digen Bora, a close associate of Mahanta and MLA of Batadroba constituency, began to malign the senior leaders by painting them as future opponents of Mahanta. Atul Bora had to contest a by-election from the Dispur constituency as the election was previously halted due to the death of a candidate. But AASU was demanding a revision of the voter's list immediately and boycotted the election. As things were not turning into Atul Bora's favour, he sensed a conspiracy in the changing situation. Bora was desperate to get elected within six months to the Assam assembly. As per the provision of the Indian constitution, one has to get elected to the legislature within six months in order to

¹²⁸ Parag Kumar Das became a victim of rivalries between the ULFA and the SULFA (surrendered ULFA). Das was a staunch supporter of the demands put by the ULFA. He was very much vocal against the discriminating attitude of the Indian government towards Assam. His writings against the former Congress ministry under Hiteswar Saikia created public opinion in favour of the AGP. Thus, the anti-incumbency fuelled by the media played a crucial role in the Assembly election of 1996 and tilted the voters towards the AGP.

¹²⁹ Unified Command Structure means joint counter-insurgency operations conducted by the army in cooperation with the Assam Police against the separatists and secessionist groups in Assam, e.g., the ULFA, NDFB, DHD, etc.

remain his cabinet position, i.e., the PWD ministry. He suspected the Chief Minister and Digen Bora, the food and civil supply minister, engaging in a foul play against him. Atul Bora's position in the AGP government was not suitable for the interest of several other leaders in the Mahanta faction. Ultimately, Mahanta-Bora relation deteriorated and Bora started questioning the misdeeds of several ministers in the cabinet. He even raised voice against the speaker Ganesh Kutum in the Legislative Assembly when his screaming against Kutum's misuse of public fund was not attended by any in the cabinet meetings. Kutum in the capacity of the speaker to the Assam Legislative Assembly increased his discretionary fund to ten lakhs. He spent a lot in foreign visit and other things which was more than 90% of the budget provision allocated for the speaker. Mahanta felt uneasy at these allegations of corruption as he had close relation with Ganesh Kutum¹³⁰.

The tendency or unwillingness of the AGP leaders to accept a single leadership was crux of all problems in the party. The Mahanta faction successfully sidelined the NAGP leaders like Brindaban Goswami, Bhrigu Kumar Phukan and Pulakesh Barua. But Atul Bora and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta got engaged in personal clash and the AGP government faced the crisis of decisional stalemate. The collective goal of the party was compromised for the sake of factional interest. Rampant corruption charges, administrative instability, employee's movement and insurgency rattled the AGP. The Mahanta faction was self-serving as usual and his lieutenants created further segmentation in the lean periods. Therefore, this period of factionalism was degenerative. The party could not repair the degeneration and people's faith in regional political parties was at stake. This had paved the way for the National political parties in Assam.

5.2 The beginning of a new phase of factionalism

The motion for a renewed conflict in the party started in the Lakhimpur general convention on 27 to 29 October, 1995. The leaders from erstwhile NAGP were denied a place in the central committee. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, Brindaban

¹³⁰ Atul Bora, *Abirata Sangram* (Guwahati: Maa Prakashak Gosthi, 2007), 117.

Goswami and other leaders left the convention early and expressed their displeasure in media. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan had been acting as the working president of the party since the AGP-NAGP unification in 1993 as per resolution of central executive committee on 12/07/1993. A post of working president was created for representative of the NAGP amending the clause 8:2 (A) of the AGP constitution¹³¹. Since then Paragdhara Chaliha was the president and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan acted as the working president. Moreover, the constitution was amended to include five members in the central working committee from the NAGP block. District level committees were reconstituted amalgamating both the AGP and the NAGP office bearers¹³². Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, in the capacity of the working president built good rapport with the tribal leaders and other political parties in view of a probable anti-congress coalition for the forthcoming assembly election. He, according to a reliable source, was ready to give in writing that he would never stake a claim for the post of Chief Minister. But he might have aspired to become the party president. The AASU was in his favour. The president and secretary of the AASU, *viz.* Sarbananda Sonowal and Samujjal Bhattacharyya requested Hiren Gohain for a mediation between the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan. It was well known to all that the AASU lobby was supporting Bhrigu-Brindaban faction¹³³. In the mean time, Atul Bora also formed his own faction with Pulakesh Barua at his back. The rising power and influence of Bhrigu-Brindaban faction brought Atul Bora and Mahanta together.

Ultimately, in the Lakhimpur general convention, outgoing president Paragdhara Chaliha proposed the name of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta as the president and he was elected unopposed. When the question of creating a post of working president aroused, Atul Bora, Digen Bora and Birendra Prasad Baishya vehemently opposed it. The unified AGP was divided into two groups. No members from the former NAGP contested in the executive posts; Brindaban Goswami and Pulakesh Barua

¹³¹ Proceeding of the central executive committee meeting dated 12th July, 1993.

¹³² Proceeding of the central executive committee meeting dated 13th August, 1993.

¹³³ Lakhinandan Bora 'Alpo-bistor,' column in the *Tinidinia Agradoot* (Assamese by-weekly newspaper), November 5, 1995.

withdrew from contesting in the general secretary and vice-president posts. All the NAGP leaders withdrew their nomination from other posts in the central executive. The NAGP leaders left Lakhimpur in the night of 28th October, when the internal election to various posts to the central committee was going on. Atul Bora was elected with highest vote as the general secretary. The following table clearly depicts the power of the Mahanta faction in the AGP.

Table 5.1

The central executive committee elected in the Lakhimpur general convention of the AGP in 1995

Post	Name of the member (the number indicates the votes secured in the election)
President	Prafulla Kumar Mahanta (uncontested)
Vice Presidents (There were 8 candidates)	Nurul Hussain (201)
	Ganesh Kutum (172)
	Durgadas Bodo (154)
	Rekharani Das Bodo (145)
	Biraj Kumar Sarma (133)
General Secretaries (There were 15 candidates)	Atul Bora (245)
	Pradip Hazarika (172)
	Sahidul Alom Choudhury (160)
	Nagen Sarma (159)
Executive members (there were 48 candidates)	Birendra Prasad Baishya (152), Kartik Hazarika (142)
	Renupama Rajkhowa (139), Quin Ozha (97), Kamala Kalita (95),
	Mrigen Das (95), Shiba Sinha Konwar (94), Pranab Goswami (91) and Prabin Hazarika (81)

Source: Proceeding of the Lakhimpur general convention, 1995

Hiren Gohain was of the opinion that Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was much shrewd politician than Bhrigu Kumar Phukan. Mahanta lobbied at the grassroots, among the district level leaders and hence his supporters outnumbered the other factions

in the central committee¹³⁴. Meanwhile, the hunger strike of the Lakhimpur District committee of the AASU protesting against the Mahanta faction was significant feature of the Lakhimpur convention. According to Ramendra Narayan Kalita,

*“The lack of trust between Mahanta and Phukan was manufactured by some self-seeking politician within and outside the party. Some backbiters instigated each other.”*¹³⁵

There was a debate and subsequent propaganda going on constantly regarding a comparative popularity, efficiency and leadership quality of the factional leaders in the AGP which led to the breach of trust and damaged the organization of the party.

The difference accelerated while distributing the tickets for the assembly election of 1996. The AGP successfully formed a pre-poll alliance with CPI, CPI (M), ASDC, PDF and UPPA. With the mediation of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Sahidul Alam Choudhury, the AGP was able to garner the support of the Jamait Ulema-e-Hind. This in fact increased possibility that the minorities would vote for the AGP led coalition. It actually happened in this election. The initiatives taken by Bhriku Kumar Phukan while he was the working president of the AGP have started to yield result. The tribal communities of Assam and the Assamese speaking voters who suffered during the Operation Rhino I and Operation Rhino II during the Hiteswar Saikia regime favoured the AGP. Large number of religious minorities in Assam preferred the AGP than the Congress because of the inability of the Congress government to stop atrocities on them done by the insurgents groups. The election was held on May 10, 1996 and the people of Assam restored the AGP led coalition in power. CPI and UPPA participated in the government and other parties extended support from outside.

¹³⁴ Hiren Gohain, Personal Interview, Guwahati, August 6, 2015.

¹³⁵ Ramendra Narayan Kalita, Personal Interview, AGP Headquarter at Ambari, Guwahati, May 9, 2016.

Table 5.2**Performance of the united front of the AGP in the Assembly election of 1996**

Name of the party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Forfeited Deposit	Votes Polled %	Vote % in Seats contested
AGP	92	59	10	29.70%	37.58%
CPI	11	3	4	1.95%	23.32%
CPI (M)	10	2	3	1.94%	23.70%
ASDC	5	5	0	1.98%	52.55%
INC	122	34	22	30.56%	30.56%
BJP	117	4	95	10.41%	10.78%

Source: Election Commission of India data (1997)

The AGP led coalition had 70 seats in the 10th Assam Assembly. But in terms of voting percentage the Indian National Congress (INC) was above of the AGP. This signifies that the vote bank of the national party had not reduced. Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) too had a good share in the vote percentage. Only the 'first past the post system' in election process helped the AGP led coalition to win in a lot of constituencies.

5.2.1 Power struggle and the impasse to development

After the election, conflict arose while the process of formation of the ministry was on. Economic and political prudence had not been observed by Chief Minister Mahanta while selecting his colleagues. The 30 member council of ministers had ten from the Nagaon district and six from the Kamrup district. Nagaon was the home district of the Chief Minister Mahanta and his bias for his appeaser annoyed many within the party. One each from the Jorhat and the Golaghat district, were allotted rank of a state minister. They did not accept it and remained aloof from oath-taking ceremony¹³⁶. They were Hiten Goswami of Jorhat constituency and Binod Gowala of Sarupathar constituency. Gowala was an important leader of the tea-tribe community. People criticized, on one hand, inclusion of several corrupt

¹³⁶ *Tinidinia Agradoot* (Assamese by-weekly newspaper), Guwahati, 19 May, 1996.

persons who earned bad name during the first AGP government and on the other absence of leaders like Pulakesh Barua, Brindaban Goswami and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan in the ministry. Pulaksh Barua, who earned good name as Speaker to the Assam Assembly during 1985-1990 for non-partisan and uncompromising role, reacted to a question of a news reporter when asked whether he is satisfied or not-

“This is not a question of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, Mahanta has formed his ministry according to the prerogative and right of a Chief Minister; hence no comment.”¹³⁷

But the remorse faces of the former NAGP leaders evidently cleared the state of affairs in the AGP. Ganesh Kutum and Nurul Hussain, two close associates of Mahanta became the Speaker and Deputy speaker respectively. Later on the duo was seen fighting with each other for power in the Assam Assembly. Pramod Gogoi of CPI participated in the ministry on cabinet rank, which was an elegant move. But the name of Abdul Muhib Mazumdar, lone MLA representing the UPPA, in cabinet rank was not taken easily by many in the Brahmaputra valley. Mazumdar was the chief architect of the IM (DT) Act, 1983, which he crafted as congressman and is denounced by the AGP as stumbling block in detection and determination of foreigners in Assam. Some districts like Sonitpur, Dhemaji were not at all represented in the AGP ministry. Sonitpur was the home district of Brindaban Goswami and postering against the discrimination could be seen on the walls in Tezpur town. Mahanta was even ready to allow Bhrigu Kumar Phukan a ministerial berth. But Phukan declined to accept it sans Goswami¹³⁸. Before the formation of the ministry, some news reports tried to malign the image of Bhrigu Kumar Phukan portraying him as Congress agent. So, Mahanta succumbed to such outside pressure and kept Phukan away from the new AGP ministry. Moreover, various ethnic communities of Assam were not represented properly. This weakness in the leadership and decision making scripted a sad chapter in the history of the AGP. Almost all the elected MLAs were seen vying for a place in the

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

¹³⁸ Mrinal Talukdar, *Assam after Independence*, (Guwahati: Nanda Talukdar Foundation, 2017), 330.

ministry. Many committed persons with integrity were left out. Even the ministers were unwilling to vacate their post in the party organization also. Several of the committed AGP leaders disillusioned at this state of affairs in the party. Some became dormant and others left the party in search of new avenues.

5.2.2 The pre-poll pact with the rebels and its consequence

Sanjoy Hazarika, one of the leading journalists of Assam, wrote, "AGPs slide in popular support came at the same time when ULFAs ratings soared. The AGP did not understand that its shortsightedness was only preparing its own political grave."¹³⁹ The ULFA capitalized on the factional differences in the AGP to set up its own organization in the rural areas during the first tenure of AGP rule. The ULFA emerged as an insurgent organization with an avowed objective of safeguarding the interests of Assamese nationality on the basis of self determination and sovereignty from the Indian union. Bhriгу Kumar Phukan, the Home Minister of Assam during 1985 to 1990 once observed, 'they (ULFA) are from among us'¹⁴⁰. So the ULFA's popularity was not merely mandated by fear. It had great support among the villagers, middle class gentry, the academics, local entrepreneurs and the students. The politicians regarded the ULFA as a power to reckon with for success in elections. In fact, the revolutionaries were the fellows of commonly student leaders in the Assam movement. Both were hand in glove, which restricted the Assam police to act in time. Even the ULFA infiltrated the police to the extent that the underground outfit knew instantly what its opponent was doing. The money extorted was deposited with a range of officials, businessman and politicians. State abdicated its responsibilities and businessman succumbed to pressure.

However, the insurgent organization received a jolt during the Hiteswar Saikia regime, between 1991 and 1996, when carrot and stick policy of Chief Minister Saikia created cracks in the organization. There were some internal dissensions

¹³⁹ Sanjoy Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1994), 184.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

regarding the government offer for bilateral negotiation. Several members of the ULFA surrendered either to evade counter insurgency operations of the military or in response to the call for negotiation with the government. Operation Rhino I during the president's rule, November, 1990 to May, 1991 and Operation Rhino II during the Congress rule led by Hiteswar Saikia was heavy blow for the insurgent outfit. There were several issues of human rights violation by the military as well. The common people had to bear the twin outrage of the ULFA as well as of the military. Hiteswar Saikia and his government became extremely unpopular in the course. Meanwhile, the AGP was charged with new vigor after the merger of the NAGP faction. It appealed for early political solution of the ULFA issue. The vernacular media was backing the AGP.

5.2.3 'The pond with all kinds of fish'

The AGP leaders entered into pre-election pact with the ULFA with a view to garner support from the public. India Today, leading news magazine of India, reported that one such copy of agreement was with them in which Nagen Sarma, AGP candidate from the Nalbari constituency while signing a pact with the Nalbari unit of Nirbachani Chetna Manch (a front of the ULFA) had endorsed the following views:

- "The right to secession of the indigenous people of Assam from other parts of India must be accepted in the Indian Constitution.
- The ban on all nationalist organizations has been imposed against the will of the people and should be lifted and a political solution worked out."¹⁴¹

If voted to power, the AGP leaders promised immediate political solution to the insurgency problem. Immediately after oath-taking of the AGP government, ULFA started attacking the government official. The first victim was the Superintendent of Police of Tinsukia District of Assam, who was shot dead along with several other policemen near Barguri of Tinsukia on 16th May, 1996. Many other police officials

¹⁴¹ 'AGP Ministers under suspicion for link with ULFA', *India Today*, December 1, 1997, retrieved from web.www.indiatoday.in on April 2, 2017.

and administrative officers who played active role during the rule of Hiteswar Saikia were on their target. At this point, it must be noted that four topmost senior officers of the administration, including the Chief Secretary, left Assam immediately after the election result was out. They were Chief Secretary Arunodoy Bhattacharyya, Director General of Police Ranju Das, Finance Secretary Nirranjan Ghosh and Inspector General of Police Ashim Roy. The exodus of senior officers of the bureaucracy was unprecedented event in the history of Assam. The assassination of well-known journalist of Assam, Parag Kumar Das, who was a sympathizer of the ULFA but succumbed to internal rivalries of the insurgents, also opened the Pandora's Box of the AGP government. The AGP was forced to adopt a hard-line approach. The coalition partners in Assam and the center had also started putting pressure upon the Chief Minister Mahanta. There was impending danger that if not acted upon the incessant spree of killing in Assam, center might impose President's Rule. West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, a noted CPI (M) leader, visited Assam towards the end of 1997 and in an interaction with the Chief Secretary enquired to him about the link between the AGP leaders and the extremist ULFA. Chief Secretary V.S.Jafa replied in a straight way, *"Well, this is a pond with all kinds of fish."*¹⁴²

In middle of 1997 the army filed an FIR against the Revenue Minister Joinath Sarma at Mangaldoi police station with case number 272/97, alleging that Sarma had been supporting the ULFA with cash and kind. The FIR was filed by R. P. Saha, captain of the 313 Field Regiment of the Indian Army on the basis of a statement by an arrested ULFA leader of the Darrang district unit¹⁴³. However, Joinath Sarma rejected the allegation as false and pre-meditated.

5.2.4 Unified Command Structure and factionalism in the party

Ultimately, the unified command structure was introduced and heavy crackdown upon the extremist jointly by the police and military began which made the ULFA dead against the AGP. Further, the Crime Investigation Department (CID) of

¹⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁴³ *The Asomiya Pratidin*, Assamese daily news paper on October 28, 1997 p.1.

Assam police interrogated top officials of the multinational companies like the Tata Tea, Williamson Magor, and Goodricke Tea etc. for their monetary support to the ULFA. These multinational companies had tried to buy peace by paying ransom to the ULFA. The ULFA set out to avenge the breach of trust. Its response was deadly for the leaders and grassroots workers of the AGP. They were threatened to quit the party and many obliged. The extremists called for boycott of the parliamentary election of 1998, in which the AGP lost in all seats. In the meantime, the dissidence of Bhrigu Kumar Phukan caught the eyes of the media. Phukan in a soothing attack against Mahanta called for withdrawal of the unified command and fresh political dialogue with the ULFA. The AGP leaders busy to quell the factionalism in their house completely ignored the organization of the party. So when the ULFA called for election boycott the grassroots workers tottered in awe. The top leaders were involved in the power struggle, while corruption charges and inefficiency ravaged the government machinery. As a result, the party had to face humiliating defeat in the Lok Sabha election of February, 1998. Since 1996 the AGP was a part of the United Front governments headed by H.D. Deve Gowda and Inder Kumar Gujral. AGP leader Birendra Prasad Baishya and Muhiram Saikia were Union Minister of Steel and Mines and Union Minister of State for Human Resource Development respectively in the united Front government. But the degenerative factionalism in the party drew a blank in the 12th Lok Sabha election held on 16th February, 1998.

Table 5.3

Members representing the AGP in the 11th Lok Sabha of 1996

Sl. No.	Name of the elected AGP member	Lok Sabha constituency
1	Muhiram Saikia	Nawgong
2	Birendra Prasad Baishya	Mangaldoi
3	Prabin Sarmah	Gauhati
4	Arun Sarmah	Lakhimpur
5	Keshab Mahanta	Kaliabor

Source: The Election Commission of India

5.3 Bhrigu Kumar Phukan and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta: rejuvenation of the factional legacy

Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, who was deprived of a respectable place in the AGP organization and in the government, was the first person who openly criticized the Chief Minister Mahanta due the blatant display of authoritarianism in the AGP. Mahanta kept as many as 25 departments including the finance, home, law, power, cooperative, excise etc in his hand. Phukan alleged that Mahanta centralized all power in the government as well as in the party organization. The centralization of power in fact created difficulties in governance. But Mahanta did not repeat the mistake made in 1985 by giving away the home and political department to Bhrigu Kumar Phukan this time. Phukan appealed for implementation of the 'one man one post' policy which was adopted on 12th July 1993 in an executive meeting of the party. It was decided in that meeting that a person should not be assigned one executive post of the government and one party post simultaneously¹⁴⁴. The constitution of the party was also amended to this effect. But Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his colleagues were holding important party posts and executive posts in the government simultaneously which was against the constitution. In the mean time, allegations of Letter of Credit (LoC) scandal left Mahanta with sleepless nights. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan would often criticize the AGP government over these issues openly which put Mahanta in an awkward situation. Phukan staged dharna and hunger strike against the LoC scandal and autocracy in the party which maligned the image of the AGP. He demanded resignation of Mahanta from Chief Ministership. Thus, Phukan, in the opinion of the leaders of Mahanta cabinet, was trying to topple the government. He had allegedly met the Congress president Sitaram Kesri at New Delhi accompanied by Brinadaban Goswami, another former NAGP leader.

Therefore, on 7th August, 1997 the executive committee decided to suspend Bhrigu Kumar Phukan from the primary membership of the party and called for

¹⁴⁴ Proceeding of central executive committee meeting held on 12th July, 1993.

explanation from him as to why disciplinary action be not taken against him due to his anti party activities¹⁴⁵. The proposal goes as follows...

*"The central executive committee unanimously ratifies the proposal, as advised by the AGP legislative party, to suspend Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, current MLA of the party, who repeatedly broke the party rules as enshrined in the constitution and is involved in conspiracy of overthrowing the AGP-led coalition government, from the primary membership of the party."*¹⁴⁶

Thus, Phukan, who was not present in the meeting, was sacked in haste and few people spoke in his favour in the executive committee meeting and against the proposal. Some of the colleagues of Mahanta even demanded suspension of Brindaban Goswami too for anti party activity. Atul Bora, the PWD Minister, Jatin Mali, the Education Minister and Digen Bora, the Food and Supplies Minister were very much vocal against Bhrigu Kumar Phukan. Atul Bora moved the suspension proposal and the other two elaborated the necessity of it.

5.3.1 The one man one post system

In the same meeting, an important amendment to the AGP constitution was also ratified, viz. the 'one man one post' system was abolished from the constitution. Accordingly, the section 30 (1) was amended. The provision as amended was:

*"Any member of the AGP can hold one executive post in the government and one post of office bearer in the party at the same time"*¹⁴⁷.

The amendment was in fact moved to cater the factional interests. Discretionary power of the Working Committee was increased by amending the section 35 of the constitution. It empowered the Working Committee to take immediate action against any member who involves in such activities that malign the image of the

¹⁴⁵ Proceeding of the central executive committee meeting held on 7th August, 1997, p.118.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.* p127.

party. The committee would either call for explanation or suspend the person from the party.¹⁴⁸ This established the fact that an autocratic tendency ruled over the party which was pointed out by Bhriku Kumar Phukan initially. He after being expelled from the AGP started to unite all the dissidents of the party and created public opinion against the Mahanta led AGP government. Phukan alleged in an interview that Mahanta is surrounded by some bad elements and he was working on their advice. He started behaving in an autocratic manner after the Lakhimpur general convention. In a retrospective note, Phukan said,

“Even after 12 years, there is no political culture in the party. The leaders are only hankering after power and money. People will never forgive us if we indulge in corruption, if we commit public nuisance. They have a different image about us, and so if our ministers start behaving like the Congress, the people will not tolerate it.”¹⁴⁹

He again said,

“My personal feeling is that there is some political blackmail going on because Mahanta is involved in the LoC scam and the Centre is taking full advantage of the incapability of the Chief Minister. The AGP government has become a puppet government and the Center is doing what it likes.”¹⁵⁰

He advised that the Unified Command be withdrawn for one month and peace talk be started immediately.

5.3.2 Formation of the Asom Jatiya Sanmilian (AJS) and abrasion of AGP vote bank

Meanwhile, the United Front coalition government at the center, led by Inder Kumar Gujral of Janata Dal, was facing a crisis and the possibility of fresh parliamentary election was in the offing. Bhriku Kumar Phukan and his supporters started to mobilize the people at the district level. A new political party named Asom Jatiya Sanmilian (AJS) came into existence towards the end of December, 1997. Dinabandhu Choudhury a former senior leader of the NAGP became the

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.* p126.

¹⁴⁹ Bhriku Kumar Phukan, Interview with Sumit Das Gupta of the *Sunday* magazine, retrieved from <http://www.rediff.com/news/dec/26assam4.htm> on 15th May, 2016

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

president and Hemanta Barman was the general secretary. Israel Nanda, Chandra Arandhara, Samar Saikia were other important leaders who sided with the AJS. The party was strengthened by the support of the martyrs' family of the Assam movement, the workers of the movement who felt betrayed by the Mahanta faction and common people who had to bear the military atrocities during counter insurgency operations of the unified command. The corruption charges and inefficiency of the AGP government created crisis of governance at that time. The AJS convened political convention at Guwahati in the month of November, 1997 to garner support from the Assamese community. The AJS announced that it would support likeminded independent candidates in the coming election to the Indian parliament. Gautam Uzir as the candidate of the AJS from the Gauhati constituency eroded the support base of the AGP candidate Prabin Sarmah. Same was the case of the AGP candidate, Deba Kumar Bora in Jorhat constituency. In Nawgong, BJP candidate took the advantage of the abrasion of AGP vote bank. Ultimately, the AJS caused the second split in the AGP.

5.4 Politics between Atul Bora and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta faction: Frustration unbound

Atul Bora was like the big brother in the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta cabinet during the second term, whose advice and solutions to end the personal bickering in the party were never considered by the close associates of Mahanta. A host of shortsighted politicians encircled him and healthy internal democracy was *bade adieu* from the party. Everyone seemed to have left no stone unturned in flattering the Chief Minister cum president of the party to keep own position intact. Atul Bora sensed a conspiracy within the party against him during the by-election to the Dispur constituency. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta told Atul Bora, while finalizing the Ministry in 1996 that Digen Bora MLA from Batadroba and a close friend of Mahanta was longing for the PWD Ministry. But according to Atul Bora, it had become a tradition to offer the PWD to a senior person who is regarded as the second in order in the cabinet after the Chief Minister. So he was reluctant to give it

up. Therefore, he sensed a conspiracy popping up in the corridor of power to obstruct him from getting elected and holding the PWD department. So as assumed by Atul Bora, the AASU unit of Guwahati was instigated to disrupt the by-election in Dispur from which Atul Bora was contesting¹⁵¹. This episode of betrayal and conspiracy though seems silly and negligible had perturbed the relationship between Mahanta and Atul Bora. There were several occasions afterwards which get on the nerves of Atul Bora.

5.4.1 The Letter of Credit (LoC) scam: The breeding ground of factional conflict

The allegations of Mahanta's involvement in the LoC scandal, as per the statement of the prime accused Rajen Bora, regarding payment of 4 crore to Mahanta was out in the media. CBI asked for permission from the Hon'ble Governor of Assam to start interrogation and prosecution against Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. Tension mounted among the coalition partners of the AGP, specially when CPI and CPI (M) expressed that if charge sheeted in the LoC scam, Mahanta must resign as Chief Minister. But the Governor of Assam, General S.K.Sinha decided to withhold the sanction for the prosecution of the Chief Minister on the basis of lack of prima facie evidences against him. His decision was widely criticized because it 'carried an unmistakable stamp of a "judicial verdict"'.¹⁵² The Governor of Assam remarked that the evidences put by the CBI were not enough to prosecute Mahanta in the LoC scam. But the hon'ble constitutional functionary is not expected to act as a court of trial either shifting, evaluating evidences in detail. This is precisely what the Governor of Assam appeared to have done.¹⁵³ Former Minister and colleagues of Mahanta, Nakul Das, Dilip Saikia Sonowal and Barki Prasad Telenga figured among the suspected accused in the scandal that was committed in the Veterinary Department during the first tenure of the AGP. Almost 400 Crores of rupees were withdrawn through fraudulent LoC from the treasury and pocketed by the officials, politicians and middlemen. So, news papers in Assamese vernacular reported that being the Chief Minister and the Finance Minister of that period

¹⁵¹ Atul Bora, *Abirata Sangram*, (Guwahati: Maa Prakashak Gosthi, 2007), 110-115.

¹⁵² 'Breather for Mahanta', *The Hindu*, February 9, 1998.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

Prafulla Kumar Mahanta can't evade the responsibility. All these were open secrets which ultimately doomed the AGP government. The CBI started the enquiry in 1994 and submitted its report three years later accusing 38 persons. Ashok Saikia an upright official, who was then Education Commissioner, was enquiring the LoC scandal at the behest of the government. But when he began to nose around too much for the comfort of the party and complained about the pace of the investigation in a state cabinet meeting, he was led aside by the CM and told gently, essentially, to keep quiet. 'The money is for the "boys", he was told.¹⁵⁴ Here the term "boys" refers to the cadres of the ULFA. The LoC continued to haunt the party even during the second term in office creating substantial scope for factionalism and mad slinging. The allegations put questions on the credibility of the government and damaged the cohesiveness in the party. Bhriku Kumar Phukan staged *dharna* protests and got himself expelled for anti-party activity. Atul Bora though targeted by factional interests in the government held independent views. Others kept mum to the untoward happenings and enchanted loyalty song to keep one's office of profit secured.

5.4.2 Dynasty politics in the AGP and factionalism

The unity and coherence in the AGP declined to a very low level during the Lok-Sabha election of 1998. Muhiram Saikia, three times MP from the Nawgong constituency and former minister of states in the Human Resources Development Department at the Center was denied party ticket in that election. Instead of him, Jayashree Goswami Mahanta, wife of the Chief Minister was allowed to contest in the election. The Nagaon unit of the AGP got divided over the issue. The close associates of Mahanta in the cabinet and some MLAs from the Nagaon District were pressing hard for a party ticket for Jayashree Goswami Mahanta. Prominent among them were Digen Bora (Minster for food and civil supplies), Bubul Das (Minister for Fisheries), Abdul Rouff, Khalilur Rahman Choudhury and Girin Barua.¹⁵⁵ On the other hand Atul Bora (Minister for the Public Works Department),

¹⁵⁴ Sanjoy Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist: Tales of war and peace from India's Northeast*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1994), 184.

¹⁵⁵ *Tinidinia Agradoot*, Guwahati, January 18, 1998.

Jatin Mali (Minister for Education) stood in favour of Muhiram Saikia. As per the policy of the party, all the five current Lok Sabha members of the party should have been allowed to contest again in the forthcoming election. But in the working committee meeting party ticket to Mrs. Mahanta was finalized amidst vehement protests from Atul Bora. He predicted that AGP would suffer due to this decision and the party might draw a blank in the ensuing election which eventually was proved true.¹⁵⁶ This was a clear implication of degenerative factionalism in the AGP. AGPs vote share came down from 31.11% in 1996 to 19.05% in 1998. Other important factor of the poll debacle was the deteriorating relationship with the ULFA. The underground outfit became dreaded enemy of the AGP leaders. Biraj Kumar Sarma, one of the signatories of the Assam Accord and a cabinet minister of the AGP government was attacked by the ULFA. Anil Kumar Barua, CPI (ML) candidate from the Dibrugarh parliamentary constituency was shot dead on the eve of the General election, 1998. During that time ULFA had also issued caveat to the grassroot level AGP workers and office bearers to leave the party and to abstain from election campaigning. Labhendra Bora, a district level office bearer of Nagaon District and close associate of Chief Minister Mahanta was assassinated by the militant outfit on January, 27, 1998. Following this assassination, Secretary and Joint Secretary of the nagaon District resigned from the AGP¹⁵⁷ This caveat from ULFA terrified the AGP workers. People kept themselves inside on February 16, 1998, the date of the election. So voting percentage in that election was very low and as a result AGP faced a humiliating defeat. In most of the constituencies the party held third position after the Congress and the BJP. After the severe election debacle of 1998, the working committee taking the responsibility collectively resigned on March 10, 1998.¹⁵⁸ But factionalism took a new dimension. The personal image and power of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta reduced to some extent. As a result, Birendra Prasad Baishya, one of the lieutenants of Mahanta failed to get a ticket for the vacant seat in the Rajya Sabha. Arun Sarma was sent as Rajya Sabha member from Assam to represent the AGP on April 3, 1998. Atul Bora made it

¹⁵⁶ Atul Bora, *Abirata Sangram*, (Guwahati: Maa Prakashak Gosthi, 2007) 118-119.

¹⁵⁷ *Tinidinia Agradoot*, Guwahati, February 15, 1998.

¹⁵⁸ Proceeding of the AGP Working Committee, Guwahati, March 10, 1998.

public in the press accusing Mahanta indulging in corrupt political practices. Pradip Hazarika, the Transport Minister and MLA of Amguri constituency took the lead. But the issue did not go further as Mahanta faction applied all possible measures to quell the revolt.

5.4.3 Suspension of Atul Bora and Jatin Mali from the party

The budget session of Assam Assembly started on 14th March, 1998 and continued till 15th may, 1998. All was not well in the AGP house. Mahanta in a sudden ministry reshuffle on May 16, 1998 disengaged Atul Bora and Jatin Mali from the PWD and the Education Department. PWD was bestowed upon Nagen Sarma. Atul Bora was away in New Delhi on that day. He and Bhriku Kumar Phukan travelled on the same Air India flight to New Delhi on the previous day which was reported as hatching a conspiracy against Mahanta. Atul Bora on return from New Delhi resigned from the Mahanta cabinet on May 18, 1998 and briefed the reporters over the issue. Pulakesh Barua, Pradip Hazarika and Jatin Mali were seen beside him in the press meeting expressing solidarity. A few days later, Jatin Mali was sacked from the ministry. Thaneswar Bodo, another senior leader of the party also resigned from the Mahanta cabinet. Brindaban Goswami and Bhriku Kumar Phukan also came forward to support the cause of Atul Bora. All the dissident leaders of the AGP decided to elect Thaneswar Bodo as the leader of the AGP legislative party with a view to dethrone Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. The signatories of the resolution taken on May 31, 1998 were: 1. Thaneswar Bodo, 2. Hazi Abdul Rouff, 3. Bhriku Kumar Phukan, 4. Jatin Mali, 5. Pradip Hazarika, 6. Atul Bora, 7. Pulakesh Barua, 8. Brindaban Goswami, 9. Atul Bora (Junior, MLA from Golaghat LAC). Apparently the party was divided into two different factions. The Working Committee of the AGP took a resolution to suspend Atul Bora and Jatin Mali from the primary membership of the party for indulging in anti-party activities.¹⁵⁹ After his expulsion, it became easy for Jayashree Goswami Mahanta, wife of Chief Minister Mahanta to get elected as MP to the upper house of the Indian parliament. Atul Bora continued his stand against Mahanta and his associates.

¹⁵⁹ Proceeding of the Working committee of the AGP, Guwahati, June 8, 1998.

Table 5.4
The relative strength of the Atul Bora faction and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta faction in 1998

Sl. No	Atul Bora faction	P. K. Mahanta faction
1.	Atul Bora, Cabinet Minister	Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Chief Minister
2	Thaneswar Bodo, Cabinet Minister	Digen Bora, Cabinet Minister
3	Pradip Hazarika, Cabinet Minister	Nagen Sarma, Cabinet Minister
4	Jatin Mali, Cabinet Minister	Sahidul Alom Choudhury, Cabinet Minister
5	Pulakesh Barua, MLA	Rekharani Das Bodo, State Minister
6	Brindaban Goswami, MLA	Surendra Nath Medhi, State Minister
7	Hiten Goswami, MLA	Kamala Kalita, Cabinet Minister
8	Haji Abdul Rouff, State Minister	Ganesh Kutum, Speaker of the Assembly
9	Atul Bora (Junior), MLA	Nurul Hussain, Deputy Speaker of the Assembly
10	Gaheen Das, MLA	Maidul Islam Bora, Chief Party whip
11	Dilip Kumar Saikia, MLA	Birendra Prasad Baishya, former minister
12		Phani Bhusan Choudhury, Cabinet Minister

Source: Data collected during field work.

But the Mahanta faction was able to win over most of the members of the Atul Bora faction. Hiten Goswami was made the Law Minister with cabinet rank. Thaneswar Bodo was persuaded to merge with the mainstream. Brindaban Goswami was perhaps unwilling to come against Mahanta strongly. In fact, nobody wanted to get disqualified under the Anti-defection Law, so the rebellion for change in leadership died a premature death. Only Pulakesh Barua and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan remained with Atul Bora. Atul Bora continued his crusade till the last. On November 3, 1999 he raised questions against the Speaker of the Assembly on the floor. The matter was raised in the cabinet meeting previously when Bora was PWD minister. He questioned the ethics and economic prudence of the Speaker who increased his own discretionary fund up to 10 lakhs. Whereas, the discretionary fund of the Chief Minister and other ministers were 2 lakhs and 50 thousands respectively. Kutum was provided a shield of protection by Chief Minister Mahanta and the cabinet

could not take concrete decision¹⁶⁰. This time, Bora was open on the floor of the house to expose the corruption of the Speaker who spent lakhs of rupees on foreign tour and other miscellaneous heads which was unprecedented. The allegations put the Chief Minister in an awkward situation. Further, there were corruption charges against most of the cabinet ministers of the AGP government. Within a period of three years, the government failed in development of the state, even monthly salary of the employees could not be sanctioned for months. The political and economic instability at the center was also reflected in the governance in Assam.

5.4.4 Formation of the Trinamul Gana Parishad (TGP)

Atul Bora and Pulakesh Barua started discussion with the Asom Jatiya Sanmilian (AJS) led by Bhrigu Kumar Phukan in search of a new political avenue. Senior AGP leader Rekhmani Das Bodo and Phani Bhusan Choudhury tried to persuade Atul Bora not to leave AGP. But Bora was determined on his decision to leave the party as he would not be able to sit together with Mahanta. This was clearly an example of clash of personal ego in the party.¹⁶¹ However, Bora was not in favour of joining the AJS. But the AJS and Atul Bora group together pledged for strengthening the regionalism in Assam. They were strengthened by the support of former PLP leader and founder of the AGP Krishna Gopal Bhattacharyya. AGP leader Paniram Rabha and Israel Nanda also extended support. In a meeting on September 15, 1999, they decided to hold a workers convention to unite the grassroots workers of the AGP. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan and Atul Bora became the joint conveners. Atul Bora in a personal confession observed that they were in a dilemma about the formation of a new political party. Even Bhrigu Kumar Phukan did not join the AJS formally. They needed support of one third of the current AGP MLAs in order to formally register as a separate political party. Otherwise, they would face disqualification and forfeit the membership of the Assembly under the Anti-defection Law, 1985, which is the last thing they would prefer. Mainly due to these personal interests and contradictions, the joint convention of AJS and Atul Bora

¹⁶⁰ Atul Bora, *op cit.*, p 117.

¹⁶¹ Rekhmani Das Bodo, Personal interview, Guwahati, January 9, 2015.

faction could not materialize. Ultimately, a new political party emerged on February 8, 2000 in a state level convention with Pulakesh Barua as the president and Atul Bora as the chief general secretary. The party was named as Trinamul Gana Parishad (TGP). The party was not fully functional till the eve of the Assembly election of 2001 and its strength remained limited to certain areas of Assam. Yet it contested in 19 constituencies and won one. Premodhar Bora got elected as TGP legislator from Bihpuria LAC. Pulakesh Barua and Atul Bora were defeated. Even Bhriгу Kumar Phukan failed to get elected this time. The precise result for the Dispur LAC in 2001 Assembly election was as follows:

Figure: 5.1

Election result of the Dispur Assembly constituency in 2001

Name of the candidate	Party affiliation	Total votes secured
Rabin Bordoloi	Congress	43,057
Atul Bora	TGP	40,647
Prafulla Kumar Mahanta	AGP	23,577

Source: Election commission of India

The above table illustrates how factional rivalry uprooted the AGP from its heartland. It is interesting to note that Chief Minister Mahanta left no stone unturned to ensure defeat of his rivals. Mahanta himself contested against Atul Bora in Dispur giving an easy ride to Rabin Bordoloi of the Congress.¹⁶² All these analysis proves that it was the factional rivalry and indiscipline in the AGP that ensured its defeat in the subsequent elections since 1998. The personal clash of ego and self-interests spoiled the common interest of the party. There were a set of leaders who continuously flattered the Chief Minister. These backbiters and rebels, indulged in factional politics, doomed the future of the party in the Assembly election of 2001.

5.5 The AGP in 21st Century: The age of extremes

The AGP joined hands with the national political party Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) to fight the Assembly election of 2001. It was a critical period for the AGP. Factionalism on one hand and anti-incumbency on the other made the political

¹⁶² Atul Bora, *op cit.*, p 151.

future of the AGP leaders bleak. Following the formation of the TGP, Pulakesh Barua was expelled from the AGP. Most of the prominent AGP leaders were either expelled from the party or remained aloof from active politics. As a result only a few people were with the Chief Minister Mahanta to advise him on critical political issues. At this moment Mahanta seemed to have followed the advice of the Governor of Assam S. K. Sinha who was very close with the Union Home Minister L. K. Advani¹⁶³. Mahanta and his ministry cooperated with the Union Home Ministry in all counter insurgency operations. Therefore, central government did not want at regime change in Assam. But the counter insurgency operations and alleged 'secret killing' made the ULFA dead against the AGP leaders. The insurgent outfit retaliated with violent attack on the AGP ministers. Nagen Sarma, the Forest and PWD minister was killed by ULFA in a bomb blast near Hajo of Kamrup district. Sarma was the backbone of AGPs organization, his death was a massive blow to the party. This was a critical period for the AGP; its supporters and grass-root workers became dormant ostensibly to avoid the wrath of the insurgents.

AGP's leadership could sense the weakness in the party organization and forged pre-poll alliance with the BJP. There was no disagreement among the top leaders about this decision. However, general people and party workers saw the alliance as the 'death trap' of regionalism. People had been compelled to think that the regional political party and its leadership had become soft and flexible to the cause of regional interest. The nationalistic attitude of the AGP leaders was rather moved by self interests. By the time, the Election Commission of India announced 10th May, 2001 as the date of election to the Assam Assembly. The nomination process got started in consultation with the BJP leadership which resulted in further rift among the leaders of the AGP. At least five AGP ministers queued for Congress tickets. Pradan Barua, the sitting AGP MLA from Jonai constituency left the party and joined Congress on April 12, 2001. Other AGP leaders were also perplexed

¹⁶³ The *Amar Asom*, April 2, 2001. News report of AGP central executive meeting held at midnight on April 1, 2001. The party decided to fight the Assembly election of 2001 in alliance with the national political party. As per the understanding AGP would relinquish 46 Assembly constituencies to the BJP.

about the idea of friendly contest in 10 constituencies. These constituencies were West Guwahati, Hajo, Palashbari, Raha, Teok, Jonai, Batadraba, Barchala, Laming and Naoboicha. All these constituencies were situated in the Brahmaputra valley and known to be the AGP heartland. The sitting AGP MLAs of these constituencies including Ramendra Narayan Kalita, Nurul Hussain and Jatin Mali were at a loss due to this decision of the party. It is interesting to note here that the AGP and the BJP did not come up with a common minimum programme or manifesto. So election campaigning became leader specific. Lack of strategy on the part of the AGP was obviously visible. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta was all out in praise for the partner BJP, while other leaders would brand the BJP as communal political party to woo the voters. There was complete chaos during the campaigning. The alliance proved ineffective and doomed the regional politics to the dust.

5.5.1 The AGP losses power: Factionalism or anti-incumbency

The election result was declared on May 13, 2001. The AGP-BJP alliance faced humiliating defeat. Vote share of the AGP came down from 29.70% in 1996 to 20.02%. The regional party could win in 20 seats in the legislative assembly election. BJP's vote share also degraded by 1% but its tally increased to 8 in this election. Most of the current AGP MLAs and ministers including Thanesar Bodo, Ramendra Narayan Kalita, Pradip Hazarika, Biraj Kumar Sarma, Ganesh Kutum, Chandra Mohan Patowary, Renupama Rajkhowa, Maidul Islam Bora and the dissident AGP leaders like Atul Bora, Bhigu Kumar Phukan, Pulakesh Barua were defeated. As many as 13 candidates of the party had to forfeit their security deposit. As a consequence of friendly contest between the AGP and BJP in some constituencies like Palashbari, Raha, Naoboicha, Barchalla and Gauhati West the opposition candidate reaped the benefit of division of votes. Table below is given for more clarity:

Table 5.5
Results of friendly contest between the AGP and the BJP in 2001

Constituency	Name of the candidate	Party	Valid votes polled	% of vote share
Palasbari	Pranab Kalita (Winner)	IND	30943	37.30%
	Jatin Mali	AGP	30308	36.54%
	Dinesh Choudhury	BJP	4542	5.48%
Gauhati West	Hemanta Talukdar (Winner)	INC	36471	35.26%
	Manoj Ram Phookun	BJP	31924	30.87%
	Ramendra Narayan Kalita	AGP	24395	23.59%
Barchalla	Tanka Bahadur Rai (Winner)	INC	26567	35.79%
	Prafulla Goswami	AGP	17455	23.51%
	Ranjit Neog	BJP	11072	14.92%
Naoboicha	Sultan Sadik (Winner)	IND	29813	31.07%
	Moniram Pathari	AGP	22105	23.04%
	Prodeep Sarmah	BJP	11820	12.32%
Raha	Dr. Ananda Ram Barua (Winner)	INC	47700	47.14%
	Umesh Das	BJP	32972	32.59%
	Gahin Chandra Das	AGP	18396	18.18%

Source: Statistical report on the general election to the Legislative Assembly of Assam 2001, Election Commission of India.

In 2001, there were 18 administrative districts in the Brahmaputra valley. The AGP could win no assembly seat in 7 districts, *viz.* Kokrajhar, Goalpara, Barpeta, Kamrup, Nalbari, Golaghat and Sibsagar. Only one seat each was won in the districts of Darrang, Morigaon, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. The result was obvious for three reasons; lack of election strategy being the first reason. The AGP central committee leadership failed to support its candidates properly. Party president Mahanta remained confined mainly in the Dispur constituency and in his home district of Nagaon. Second, the AGP was unable to bring up new generation of leadership which the Congress did successfully. There were 57 new faces in the 12 Assam Legislative Assembly most of whom belonged to the Congress. The regionalist agenda and the old guards of

the AGP leadership did not appeal to the new generation of voters in the 21st century. The fact that Assamese people gaining maturity as a political community was not fully comprehended by the AGP. Third and most important reason was factionalism within the party. Most of the veteran leaders of the AGP were either expelled from the party by the Mahanta faction or left the party to form new political party. Former AGP leader Paniram Rabha, Bharat Chandra Narah, Pradan Barua, Tanka Bahadur Rai contested as Congress candidates and won the election. Firebrand leaders Pabindra Deka fought as independent candidate from Patacharkuchi and won. The AGP candidate stood fifth in Patacharkuchi. In Kamalpur, three leaders from the regional camp namely Satyabrat Kalita, Maidul Islam Bora and Hitesh Deka fought and the official AGP candidate stood fifth in that constituency. These are some examples how the factional politics and egoism of the AGP leaders caused erosion to the vote bank of the party. Defeat in the Assembly election of 2001 was foregone conclusion. The following table shows the result in details.

Table 5.6

Performance of the AGP in the 11th Assam Legislative Assembly election of 2001

Name of the party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Forfeited Deposit	Votes Polled %	Vote % in Seats contested
AGP	77	20	13	20.02%	32.05%
BJP	46	8	14	9.35%	26.31%
INC	126	71	11	39.75%	39.75%
CPI	19	0	16	1.10%	7.68%
CPI (M)	22	0	17	1.78%	10.65%
ASDC (U)	5	2	1	1.11%	29.45%

Source: Statistical report on the general election to the legislative assembly of Assam 2001, Election Commission of India

5.6 Power tussle between Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his rivals

AGP sat in the opposition bench of Assam Legislative Assembly with 20 MLAs. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the leader of the AGP legislature party. He continued to be the president of the party as well despite all the criticism from the

media and intellectuals of Assam. Mal-administration of the Mahanta government, corruption charges against his colleagues and the awful episode of secret killing were the main reasons behind the poll debacle of the second AGP government. Yet there was virtually no challenge to Mahanta's leadership until the news of bigamy broke out in the vernacular media. Though Mahanta denied the allegation of second marriage, he had to step down as the party president and handed over the charge to Biraj Kumar Sarma. Mahanta's resignation was accepted by the AGP general council held in September, 2001. Veteran leaders Brindaban Goswami was unanimously elected as the president of the party on that day. Mahanta expressed grief in his resignation letter because the senior party leaders seemed to have accepted the claims of two 'pro-Congress' local dailies about the sordid scandal of bigamous relationship.¹⁶⁴

5.6.1 Rise of Brindaban Goswami as leader of the AGP

Brindaban Goswami reorganized the grass-root workers again and enhanced the morale of the AGP supporters. Young leaders like Keshab Mahanta, Sarbananda Sonowal, Padma Hazarika, Kumar Deepak Das, Apurba Kumar Bhattacharyya among others were included in the highest decision making committee of the party. But the power tussle in the AGP intensified when Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his associates were trying to veto the rising authority of Brindaban Goswami. The party was virtually divided into two opposite camps. Brindaban Goswami in a reply to the groupism reconstituted the political affairs committee. He in the capacity of the president of the party did not include Mahanta and four other current MLAs, known to be close to Mahanta, in the 41 member committee. Other current MLAs and senior leaders were given a due position in the committee. The MLAs known to be close associates of Mahanta were Sahidul Alam Choudhury, Ali Akbar Mia, Bubul Das and Utpal Dutta were excluded. Mahanta himself was present in the meeting facing the embarrassment. Party spokesman Sarbananda Sonowal said that the new committee will "advise the president on all political issues." A party member close to Goswami said Mahanta's omission from the

¹⁶⁴ 'Goswami elected AGP president', *The Hindu*, September 07, 2001

committee was “expected”, given the party president’s insecurity following his predecessor’s attempt to make political comeback after a yearlong hiatus.¹⁶⁵ Mahanta had almost disappeared from the political scene since September 2001 facing series of allegations of ‘secret killing’¹⁶⁶ illicit relationship and inefficiency. However, towards the middle of 2002 he made a “comeback tour” of Upper Assam, apparently to make a return to the party leadership, which rang the alarm bell in the Goswami camp. Brindaban Goswami in order to strengthen the AGP brought Bhrigu Kumar Phukan into the party. Phukan fought the Lok Sabha election of 2004 as AGP candidate from the prestigious Gauhati constituency. In the Lok Sabha election of 2004, AGP’s performance was nice.

Table 5.7
Performance of the AGP in the Lok Sabha election of 2004

Name of Constituencies where the AGP registered win	Name of Constituencies where the AGP stood second	Name of Constituencies where the AGP stood third	Name of Constituencies where the AGP supported other parties
Dibrugarh Lakhimpur	Kaliabor Tezpur Barpeta Dhubri	Nowgong Karimganj (SC) Gauhati Mangaldoi Jorhat	Autonomous District (ST) Silchar Kokrajhar (ST)
2 (two)	4 (four)	4 (four)	3 (three)

Source: Statistical report on general election, 2004 to the 14th Lok Sabha, Vol. III, Election Commission of India, New Delhi

Arun Kumar Sarma and Sarbananda Sonowal got elected to the Indian Parliament from Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur constituencies respectively. This was decent performance in comparison to the earlier two parliamentary elections in 1998 and

¹⁶⁵ ‘Mahanta ousted from AGP panel, *The Telegraph*, September 30, 2002

¹⁶⁶ ‘Secret Killing’ refers to the murder of innocent relatives of leading ULFA leaders during 1998 and 2000. These killings were executed in the midnight hours and the assassins were never found by the police. Even on some occasions dead bodies were also not found. The secret killing occurred when the AGP was in power in Assam. Justice K. N. Saikia Commission appointed by the Congress government later enquired these cases and found some similarities in the killing incidents. Justice Saikia indicated these might be a part of the counter insurgency operations jointly run by the police and the military. The issue of secret Killing has become an election issue for the Congress against the AGP. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his cabinet colleagues in the government can’t evade the responsibilities of these inhuman assassinations as remarked by Justice K. N. Saikia in his report.

1999 when the AGP draw a blank. Both the AGP MPs earned name as active parliamentarian in the 14th Lok Sabha. In the fifth general conference held in Tezpur from 28 -30th January, 2004 Brinadaban Goswami became the president of the AGP defeating the arch-rival Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. Since then legitimacy of Brindaban Goswami ascended in the party and the Lok Sabha election result augmented it.

5.6.2 Factional politics during the tenure of Brindaban Goswami as the AGP President

Following the defeat in the Tezpur general conference, former chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta started voicing dissent against Brindaban Goswami and his faction in the AGP. Mahanta's comment against the leadership of the AGP and his unilateral activities throughout Assam without taking the cognizance of the president was seen by the Brindaban faction as anti-party activities. Mahanta was trying to cobble together a 'third front' independently to take on the ruling Congress in the state.¹⁶⁷ As such, Mahanta was barred from organizing meetings outside his own constituency in barhampur for trying to supersede the party president. Ultimately, he was served a show cause notice from the party in the month of June 2005. This signaled intensification of factional rivalry between the two camps. Immediately, Shyamal Sanyal, an expelled AGP leader and Mahanta supporter made it clear that they were going to form a new political party soon. He said,

*"We have been organizing meetings in different parts of the state to mobilize support."*¹⁶⁸

Prafulla Kumar Mahanta on the other hand said,

*"I am only trying to strengthen the party. It's actually some other people who are trying to divide it."*¹⁶⁹

The steering committee of the AGP formally announced Brindaban Goswami as the party's candidate for the chief minister's post in the run-up to the forthcoming

¹⁶⁷ 'AGP serves show cause notice on Mahanta' retrieved from <http://www.rediff.com/news/2005/june/13assam.html> on December 15, 2016.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

assembly elections in 2006. This was done ostensibly to strengthen Goswami's position in the party.

The factional drama did not end here. Meanwhile, the Mahanta faction organized a convention under the Sanmilita Yuva Samaj, Asom (SYSA) to float a third front bypassing the AGP leadership. Besides, war of words continued between the two factions of the party unabated. On June 26, 2005 party's steering committee decided to suspend Prafulla Kumar Mahanta from the party for six years. Before the steering committee meeting a senior leader of the AGP told,

*"The party can't go on tolerating indiscipline. This time we will have to take some tough decisions, no matter how painful and unfortunate they might be."*¹⁷⁰

This decision was ratified in the Central executive meeting held in Tinsukia town and Mahanta was expelled on July 3, 2005 accordingly. On June 27, 2005, Mahanta and four other AGP legislators along with several other functionaries of the party attended the SYSA convention. The four AGP MLAs were Sahidul Alam Choudhury, Bubul Das, Utpal Dutta and Gunin Hazarika. The Mahanta loyalists called the expulsion as "anti democratic and anti-people."¹⁷¹ The AGP was again divided into two groups due to factional rivalry and hegemonic attitude of the leadership.

5.7 Splitting the party-Retaining the honour: Formation of the AGP (P) in 2005

As the groundwork was already complete Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his supporters formed a new political party on 14th September, 2005. The new party was named as Asom gana Parishad (Pragatisheel) or AGP (Progressive), in short AGP (P). The original torchbearer of regionalism in Assam; the AGP was officially split for the third time. They had claimed the support of 23 out of the 26 district committees of the AGP and insisted to be the real AGP. The new party immediately

¹⁷⁰ 'AGP expels Mahanta', retrieved from <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/2005.html> on December 15, 2016.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

moved to the Election Commission to stake claim for the AGP flag and party symbol. On the other hand, Brindaban Goswami while talking to the newsman opined,

*“There has been no split and we are united, commanding support of majority of district unit.”*¹⁷²

Mahanta alleged that the AGP had shed its regional character and had failed under its present leadership. In short, the supporters and voters were perplexed at this sordid affair in the regional political party.

Prafulla Kumar Mahanta became the president of the AGP (P) with Hemanta Kalita as the general secretary and spokesman of the new political party. The prominent leaders who supported Mahanta were Sahidul Alam Choudhury, Utpal Dutta, (these two sitting MLAs were also expelled from the AGP for indulging in anti-party activity), Gunin Hazarika and Bubul Das, Kartik Hazarika, Girin Barua and other district level functionaries. In the political convention held in Guwahati and attended by delegates from different districts of Assam, Kartik Hazarika, a convener of the AGP (P) moved a resolution resolving to form a “parallel and real AGP” and announced the expulsion of the present AGP leadership led by Brindaban Goswami from the party. The resolution said that the AGP leadership had deviated from the party’s objectives and was indulging in “politics of expulsion” which weakened regionalism. As a result of the spilt, Brindaban Goswami enjoyed support of 13 MLAs, others shifted loyalty to Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. Mahanta justified the convention as necessary to revitalize regionalism in Assam which received a setback as the AGP leadership was indiscriminately expelling leaders.¹⁷³ History was repeating itself-the episode of factional politics of the 1991 was recast again in 2005. The factionalism revealed mainly two aspects: first, top leaders of the AGP could not rise above the self-interest and second, they

¹⁷² Sukhendu Bhattacharya, ‘Mahanta looks forward banking on revival of past’, *The Outlook*, September 18, 2005 retrieved from <http://www.outlookindia.com/newswire/story/Mahanta-looks.../323553.htm> on May16, 2016

¹⁷³ Sushanta Talukdar, ‘AGP splits, Mahanta floats new party’, *The Hindu*, September 15, 2005

were ready to sacrifice the general interests to protect their ego. This was an extreme form of 'degenerative factionalism' in the AGP.

Table 5.8
Comparative strength of the Brindaban Goswami and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta factions

Sl. No	Brindaban faction	Mahanta faction
1.	Brindaban Goswami, President & leader	Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, leader
2	Phani Bhusan Choudhury	Sahidul Alom Choudhury
3	Joseph Toppo	Bubul Das
4	Hiten Goswami	Utpal Dutta
5	Dilip Kumar Saikia	Gunin Hazarika
6	Joi Nath Sarma	Girin Barua
7	Hitendra Nath Goswami	Ali Akbar Mia
8	Sarbananda Sonowal	Kumar Deepak Das
9	Padma Hazarika	Birendra Prasad Baishya
10	Atul Bora (Junior)	Hemanta Kalita

Source: Data collected during the field work.

5.7.1 The Assam Assembly election of 2006: A missed opportunity

It had become a trend since 1985 that the AGP and the Congress enjoyed the power in Assam alternatively. So the supporters of the regional party were hopeful for a comeback of the AGP. Vernacular media was all out in support of the regional party. The clean image of Brindaban Goswami, who was declared as the candidate for the post of chief minister was the face of the moment. The election was held in two phases on April 3 and 10, 2006. But the AGP failed in strategy and alliance making. As remarked by Atul Bora in an interview, the AGP under the leadership of Brindaban Goswami did not formally engage in pre-poll alliance with any regional party in Assam.¹⁷⁴ No common political agenda was sorted out with the Trinamul Gana Parishad (TGP), PLP of Pabindra Deka, Jatiya Oikya Mancha of Pranabjit Chaliha, Bodo People's Front (BPF) of Hagrama Mahilary and with the BJP. The TGP led by former AGP leaders Atul Bora and Pulakesh Boruah were

¹⁷⁴ Atul Bora, Personal interview, at his residence in Guwahati on January 2, 2014.

even willing to merge with the parent political party. Consequently, the hesitancy was proved fatal for the anti-Congress parties. The indecision was partly because of an internal pressure from within the AGP upon the president Brindaban Goswami, as some leaders of the AGP would have to sacrifice their favourite constituency seats in the wake of an alliance with other parties. Secondly, clean image of a leader does not make it for political success, for which one need the prudence of statesmanship as observed by Atul Bora regarding the role of Brindaban Goswami.¹⁷⁵ A common manifesto of the regional political parties, understanding among the regional leaders regarding seat sharing for the election was an important lifeline for the AGP, which could not be achieved. On the contrary, AGP found itself in a piquant situation by having to fight a number of rebel candidates in the Assembly election. Topping the list were Biraj Kumar Sarma and Rekha Rani Dasboro, two founder members of the party who filed nomination as independent candidates from the Gauhati-East and Barama LAC respectively when denied a ticket by the party. Former AASU leader Prabin Bodo, who belonged to Brindaban faction, was given a ticket from Barama LAC; Rekharani Das Bodo contested as independent leading to the defeat of Prabin Bodo. Political analysts felt that the vertical split and rebellion of aspiring candidates in different constituencies sealed the fate for AGP in 2006. Rekharani Das Bodo was of the opinion that Brindaban Goswami made a mistake by not allowing tickets to the promising candidates in the election, whom he thought belong to the Mahanta faction. He was moved by the advice of his associates and did not exercise according to his conscience.¹⁷⁶

Table 5.9

Statistics on performance of the AGP in the 12th Assam Assembly election of 2006

Name of the party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Forfeited Deposit	Votes Polled %	Vote % in Seats contested
AGP	100	24	28	20.39%	25.59%
AGP (P)	93	1	88	2.51%	3.38%
BJP	125	10	87	11.98%	12.07%

¹⁷⁵ Atul Bora, *Abirata Sangram*, (Guwahati: Maa Prakashak Gosthi, 2007), 133-139.

¹⁷⁶ Rekharani Das Bodo, Personal interview, Guwahati on January 9, 2015.

INC	120	53	11	31.08%	32.70%
AUDF	69	10	36	9.03%	16.12%
CPI	9	1	6	1.02%	15.04%
CPI (M)	16	2	12	1.03%	11.24%
ASDC	5	1	0	0.89%	23.54%

Source: Statistical report on the general election to the legislative assembly of Assam 2006, Election Commission of India

The AGPs vote share increased marginally but the percentage of votes polled in seats contested decreased by almost 7%. This data shows the impact of factionalism on the party. The rival AGP (P) could win only one seat in Barhampur but its 2.51% vote share proved fatal for the AGP. Two new regional political parties contested in this election for the first time. Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF) and the All India United Democratic Front (AUDF). BPF clinched 10 seats in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) areas. The other party AUDF also won 10 seats with 9.03% vote share in the minority dominated constituencies of lower Assam which are dominated by the religious minorities. In fact, polarization of votes in favour of the BPF and AUDF squarely affected the AGP vote bank. This signaled towards formation of new regional political parties along the ethnic lines and therefore, the emergence of regionalism in a new plane in Assam. AGP leaders as shocked by the fractured mandate bewildered in disappointment. The Congress with 53 seats became the majority party in the Assembly and formed the government with the support of the BPF.

5.8 Battle for supremacy: Factionalism in the AGP after the Assembly election of 2006

After the Assembly election 2006, the AGP sat in opposition with 24 MLAs, Brindaban Goswami became the leader of the opposition. There were roar against his leadership. A bid for unification of all regional forces basically to recoup power at Dispur started in the AGP house. Most of the members of the central executive committee of the party started alleging the President, Brindaban Goswami, for his

failure to coalesce the party with the AGP (P) led by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. They were of the view that expulsion of Mahanta before the Assembly poll in 2006 damaged the prospect of the AGP. The general view in the executive committee was that the party can't be strengthened sans Mahanta. Though, Mahanta was no more a member of the AGP, yet he continued to influence the internal affairs of the AGP. There was a demand of resignation of Brindaban Goswami from the post of party president. But Mahanta's return to the AGP was being opposed by the most prominent student organization of Assam; the AASU. Brindaban Goswami and his faction were also against the merger of the AGP and AGP (P). Apparently, the Brindaban Goswami faction, comprised of the former AASU leaders like Keshab Mahanta, Sarbananda Sonowal, Apurba Kumar Bhattacharya, was closer to the AASU leadership. The AASU opposed Mahanta's inclusion due to his failure to implement the Assam Accord of 1985 and his alleged involvement in the 'secret killings.'

Despite the political crisis and factional rivalry in the party, Brindaban Goswami was re-elected as the AGP president in the 6th general conference of the party held in Guwahati on 29-31st August, 2007. In this conference the AGP constitution was amended and a new post of working president was created. Phani Bhusan Choudhury became the first working president. A section of protesters who demanded Phani Bhusan Choudhury's appointment as president vandalized the venue and the reportedly stained the image of the party. Meanwhile, Mahanta faction continued its pressure upon the AGP for unification which seemed impossible at the presence of Brindaban Goswami. Goswami after being unable to set his own house in order got engaged in national politics for building a third front as an alternative to the Congress and BJP. The AGP joined hands with eight regional political parties of different states in the new front which included All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), Telegu Desham, Samajwadi Party (SP), Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) and Jharkhand Vikas Morcha. This step of Brindaban Goswami had created uproar in the AGP house and the opposite

faction campaigned against the president for being over ambitious in national politics.

Ultimately, Goswami the President of the party was given an unceremonious farewell in a special general conference of the AGP held in the Uddeshna hall at Guwahati on Sept. 21, 2008. He was ousted from the post of president and senior leader Chandra Mohan Patowary became the new president. In fact, Brindaban Goswami had to flee from the volatile general body meeting after he faced death threat from the goons present in the hall. The party vice presidents Arun Kumar Sarmah and Sarbananda Sonowal, known as close associates of Brindaban Goswami also resigned. The central executive of the AGP was dissolved minutes after the resignation and the deck for unification of the regional forces; specially the merger of AGP (P) was cleared at a verbal note. This special general conference showcased the utter indiscipline created by factionalism in the party. However, Brindaban Goswami ruled out any possibility of resignation from the AGP due to the indecent behavior of some of his colleagues in the party and assured all cooperation to the new president Patowary in taking the party forward.¹⁷⁷

5.9 The homecoming season for the breakaway factions of the AGP: Chandra Mohan Patowary time

The new president Chandra Mohan Patowary immediately after taking charge took measures for re-union of all likeminded regional leaders and parties. The impetus for unification came entirely from electoral considerations. The AGP celebrated its 23rd foundation day on 14th October, 2008 at Golaghat where it was born in 1985. It was the D-Day for the regional party as all the breakaway factions merged with the parent organization. The AGP leadership and supporters were jubilant on the occasion. The AGP (P) of the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, PLP of Pabindra Deka, and TGP of Atul Bora were expected to reinvigorate the regionalist front in Assam. But Brindaban Goswami stayed away from the festivities. Significantly, grassroot workers of the AGP mostly pressurized for the unity. However, the party took a

¹⁷⁷ 'Brindaban alleges threat', *The Telegraph*, September 23, 2008.

resolution to prevent the newcomer from assuming any important party post upto three years. The Mahanta faction was seemingly angry at this bar.

The AGP fought the parliamentary election of 2009 under the leadership of Chandra Mohan Patowary. But the party could win only in one constituency. Joseph Toppo won from the Tezpur parliamentary seat. The dismal show in this election demoralized the AGP workers. The party leadership went into a retrospective mode and organized *sankalp* rally, workshops, protests etc at different parts of Assam. In the run up to the forthcoming assembly election in 2011, president Patowary said,

*"We have learnt from our mistakes and are determined not to repeat those. The AGP understands the feelings of the people better than any national party can ever do. Unlike the Congress, we are not controlled by a high command and so our leaders can freely raise the concerns of the people."*¹⁷⁸

This time several top leaders of the party felt that a tie up with the BJP would be detrimental for AGPs interests. The AGP was engaged in some sort of electoral understanding since the Panchayat election of 2007. But after the poor performance in the parliamentary election of 2009, the regional party was under tremendous pressure from its rank and file to sever its tie with the saffron party. AGP won just one seat, while the BJP seized the opportunity of the alliance to win four seats in 2009. In the 2004 election, the AGP and the BJP won two seats each-without any electoral alliance. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Brindaban Goswami had voiced against AGP-BJP alliance, but party president Chnadra Mohan Patowary and Sarbananda Sonowal insisted to continue the tie up till 2011 election. Sarbananda Sonowal eventually joined the BJP and went on to become the president of the Assam state committee. By the time, the AGP and BJP became look alike for the voters in Assam. However, in the assembly election of 2011, both the parties fought independently against the ruling Congress.

¹⁷⁸ 'United AGP sharpens oust-Cong knife', *The Telegraph*, January 30, 2011.

5.9.1 Assembly Election of 2011 and factional politics in the AGP

The assembly election of 2011 was a watershed event for the AGP. Despite all the odds, the party jumped into the electoral fray with new vigour. This time there was no internal dissension or rebellion regarding nomination or ticket distribution. In fact, image of the party as an unstable and faction ridden party reached such a level that there were no potential candidates seeking party tickets in some constituencies. Even the political analysts have not put any hope for the regional party. Though the Congress had ruled the state for 10 years, yet there seemed no alternatives to it. The main opposition parties having a prospect for government formation were the AGP and the BJP. But the grassroot organizations of the AGP had been shattered by the internal dissensions and that of BJP was still an urban based organization having no root in the rural areas of Assam. So the psephologists predicated a hung assembly in which the AGP was expected to play a kingmaker role. But the result was unexpected. The following table clears the picture:

Table 5.10
Statistics on performance of the AGP in the 13th Assam Assembly election of 2011

Name of the party	Seats Contested	Seats Won	Forfeited Deposit	Votes Polled %	Vote % in Seats contested
AGP	104	10	46	16.29%	19.72%
BJP	120	05	84	11.47%	12.09%
INC	126	78	12	39.39%	39.42%
AUDF	78	18	41	12.57%	19.87%
CPI	17	0	16	0.52%	4.12%
CPI (M)	17	0	14	1.13%	7.71%
AITC	103	1	100	2.05%	2.46%
BPF	29	12	11	6.13%	25.16%

Source: Statistical report on the general election to the Legislative Assembly of Assam 2011, Election Commission of India

The people's mandate was in favour of the Congress which secured absolute majority winning 78 seats. AGPs vote share decreased in comparison to the

assembly election of 2006 and the total tally remained at 10. The AUDF became the biggest opposition party with 18 seats. The BPF was able to increase its tally to 12 seats and secured its vote bank in the bodo heartlands. Even the regional party failed to win even a single seat in 21 out of the total 27 districts and its representation has been limited to the districts of Nagaon, Lakhimpur, Bongaigaon, hailakandi, Sonitpur and Udalguri. 20 out of the 24 sitting MLAs of the AGP lost the election. BJP too was confined to only five seats in Brahmaputra valley. CPI and CPM could not bag a single seat in this election. In fact, the ruling Congress swept election.

The result was like the bolt from the blue for the AGP. Next year the party's leadership was again passed on to Prafulla Kumar Mahanta in the 9th general conference held on 25-26 April, 2012. He defeated Padma Hazarika in the internal election to the post of party president. This defeat unleashed a fresh factional rivalry between Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Padma Hazarika. Later on, when expelled by the party, Padma Hazarika left the AGP to join the BJP. In the wake of the parliamentary election of 2014 two other important leaders of the AGP, Hitendra Nath Goswami and Chandra Mohan Patowary left AGP to join the BJP. Along with these leaders a large section of AGP workers and supporters also shifted allegiance to the national party.

5.10 The postscripts: Culmination of degenerative factionalism

In the parliamentary election of 2014, AGP could win no seat. In this election, the Modi wave worked for the BJP which successfully clinched 7 seats. The Congress was limited to only 3 seats. In this election, Assam witnessed highest ever voter's turnout of 79.88%. But the AGP could not cash on this wave election. Its support base dwindled and the image of a viable opposition has been damaged. Nobody took the issue of the AGP seriously including the media. The leadership of the party failed to mould second generation of leadership and paid the price for it. After the parliamentary election president Prafulla Kumar Mahanta took leave from his post due to illness and the working president Atul Bora (Junior) took over the charge of president as per decision taken in general house meeting for six

months. Then the general house bestowed full-fledged charge of the president upon Atul Bora (Junior) till next general conference to be held in 2016. Keshab Mahanta was upgraded as working president. Meanwhile, Atul Bora (Senior) also joined the BJP in search of new political fortune in 2014. Thus, the regional force in Assam led by the AGP received jolt one after another and could not recover from the trauma till the assembly election in 2016.

5.10.1 Regionalism after the 14th Assam Assembly election of 2016

AGP was left with no other option but to forge an alliance with the BJP for the assembly election of 2016. President Atul Bora and working president Keshab Mahanta started negotiation with the BJP leadership. But Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and a few others were opposed to such an alliance. They expressed fear that the BJP's juggernaut might crush the regional identity of the AGP. As such the AGP leadership was again divided into two factions over the issue of pre-poll pact with the BJP. Another section of AGP leaders adopted a pro-Congress approach and secretly met the Congress leadership with a similar proposal. Durga Das Bodo, one of the leaders of that group whose name was leaked in the vernacular press joined the Congress. However, Atul Bora (Junior) and Keshab Mahanta faction preferred to join hands with the BJP rather than falling into oblivion. They arrived on a seat sharing agreement and succeeded in securing 14 seats in the assembly election of 2016. Since then AGP has been a partner in the BJP led ministry in Assam and trying to revive its lost political ground in politics.



Factionalism in the AGP and crisis of regionalism in Assam

Chapter 6

6.1 Regionalism and contradictions of Assamese nationalism

Regionalism and regional consciousness is natural phenomena in case of the peripheral states like Assam. Though, since ancient times Assam shares some cultural and linguistic affinities with the larger Indian civilization, yet this land has been independent political and administrative entity till the coming of the British. The British colonialism officially brought Assam under a common administration with that of India. After that the anti-colonial movement led by Mahatma Gandhi helped the middle class of Assam in associating regional interests of the people of Assam with that of nationalist interest of India. The merger of Assam Association with the Indian National Congress (INC) in 1921 was a watershed event. Since then middle class people continued to offer loyalty to the Indian nationalist cause. But the multi-faceted ethnic and linguistic interests in Assam continued to emerge in the form of the Tribal League, the Ahom Sabha, the Asom Sangrakhini Sabha etc., in the mid 20th century. Simultaneously, a political current for assimilation of all tribes and ethnic communities into the Assamese nationalism continued under the leadership of the Assamese middle class. At the same time, preservation of socio-economic and linguistic interests of the ethnic Assamese and indigenous tribal population also became important political agenda after the independence. These demands took the form of socio-economic and linguistic movement. Gradually, the process of assimilation into the Assamese middle class was turned down by the new tribal middle class in Assam and asserted their distinct cultural identity. The rift between the dominant Assamese people who speak the Assamese and the other ethnic communities who speak either the Bengali or other tribal languages became apparent after the promulgation of Assam State Language Act, 1960. Identity assertion of the tribal communities based on their culture and language got new impetus. The tribal communities ventilated their grievances against the ruling elites

of Assam dominated by the Assamese middle class. These contradictions were in a process of halting the nation building process in Assam. The Assamese nationalism itself was distorted and incomplete due to the continued influx of the outsiders into Assam and the internal ethnic grievances which were yet to be addressed. Nandana Dutta in her study on the questions of Assamese identity observes that “This is a location where migration indeed was responsible for spawning separatist movements, and where the internal dynamics generated by migration gave birth to the autonomy movements of many of the larger tribal groups within the state.”¹⁷⁹ Gradually, the issue of indigenous people and immigrants became the primary political discourse. This issue had bound different communities together during the Assam Movement.

6.1.1 The Assam Accord and the indigenous people

The above reference is useful to understand the hype and expectations of the people of Assam upon the Assam Accord, which was signed in order to provide safeguard to the indigenous people of Assam against the ‘silent invasion’ by the foreigners¹⁸⁰. The common masses of Assam had great expectation from the leaders of the Assam Movement who vouched for protecting the regional interests irrespective of the caste, creed, language and ethnicity. But after assuming power as a regional political party the leaders of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) i.e., the erstwhile leaders of Assam movement failed to live up to the popular expectations. The Assam Accord became a focal point of debate as it did not have any provision for protection of the tribal and indigenous people. The clause 6.0 of the Accord regarding the constitutional safeguard for the Assamese people is a vague term having no legal basis. Alaka Sarma, one prominent woman leader of the AGP who was distinguished journalist too said,

¹⁷⁹ Nandana Dutta, *Questions of Identity in Assam: Location, migration and Hybridity*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications India, 2012), xx.

¹⁸⁰ Hiranya Kumar Bhattacharyya termed the unabated infiltration from erstwhile East Bengal/East Pakistan and now Bangladesh, into Assam as ‘the Silent Invasion’ in his book *The Silent Invasion: Assam versus infiltration*, Guwahati, Spectrum, 2001.

*"The Assam Accord did not have any provision for repatriation of the foreigners which is the basic weakness."*¹⁸¹

It was a 'memorandum of understanding' to hoodwink the agitating students and not an accord in the legal sense. Some of the leaders of the movement, specially the PLP and the AJD leaders criticized it as 'stillborn baby'. But the AASU leaders staged victory rally in favour of the Assam Accord. So, there were two sharp contrasting arguments regarding the Accord. When the debate was going on, the central government announced general elections in Assam. The leaders of the Assam Movement get organized into a regional political party, viz. the AGP on 14th October, 1985. As expected the party came with flying colors in the election and occupied political power in Assam.

But the AGP government did not show respect for the tribal identity movements spawning in the 1980s. As a result, the regionalism of the AGP remained confined to the Assamese linguistic communities. In the opinion of Ranoj Pegu, a noted leader of the Mising Autonomy movement,

*"The process of democratization of the society engulfing all the tribal communities in Assam did not happen simultaneously during the Assam Movement or even after. Democratization means equality of rights, equity in dignity and development. The Assamese culture and language was exclusively perused by the movement leaders. The AGP could not peruse an inclusive policy for all the communities. As such, a social rift emerged in Assam along the ethnic line and the tribal section of the AGP leadership got alienated within the party. This fact had weakened the AGP as well as regionalism in Assam."*¹⁸²

The AGP support base did not extend to the Barak valley; it did not have followers in the Karbi and Bodo ethnic heartlands. There were some tea garden leaders in the AGP who were very active in the Assam Movement. The core leaders of the AGP, busy in augmenting personal influence and power, could not decentralize the party structure. This was the time when the suspicion and anger of the tribal towards the

¹⁸¹ Alaka Sarma, Personal interview, Guwahati, January 6, 2015.

¹⁸² Ranoj Pegu, Personal interview, Gogamukh, Mising Autonomous Council (MAC) headquarter, August 5, 2016. Ranoj Pegu, who held the post of Chief Executive of the MAC, recently joined the BJP and then got elected from Dhemaji Assembly Constituency in a recent bye-poll. His original ethnic assertion has now got subsumed under nationalist ideology of the BJP.

Assamese hatched on the ground that the Assamese have exploited and suppressed them both economically and culturally. After a thorough examination of the Assam Accord the tribal people did not find any provision for equitable development of all the indigenous communities.

It is a fact, Assam is a heterogeneous state and any homogenous nationalism is bound to meet the failure. Assamese nationalism became a failed case at the hands of the AGP. There were two main aspects of the failure: first, the lack of statesmanship and factionalism; second, the chauvinistic extremism. A farsighted leadership and inclusive regionalism was the need of the hour.¹⁸³ Factionalism grew in the AGP because leadership contradiction became sharp. This had happened not because of policy differences among the leaders but for getting more power and importance individually in the government machinery and in the party. As Alaka Sarma, a former MLA from the Nalbari Assembly constituency, remarked,

*“the post of the party president and the chief minister was the apple of discord among the factional leaders in the AGP”.*¹⁸⁴

Questions arise about who are the Assamese and who are the indigenous people in Assam, whose rights and dignity the AGP government is going to protect. The caste Hindu communities in Assam who were the flag bearers of the Assamese language and culture wanted assimilation of all other tribe into the Assamese nationalism. But the tribal communities thought the opposite and wanted to assert their separate identity and demanded self-determination. Unhappy with the government policies regarding the tribal, these communities, specially the Bodo, the Mising, the Karbi and the Dimasa started autonomy movements for self-determination based on their indigenous status. The AGP government looked at these autonomy movements as separatists and law and order problem.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Alaka Sarma, *op.cit.*

6.1.2 The tribal autonomy movement and factionalism in the AGP

Immediately after assuming power in Dispur the AGP government received a jolt from the Bodos, as they spearheaded a massive movement for a separate Bodoland. The Bodos started the movement under the All Bodo Student Union (ABSU) and it took a violent turn. It is alleged that ABSU president Upendra Nath Bramhma while coming to meet the AGP leaders at Dispur to discuss the issues of the Bodo community was not treated well. The DGP of Assam police, Nishinath Changkakati, started an initial dialogue in 1986 with the Bodo leaders including Upendra Nath Barhma and Pramila Rani Brahma in order to arrive at an understanding. But the next level talk either with the Home Minister or the Chief Minister could not be started due to the apathy of the AGP government.¹⁸⁵ Eventually, the Bodo movement for autonomy started and the ABSU made it a mass movement in the Bodo dominated areas. The movement was directed against the Assamese hegemony and anti-tribal attitude of the AGP government. The main opposition to the Bodo movement came from the AGP and the party took a stand of opposition to the demand of separate state. The AGP leaders suspected the hands of the Congress party behind the Bodo agitation which gave slogan of "divide Assam fifty-fifty". When factional politics grew rapid in the AGP and the party got divided into two blocks, each blamed the other for the inability to deal with the Bodo agitation. Brinadaban Goswami who was in the anti-Mahanta camp had the opinion that Bhrigu Kumar Phukan as the Home Minister was at the threshold of solving the Bodo issue. He arrived at a consensus with the Bodo leaders and was ready to accept almost 90% of their demands. At this point, Phukan was removed from that responsibility by Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.¹⁸⁶ Senior AGP leader and former president of Asom Sahitya Sabha Nagen Saikia mentioned during an interview that he used to meet Bodo leader Binoy Khungur Bismutiary at the Parliament during his term in Rajya Sabha. Bismutiary expressed intention to hold talk with the AGP government regarding the Bodo

¹⁸⁵ Premkanta Mahanta, *Raj bhaganor pora kol thukaloike*, Personal memoir of a retired IPS officer in Assam. p.130.

¹⁸⁶ Brindaban Goswami, Personal interview, Guwahati on January 7, 2015.

issue. Saikia on several occasions intimated this to Chief Minister Mahanta who took virtually no action. He informed Saikia that Bhriku Kumar Phukan was looking after the issue and thus avoided the matter.¹⁸⁷ In fact, factionalism debarred the leaders of the AGP to discuss the crucial ethnic issues in a cordial manner. Hitendra Nath Goswami on the eve of the Parliamentary election in 2014 remarked,

*“We were given the chance to serve the people and to fight together for our rights because the ASDC, the regional party of Karbi Anglong, was our partner in the first tenure and I remember Upendra Nath Brahma, whom Bodos treated as their God, had come to meet us to discuss their demands but we failed. It is because of our neglect that these ethnic groups have gone away from us leaving us with no base in areas like Kokrajhar, Karbi Anglong and the tea belts”.*¹⁸⁸

One of the leaders of the ASDC, Haliram Terang was given a ministerial post in the first AGP government to head a less important department. He resigned from that position and returned to Karbi Anglong to fight for Autonomous State in the hill districts. In the Assembly election of 1991, the ASDC won all the ST reserved seats in Karbi Anglong district viz. Diphu, Hawraghat, Bokajan and Baithalangso. The AGP candidates contesting against the ASDC candidates stood in third position in all these seats. Jayanta Rongpi of ASDC continuously won the parliamentary seat of the Autonomous Districts (ST) for four terms in 1991, 1996, 1998 and 1999.

Table 6.1

Electoral performance of the AGP in Karbi Anglong District of Assam in 1991

Party	Bokajan (number of votes)	Diphu (number of votes)	Howraghat (number of votes)	Baithalangso (number of votes)
ASDC	Monsing Rongpi (28585)	Dipendra Rongpi (31521)	Babu Rongpi (31323)	Haliram Terang (35050)
INC	Rajen Timung (12631)	Kunjalar Hagjer (14657)	Khorsing Engti (11193)	Dhaniram Rongpi (29249)
AGP	Babu Ram Bey (8349)	Samsing Hanse (14128)	Bidya Sing Engleng (7895)	Mohan Teron (6694)

¹⁸⁷ Nagen Saikia, Personal interview, Dibrugarh on July 17, 2016.

¹⁸⁸ Retrieved from www.dailyindian.com/2013/07/25/end-of-a-dream.

Source: Statistical report on the general election to the Legislative Assembly of Assam 2011, Election Commission of India

Paniram Rabha who contested as AGP candidate in the general election of 1998 from the Kokrajhar (ST) parliamentary constituency was denied a ticket in the general election of 1999 by the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta faction as he allegedly belonged to the Bhriagu Kumar Phukan faction. Ultimately the AGP left the seat uncontested to the opposition. Pani Ram Rabha joined the Congress and won from the Barama (ST) Assembly constituency in 2001 defeating the AGP candidate Rekharani Das Bodo. In the Assembly election of 2006, Rekharani Das Bodo, who stood second in the 2001 election, was not allowed to contest on AGP ticket from Barama constituency by the Brindaban Goswami faction and gave preference to former AASU president Prabin Bodo. Rekharani Das Bodo, who was known as Mahanta supporter, contested as Independent candidate, and sealed the fate for the AGP candidate Prabin Bodo. The BPF candidate Maneswar Brahma won the seat comfortably. Later Prabin Bodo also joined the BPF led by Hagrama Mohilary.¹⁸⁹ Since then the AGP has not been able to win the Barama seat, which was a stronghold of the regional party. As such insensitivity towards the tribal issues and factionalism was one of the main causes responsible for the shrinking support base of the AGP among the tribal people.

6.1.3 Representation of the tea tribe in the AGP

Traditionally the Tea Tribe-Adivasi community¹⁹⁰ in Assam has been a habitual vote bank of the Congress party. But the new generation of the tea tribe supported the Assam Movement and took active part in it. Dineswar Tasa, a leader among them was the convener of the political convention organized by the AASU at Golaghat in 1985 which gave birth to the AGP. There were as many as five MLAs representing the tea tribe in 1985, who got elected as AGP candidate. Bhadreswar

¹⁸⁹ The BPF has been ruling the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) since 2003 in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) comprised of four districts viz. Kokrajhar, Sirang, Udalguri and Baga. Hagrama Mohilary a former rebel leader of Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) is the Chief Executive of the BTC.

¹⁹⁰ The community prefers to be addressed as Tea Tribe-Adivasis an accepted term used by the Government of Assam.

Tanti represented the AGP in the Lok Sabha from the Kaliabar parliamentary constituency in 1985. He aligned with the Bhrigu Kumar Phukan faction in 1991 and contested as NAGP candidate from Kaliabar. The division of vote bank resulted in his defeat and gradually Tanti became inactive in politics. Since 2011, the AGP could not elect any leader from the Tea Tribe-Adivasi community to the Assam Legislative Assembly. Basically, some AGP leaders of the tea tribe like Dipen Tanti left the AGP in the wake of the factional rivalry in the party and joined the Congress. Another important leader Israel Nanda became unimportant in the AGP in the late 1990s and joined hands with Bhrigu Kumar Phukan faction and the newly formed Asom Jatiya Sanmilitan in 1998. The AGP has never been able to win in Thowra and Mariani Assembly constituencies since the split in the party in 1991. In fact, the tea tribe community decides election result in most of the assembly constituencies in Upper Assam. As such, the dwindling support base of the AGP among the tea tribe was an important factor behind the political debacle since 2001 election.

Table 6.2

AGP legislators/leaders representing the Tea Tribe-Adivasi community in the Assam legislative Assembly

ALA 1985		ALA 1991		ALA 1996		ALA 2001		ALA 2006	
Name	LAC	Name	LAC	Name	LAC	Name	LAC	Name	LAC
Barki Prasad Telenga	Thowra	Binod Gowala	Sarupathar	Joseph Toppo	Dhekiajuli	Joseph Toppo	Dhekiajuli	Joseph Toppo	Dhekiajuli
Naren Tanti	Mariani			Binod Gowala	Sarupathar			Binod Gowala	Sarupathar
Dipen Tanti	Lahowal								
Padmanath Koiri	Biswanath								
Binod Gowala	Sarupathar								
Total	5	1		2		1		2	

Source: Election Commission of India

6.1.4 Schumpeter's theory of political party: the frightful AGP and factionalism

Joseph Schumpeter, a leading political thinker, categorically mentioned about the unstable political parties which had to succumb to every conceivable crisis due to its inability to fulfill people's expectations and aspirations. He said that political loyalty to a party should not be so fragile that it is withdrawn at every instance of its failure. He recommended for building strong political loyalty so that the party can survive the impending crisis. The AGP was facing a major crisis of survival in 1987-88 in the wake of rise in insurgent activities and ethnic movements all over Assam. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, the then Home Minister of Assam appealed to the people to lend moral support to the government. In fact, during the disastrous non-rule of the AGP, which even the party leaders have acknowledged later, it was difficult to determine who was responsible for the failure of the party as well as its Government. Ultimately, a mudslinging among the leaders started. There were a few attempts from within the party to topple the Mahanta government. The first of such attempt was made by Pulakesh Barua, the Speaker of the Assam assembly. However, he refrained from executing the plot on advice of some senior well-wishers of the party.¹⁹¹ But the internal dissensions intensified among the leaders of the AGP and in this process two clear factions emerged, one led by the Chief Minister Mahanta and the other Bhrigu Kumar Phukan.

The prevailing political environment nurtures the internal politics of every political party. The nature and extent of factionalism in the AGP also followed this principle. The factional conflict intensified in proportion to the socio-political dilemma and conflict in Assam in the 1990s. There was correlation between the social environments, condition of ethnic conflicts outside in the society and the factionalism inside the AGP. The leaders of the AGP were left in disarray and felt helpless in the event of the new social challenges and eventual non-rule of the government. Senior leader Dinesh Goswami expressed his agony and disgust at the situation and also frustration in his inability to curb the impending danger in front

¹⁹¹ Premkanta Mahanta, *op. cit.*, p 131.

of his party colleagues.¹⁹² The election manifesto of 1985 declared that the AGP is the party of the people of Assam. This entailed a promise for the people of Assam too. By virtue of its origin based on the popular support, the AGP had also accepted John Locke's notion of people's right to dissent. The leaders of the party on many occasions expressed that the people of Assam is the high-command and guardian of the party.

But most exciting achievement of the AGP rule would have been a harmonious blend of theory and practical ideas in reality. Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta soon after assuming power realized the difficulties and said,

*"It is very tough, much tougher than we had thought. People want us to do so much more that we can humanely do."*¹⁹³

Bhriku Kumar Phukan also found himself in a mellowed mood and said,

*"The only reason we came to power was to implement the accord. We just cannot afford to fail the people there."*¹⁹⁴

The blame game started in the wake of the criticism in the media about the failure in governance. Even the party mouthpiece, *Gana Batori'* reported such incidents and remarked that the AGP should be open to any constructive criticism. Despite such open criticism from the civil society, the AGP could not solve its internal squabbles and succumbed to it.

6.2 The AGP's response to the secessionism in Assam

Both the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) and the AGP spawned from the same platform of Assam Movement. Though ULFA was created on April 7, 1979 at Sivasagar, yet some of its leaders participated in the Assam Movement and became members of the AAGSP, the umbrella organization of Assam Movement. For example, top ULFA leaders like Rajeeb Rajkonwar (later Arabinda Rajkhowa) and Golap Barua (later Anup Chetia) who became the chairman and the general

¹⁹² *ibid.*

¹⁹³ Shekhar Gupta, 'Assam: The endangered accord', *India Today*, March 15, 1986.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*

secretary of the secessionist outfit participated in state level convention of AAGSP.¹⁹⁵ On the AGP-ULFA relationship, Udoyan Misra remarks:

*“With the coming to power of the AGP in December 1985 ULFA started spreading its network very fast and there is little doubt that in this it received a lot of direct and indirect support from the state government. Thus in the process, ULFA entered into a rather complex sort of relationship with the state authority. Many of the ULFA cadres were close to the Asom Gana Parishad and the latter could not help but patronize them.”*¹⁹⁶

The ULFA got conducive atmosphere during the AGP rule since 1985 for building its organizational set up, recruitment of cadres and training. Tamjeng Langkumera, an NSCN leader claimed in an interview with the Asomiya Pratidin that the first visitors to Nagaland on behalf of ULFA were the student leaders Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Pradip Hazarika along with Arabinda Rajkhowa who went to request the NSCN leadership to provide arms and ammunitions to the nascent extremist outfit.¹⁹⁷ The AGP ministers later talked about the ULFA leaders as one amongst us and the ULFA leaders had easy access to the corridors of power in Dispur. Therefore, the AGP government failed to check the parallel government run by the ULFA in the rural areas in Assam. Common people were charged with nationalistic fervor at the welfare activities taken up by the ULFA in rural areas. The ULFA took measures against anti-social elements and held trial of the corrupt people and criminals. People preferred to approach the ULFA to ventilate their grievances instead of going to the police and court. This was a critical period for the democratic machinery and bureaucracy in Assam. The Home Ministry under Bhrigu Kumar Phukan was rendered helpless due to the large scale popular support towards the actions of the militant outfit. Paresh Baruah the Commander-in-Chief of the ULFA had acknowledged in an interview in *The Week* the receipt of a huge amount as donation from the AGP ministers like Bhrigu Kumar Phukan,

¹⁹⁵ Atul Bora, *Abirata Sangram*, (Guwahati: Maa Prakashak Gosthi, 2007), 40 & 45. (Bora mentioned that these two ULFA leaders participated in AAGSP meeting on December 20, 1981 and December 28, 1982 representing the Sivasagar and Tinsukia district of the AJYCP.)

¹⁹⁶ Udayan Misra, *Periphery Strikes Back: The challenges to the Nation State in Assam and Nagaland*, (Shimla, Rastrapati Nivas: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2000), 156.

¹⁹⁷ Nani Gopal Mahanta, *Confronting the State: ULFA's quest for sovereignty*, (New Delhi: Sage publications, 2014), 86.

Pradip Hazarika and Chandra Mohan Patowary and said that the AGP men were once upon a time were their friends and also talked about revolution.¹⁹⁸

However, the AGP leaders did not look at the Bodo movement with the same parlance. The Bodo youths and organizations felt angry at the policies of the AGP government regarding the forest land or the four language formula.¹⁹⁹ The Bodo insurgency was the by-product of the policies and actions of the AGP government which treated the ethnic demand for autonomy as law and order issue. The counter movement operations led by the Assam police in the Bodo dominated areas put the AGP government in embarrassment. The factional leaders in the AGP always tried to put the onus of these incidents upon the rival groups.

The Language Bill of 1986 that made Assamese compulsory in schools resulted in bitter protest movement in the Barak valley too. However, a rumor was spread by the opposition parties that the Bengali language will be removed from the curriculum. Brindaban Goswami, the Education Minister went to Silchar in Barak Valley and talked to the civil society members and could calm down the anti-government movement. After Goswami's successful visit as Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta went to Karimganj to observe the situation, there was heavy protest against him and police had to resort to firing that resulted in death of a Bengali student. Brindaban Goswami advised Mahanta to refrain from an immediate tour to the Barak valley, but Mahanta did not take notice of that and visited the valley whimsically. The firing incident flared up the situation.²⁰⁰ The matter strained relations between the Chief Minister and the Education Minister. As far as the politics of regionalism is concerned, the AGP could not build a vote

¹⁹⁸ *ibid*, p 87.

¹⁹⁹ AGP government while going to evict the encroachment from forest land jeopardized the interests of the Bodo people who owing to internal displacement settled in the reserved forests.

The four language formula refers to the AGP government's policy making Assamese language compulsory in the schools. According to this policy of the Education Department a student was bound to learn the mother tongue as the first language, Assamese as the state language, Hindi as the national language and English as the international language. As a result, the Assamese speakers learnt three languages in school, but the ethnic tribal students had to learn four languages.

²⁰⁰ Brindaban Goswami, Personal interview, Guwahati on January 7, 2015.

base in the Barak valley in future. The Bengali dominated region of Assam demanded separate statehood. The AGP's support base remained confined to the Brahmaputra valley where the Assamese speakers are majority. The tribal communities like the Bodo, Mising, Rabha, Tiwa, Karbi, Dimasa, Deuri, and the tea tribe gradually became alienated from the Assamese nationalism which weakened the regional politics of the AGP.

6.2.1 The ULFA insurgency and the class interest of the AGP

In connection with the attitude of the AGP leaders towards the ULFA, as already discussed, it may be worthwhile to add some more on the differences among the AGP leaders regarding the insurgent outfit. The ULFA built training camps and bases in the forests, ran parallel government in Assam, resorted to killing of the Congress workers and politicians, and openly used arms for extortion of money from the non-Assamese businessman allegedly in connivance with the government. Bhriku Kumar Phukan condemned such incidents and on couple of occasions suspended the Officer in Charge of the local police station but the culprits were never apprehended. The Assamese middle class was enthralled at the Robin Hood image of the ULFA engaged for reform of the society. The Assamese caste Hindu section hailed the anti-alcohol drive, while the tribal section of the society regarded it as an attempt to insult their culture. Such reform agenda was criticized as an epitome of caste Hindu ideology. The United Revolutionary Movement Council of Assam (URMCA) criticized the ultra-nationalist and class character of the ULFA. The URMCA was the first organization in Assam which dared to defy the ULFA dictation. Sabyasachi Rabha of the URMCA accused the ULFA of unleashing a reign of terror in Assam. Ranaj Pegu the General Secretary of URMCA, branded the ULFA insurgency as the luxury of a few groups of boys, who were more attracted to easy money and motor cycle culture. The ULFA retorted to this and accused the URMCA of making an attempt to divide the people of Assam in the name of tribal identity. The ULFA also argued that reservation policy as demanded by the URMCA must be followed by economic consideration as the yardstick and not

caste. Due to the anti-ULFA stand many URMCA cadres had to pay their lives.²⁰¹ The AGP government paid a deaf ear to all these atrocities and as a result the tribal communities stood aloof from the regional party. The tribal leaders gradually left the AGP fold and joined in other parties specially Congress.

One important point the AGP leaders could not visualize was that the notion of greater Assamese nationalism which was seriously damaged by the ideological stand of the ULFA. The ULFA was thought to be the B team of the AGP. The ULFA was not concerned with the illegal immigrants of Assam neither regarded the Bangladeshi immigrants as the enemy. Instead of that the insurgent outfit castigated the Marwari and Bengali traders, the Biharis and other Indian settlers in Assam as the colonialist exploiters. The Marwaris, Bengalis and the Biharis who settled in Assam had never opposed the genuine nationalist demands of the Assamese people. The AGP too had no clash of interest with these sections of people. But the inaction of the AGP government against the extortion drive of the ULFA made AGP unpopular. The Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) had to secretly airlift the non-Assamese officers of the tea industry to Kolkata without informing the AGP government. This was the time when internal bickering in the AGP reached very low level. Eventually, the Chandrasekhar Government at the center imposed president's rule in Assam on 27 November, 1990. As a first step, the ULFA was declared as an unlawful organization and was banned. Operation Bajrang, the first counter insurgency operation began in Assam. The Upper Assam was declared as disturbed area and common people had to face hardship during search operations of the army. Ranoj Pegu opined in a personal interview said that *"Two main reasons of AGP's debacle as a regional party was the factionalism and the ULFA insurgency."*²⁰²

²⁰¹ Nani Gopal Mahanta, *op.cit.*, p 78-80.

²⁰² Ranoj Pegu, Personal interview, Gogamukh, Mising Autonomous Council (MAC) headquarter, August 5, 2016.

6.2.2 Mahanta and Phukan faction on ULFA issue

The Bhriku Kumar Phukan faction held Prafulla Kumar Mahanta responsible for the imposition of the president's rule. It alleged that Mahanta gave consent to a proposal of the then Governor of Assam for declaring the upper Assam as disturbed area. It demanded Mahanta's resignation from the position of party president and when the latter rejected it the split of the party was obvious and the Natun Asom Gana Parishad (NAGP) was born. These aspects of factionalism in the AGP have been elaborately discussed in the fourth chapter. Here I would like to show the link between factional politics and the ULFA issue. Bhriku Kumar Phukan and his associates declared that future of Assam was bleak under the weak leadership of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta. They accused Mahanta responsible for the lawlessness and subsequent imposition of military operation in Assam. The counter insurgency operations created questions of human rights issues and the image of the AGP had further been tarnished. The AGP government created designated court for special trial of the cases of insurgency. But the AGP cabinet decided to form such court only at Guwahati which made the condition of the under trial alleged insurgents pathetic. The Phukan faction attacked Mahanta for this decision. The role media during this period of turmoil in the AGP was not constructive. Media used to pit one faction against the other. However, Bhriku Kumar Phukan enjoyed a considerable position in media houses. During this factional fight, the AGP organization succumbed to a vertical split. And in the subsequent Assembly election the AGP and the breakaway faction, NAGP could win in 19 and 5 seats respectively.

6.2.3 The AASU and the ULFA: Major catalysts of factionalism in the AGP

An Assamese writer has identified two reasons responsible for the failure of the AGP to quell the in-house dissidence-the dependence upon the AASU and paying least attention to the ULFA problem.²⁰³ These two factors made the AGP organization weak at the grassroots level. The leaders of the party could not establish leader-follower relationship with the supporters on holistic approach.

²⁰³Janardan Goswami, 'Asom Gana parishodor uttaran sambhab ne?,' *Agradoot*, November 9, 1994.

Because, they had to prefer the district and regional level AASU leaders while distributing political and economic resources. The AASU members did not reciprocated with sense of loyalty to the AGP, hence the relation always remained shaky. The AASU also distanced itself away from the AGP during the period of turmoil. This was a consequence of factional politics within the party. As Bhriku Kumar Phukan's faction enjoyed relatively greater influence in the AASU organization in comparison to the Mahanta faction. It is noteworthy that the AASU organization vehemently opposed the merger of the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta faction into the AGP after 2006 during the presidency of Brindaban Goswami.

The second factor; inattention towards the ULFA, was more crucial. The leaders of the AGP were perhaps in dilemma whether to oppose ULFA's demands for secessionism or not. The dilemma germinated in a loss of credibility of the administration. When the central government ousted the AGP from the power ostensibly to protect the constitutional machinery owing to acute law and order crisis created by the insurgents and to restore normalcy, people took a sigh of relief. There were no protests in the streets against the President's Rule. It seemed afterwards from the media reports that Chief Minister Mahanta had no option but to mellow down to the central decision. The Bhriku Kumar Phukan faction on the other hand was furious about the shabby stand taken by Mahanta. The juggernaut of ULFA proved fatal to the first AGP government; it could not foresee what was inevitable and failed to act judiciously.

During the Congress rule under Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia (1991-1996) counter insurgency operations was at the peak. This was known as the Operation Rhino. Common people in the Brahmaputra valley had to face twin threats; one from the ULFA and other from the military. There occurred serious human rights violations all over Assam. But the AGP could not put up a stand as the major opposition party on its own against the acts of violence committed by the state actors. Instead of that the party joined hands with the '*Ganatantrik Adhikar Sangram Samiti*' or

GASS which revealed political amateurship of AGP leadership.²⁰⁴ The GASS formed by a few influential journalists of Assam declared its objectives as nonpolitical. But the fact was that it brought all the anti-Congress forces in Assam under its umbrella. The joining of AGP with the GASS eroded its distinct political character and created confusion.

6.2.4 The Media for Phukan and the grassroots for Mahanta

After the union of two breakaway factions in 1993, Bhriku Kumar Phukan became the executive president of the AGP and became relatively stronger. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta on the other hand was the leader of the AGP legislative party and played an underdog role. Phukan obtaining advice from a section of Assamese reporters set on to move a 'no-confidence motion' against the Hiteswar Saikia government in 1994. But timing was wrong and the motion failed in the Assam Assembly. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and some of his loyal MLAs were kept in dark about this adventurous move of the AGP legislature party. The failure of the no-confidence motion ultimately strengthened the Saikia ministry and helped in solving the dissidence in the Congress party. At the same time, Mahanta realized the growing power of Bhriku Kumar Phukan in the AGP and started expanding his network at the grassroots. Phukan, on the other hand, maintained an elite character and remained confined to the urban centers specially in Guwahati. Things went against him so much that in the Lakhimpur general convention of the AGP, not a single district committee proposed Phukan's name as candidate for the post of President or Working President. It was almost unanimous decision of the AGP workers to elect Prafulla Kumar Mahanta uncontested as the President of the party. Bhriku Kumar Phukan and Brindaban Goswami left the conference in the middle of the agenda. Afterwards, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta reacting to the media said,

*"I was in favour of giving Phukan a respectable position in the party, but the other leaders did not feel so."*²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Agradoot, November 2, 1995.

After the Assembly election Mahanta did not offer ministerial berth to either Phukan or Goswami, *prima facie* on the advice of his associates like Digen Bora, Chandra Mohan Patowary, Kamala Kalita and others who grew in stature and power in the AGP cabinet during the second term of rule. Eventually factionalism in the AGP intensified during the period 1996 to 2000 and proved degenerative for the party.

There is direct correlation between the strength of the opposition and factionalism in the ruling party. For example, when the AGP was divided and weak as opposition in the Assam Assembly in 1991-92, factional politics in the ruling Congress was at the peak. This was the time when the AGP moved the no-confidence motion against the Hiteswar Saikia Ministry. Gradually, the AGP became strong after the unification and factional politics in the ruling Congress as the ruling party died down. But with the rise in strength in the AGP camp, insurgency and social unrest also increased, making it imperative for the Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia to take strong action against these elements. The strong measures against the ULFA and a section of Assamese journalist also for their alleged link with the insurgents jeopardized the image of the Congress party, paving the way for the AGP. Saikia was mentioned in the media as '*ganasatru*' (enemy of the people). However, it would be wrong to believe that factionalism in the regional political party ended. It continued to operate in a subtle manner. Yet, it was a foregone conclusion that the AGP led coalition would capture power in Assam in the next Assembly election. Media was totally in favour of the AGP led pre-poll coalition. Anti-incumbency was very high against the Congress. Even the death of Saikia further weakened the Congress party in Assam. After occupying power at Dispur, factional politics in the AGP became intense as the competition from the opposition party was less. The internal rivalry among the leaders took degenerative mode and harmed the interest of the people as a whole.

6.2.5 The ULFA-AGP pact and the aftermath

There were multiple causes adding to the victory of the AGP-led coalition in the Assembly election of 1996. One among them was the informal truce the AGP

leaders had to make with the ULFA in their respective constituencies for support in the election. The role of the underground outfit in the democratic election since 1996 became prominent. It became a deciding factor in the parliamentary elections of 1998, 1999 and also in the Assembly election of 2001. The AGP promised in its manifesto that Assam had a 'right to self-determination'-exactly what the ULFA had been saying.²⁰⁶ But the AGP could not allow the ULFA to operate freely. The Mahanta cabinet, under the pressure of the Union Home ministry allowed operation of the 'Unified Command Structure', the joint anti-insurgency operation of the Assam police and the Indian military. It was obvious because the ULFA killed almost 490 people in Assam since Mahanta took over the charge in May 1996. As a reply to this decision, Mahanta and his cabinet colleagues were attacked by the ULFA apparently to avenge them. Nagen Sarma, the then PWD minister in the Mahanta cabinet succumbed to such an attack of the ULFA in 2000. In a press release the outfit referred to Mahanta and the AGP as "betrayers".²⁰⁷ Things turned sour between the AGP and the ULFA to such an extent that grassroot workers were threatened by the ULFA to leave the party and warned not to come out to vote for the AGP in the parliamentary elections of 1998 and 1999. In the assembly election of 2001 the banned outfit favored the Congress and ensured defeat of the AGP. The anti-Mahanta factions in the AGP, however, continued their backlash on the AGP government for the failure in governance and imposition of the Unified Command and the black laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). The ASDC of the Autonomous Districts left the AGP-led coalition in the mean time. The image of the party dipped further during the heinous secret killings between 1998 and 2000. In a nutshell, incapability to stop the degenerative factionalism in the party became the permanent cause of the failure of the government machinery during the second tenure of the AGP rule from which the party is yet to recover.

²⁰⁶ AGP manifesto for the Assembly election of 1996.

²⁰⁷ Abhirook Sen, 'Assam CM Prafulla Kumar Mahanta uses Tata Tea issue to obscure AGP's links with ULFA', *India Today* (cover story), October 20, 1997.

6.3 The miscellaneous impact of social environment on factionalism in the AGP

The principal debate in the civil society arena, the dominant in the political discourse since the Assam movement was about by which institutions or organizations the nationalist and regional interest of Assam was being represented. A host of organizations like the Asom Sahitya Sabha, the AASU, the AJYCP and several socio-cultural organizations claimed to epitomize Assamese nationalism. The nature and scope of these organizations are different but at one point all these organizations stand in unison; that is protection of Assamese language, culture and demography. After 1985 the Assam Accord became a common reference point for safeguard of Assamese identity. But since the 1980s as the tribal middle class emerged, the ethnic communities distanced themselves away from the Assamese nationalism. Ranaj Pegu, a Mising tribal leader questioned the Accord,

“What provision does the accord have for preserving the culture and languages of the tribes and backward classes?”²⁰⁸

All the tribal communities of Assam came up with their own organizations as a reaction to the Pan-Assamese nationalism.

Student organizations of the tribes formed the backbone of the respective ethnic identity movements just as the AASU provided the necessary impetus to the Assam Movement. After the formation of the AGP, the AASU continued its legacy and influenced the internal politics of the party. For example, as the AASU protested against some corrupt ministers, Prafulla Kumar Mahanta had to reshuffle his ministry for the first time and dropped 12 ministers at one go. When factional division in the AGP deepened AASU had exercised covert influence upon Bhriku Kumar Phukan and demanded resignation of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta.

Another instance of AASU influence in factionalism in the AGP was evident during the rivalry between Atul Bora and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta on the occasion of the

²⁰⁸<http://indiatoday.in/story/agp-government-finds-itself-chastened-by-difficulties-in-implementing-the-assam-accord/1/348261.html> accessed on March 31, 2017.

Dispur by-election of October 1996. AASU demanded postponement of the by-election till the voter's list is updated and corrected. But Atul Bora was desperate to get elected and defied the AASU decree. As per the constitutional norm in order to remain in the post of PWD Minister he needed to be elected within six months. He sensed a plot in the machination of Prafulla Mahanta and Digen Bora. Ultimately, defiant Atul Bora contested and won. It was apparently the interference of the AASU that became the immediate factor of factional rivalry between Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Atul Bora. Thus, a new episode of factional rivalry between the Chief Minister and the PWD Minister began that ended in split in the party in 2000. The period between 1996 and 2001 was the most tumultuous period in factional politics in the AGP. The party had the twin objectives of winning back the popular confidence and establishing itself as capable political organization. Both the objectives failed only due to incessant factional politics. Mahanta had to face two pronged attack from the Bhrigu Kumar Phukan faction and Atul Bora faction. Though he was shrewd enough to quell the dissidence with carrot and stick policy, yet the governance miserably failed in Assam.

6.3.1 Disillusionment of the tribal leaders in the AGP

In the 1990s a number of tribal leaders left the AGP and joined other parties in search of better fortune. David Ledger and Bharat Chandra Narah joined the Congress. David Ledger represented the AGP in the Indian parliament. Bhrata Narah was the party spokesman and former minister in the first AGP ministry. A number of allegations were raised against Narah in the media reports because Hiteswar Saikia attended his marriage ceremony and he shared dais with the Congress chief minister in his own constituency Dhakuakhana. Narah also took a stand against AGP's hobnobbing with the GASS and criticized it as a political blunder. Narah left the party amidst these incidents. Later on Barki Prasad Telenga, an important leader of the Tea Tribe-Adivasi community, who became minister in the AGP government in 1996, left the party to join the Congress. Another tribal leader from the Rabha tribe, Paniram Rabha, suffered due to factionalism in the AGP and left the party in 2001 to contest as Congress candidate from the Barama

constituency. Pradan Barua, a promising leader of the Koch-Rajbongshi tribe, left the party to join the Congress. Most of the young Congress leaders in Assam were handpicked by Hiteswar Saikia to join the Congress party from among the AGP workers and leaders. The AGP leaders engaged in factional rivalry did not make space for the aspiring new generation of leaders. The AGP received the ultimate blow when Sarbanada Sonowal, another promising tribal leader from the Sonowal Kachary tribe left the party in 2011 and joined BJP. Sonowal later became the president of the BJP and spearheaded the national party to an unprecedented victory in the parliamentary election of 2014 and in the Assembly election of 2016. The exodus of the leadership from the AGP to other parties continued till 2016. On the eve of the Assembly election Durgadas Bodo left the AGP and joined Congress. On date there is not a single tribal leader in the party who can effect change in the AGP.

6.3.2 The piecemeal ethnic politics of the Congress and AGP's response

In 2003, the BJP government at the center amended the Constitution of India and granted Sixth Schedule to the Bodo tribe of Assam. Accordingly, the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was set up for the Bodo people. Sixth schedule was also being demanded by three other plain tribes of Assam, the Mising, the Rabha and the Tiwa. Jayanta Rangpi, MP from the Autonomous District constituency asked Government of India while taking part in the parliamentary debate on the eve of the amendment, "Why you have given the 6th Schedule status only to the Bodo? Why you have not upgraded it for other Autonomous Councils of the Brahmaputra valley namely Mising, Tiwa and Rabha Autonomous Councils.²⁰⁹ These Autonomous councils were created by Assam Legislative Assembly enactments and did not have 6th Schedule status. The two hill tribes of Assam; the Karbi and the Dimasa have been enjoying the 6th schedule status since 1952.

²⁰⁹ Jayanta Rongpi in his address in the Lok Sabha on August 6, 2003 accessed from <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/350107>

The AGP as a political party showed a lukewarm response to the BTC and the demand of other tribe for 6th schedule status. Ideologically, the AGP hoped for united Assam and wanted no further bifurcation of the state on ethnic line. The ruling Congress took the advantage of the antagonism in the AGP about the tribal demand and announced establishment of Development Councils for almost all the indigenous tribe and communities. This decision of piecemeal politics of the Congress created dilemma in the AGP house and weakened the notion of greater Assamese nationalism. In the Assembly election of 2006 the AGP could not forge alliance with the ethnic political organizations of Assam. It was great political mistake on the part of the AGP for which it had to sit in the opposition. It was the support of the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) which helped the Congress to form the government. At that time, the AGP was ridden with factional rivalry and split in the organization deteriorated its political fortune.

6.3.3 The final showdown: hijacking of regional agenda and leaders

The Congress party ruled Assam for 15 years and the main opposition party AGP remained a divided house. After Sarbananda Sonowal's exit from AGP, the young and firebrand leaders Padma Hazarika aspired to become the party president. But Prafulla Kumar Mahanta blocked his prospect and became the president defeating Hazarika in the internal election. Padma Hazarika ventilated his frustration against the party leadership in the media afterwards. He allegedly voted against the party interest in the Rajya Sabha election which resulted in defeat of Hydor Hussain, the common candidate put up by the opposition in Assam assembly. So, Hazarika was suspended from the party for his alleged misdeed. Factionalism and frustration ran high among the leaders of the AGP. In the Assembly election of 2011, AGP could win only 10 seats and lost the status of principal opposition party in the Assembly to the AIUDF. After the dismal show of election politics, Sarbananda Sonowal joined the BJP and influenced a section of leaders in the AGP for making an alliance with the BJP. But Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and his associates were opposed to that idea of political alliance with the BJP. So the pro-alliance leaders of the AGP left the party and joined the BJP. It was Atul Bora (senior) who joined the national party after Sonowal in July, 2013. Chandra Mohan Patowary and Hiten Goswami joined

the national party on March 10, 2014. Patowary exclaimed in despair expressing frustration at the failure of the AGP leadership to strengthen the regional force. He made it clear that he has nothing against the aims and objectives of the AGP and joined the BJP to fulfill his unfinished task as a regionalist.²¹⁰ In the parliamentary election of 2014 the BJP put up a spirited show with win in 7 seats and the AGP could not win any seat. BJP was the leading political party in 69 Assembly seats as per the estimate which visualized the growing importance of the BJP as a viable alternative to the Congress. After the election result was out, AGP president tendered his resignation taking full responsibility for the party's debacle in the Lok Sabha election, 2014. The command of the party went to the hands of Atul Bora (Junior). He tried his best to make the regional force in Assam strong. But Mahanta again tried to come back to the seat of power in the AGP and threatened to sue Atul Bora (Junior) in the court as the latter had not become full-fledged president of the party as per party constitution. In the meantime Padma Hazarika left the AGP and joined the BJP on October 30, 2015 which had shaken the regional party.

Despite all these odds AGP entered into seat sharing agreement with the BJP for the Assembly election of 2016 which paid dividend to the party. However, it had to play the role of the junior partner in the coalition government like the other regional party the BPF. The BJP successfully entered into political alliance with all the ethnic tribal communities and appealed to the people of Assam to vote for '*Jati, Mati aru Bheti*'. This slogan and the image of the BJP leaders catered to the greater Assamese society. This grand coalition of the ethnic minorities and linguistic minorities brought success to BJP in the Assembly election of 2016 which proved to be the day dream for the AGP. If the regional political party fails to realize the opportunity and does not build up its organization at the grassroots immediately then the prophecy made by the former Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, 'Big fish swallow the small fish in ocean' would be proved true. But it is time to act rather than making jargon and slogan.

²¹⁰ 'Patowary, Hiten formally joins BJP', *The Assam Tribune*, March 11, 2014.



Conclusion: Trends and consequences | Chapter 7

7.1 An independent regional force and factionalism in the AGP

The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) is a regional political party coming out of a mass movement, i.e., the Assam Movement which has determined its ideology, leadership and organizational structure. The rationale of its existence is based on people's consent as the leaders of the party seemed to have acknowledged the John Lockean concept of people's right to rebellion. Samir Kumar Das has put it that the argument behind the formation of the AGP was not that it would be yet another party in the already long list of prevailing political parties, but it is the 'only party that will safeguard the future of those people who have been living in Assam for generations' (*Khilonjiya Janagosthi*).²¹¹ The regional force that led to the establishment of the AGP was an independent identity. It was not like the Social Contract of Thomas Hobbes in which the constituting entities merged unconditionally. So the regional force remained independent and continued to assert itself in the internal politics of the AGP. Sometimes it played the catalyst role in factionalism. As such, the study of factionalism in the AGP is bound to open new vista about the political society and culture in a multi-ethnic state like Assam. Our analysis of factional politics in Assam has been guided by the rules of pragmatic politics. The factional politics in the party was centred on personal issues at large. The factions were not ideological. The pragmatic concerns like the law and order, social and economic development, social harmony, aspirations of the tribal people and secessionism, etc. figured as the issues of factional politics in the AGP. There were four important factional leaders in the AGP; Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, Brindaban Goswami and Atul Bora. These leaders led their respective factions in a different period.

Manifestations of factionalism in the AGP revealed that it was bi-factional initially. Its nature was Competitive which later turned into degenerative factionalism. After

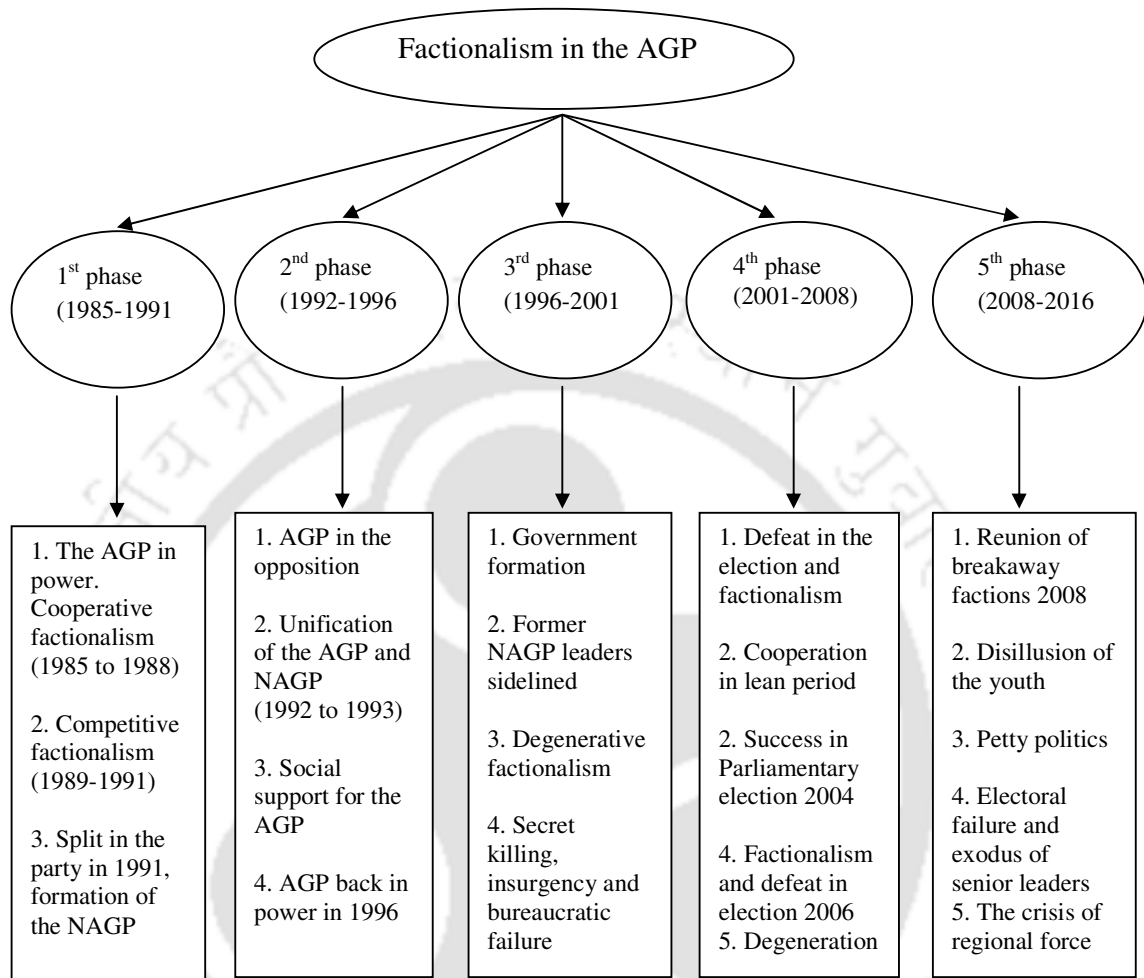
²¹¹ Samir Kumar Das, *Regionalism in Power* (New Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1997), 2.

the AGP was formed in October 1985, factional groups contributed to the strength of the party by attracting people of diverse social interests. This had widened the support base and brought electoral success to the party. All the factions unanimously believed in regionalism and the liberal process of development. To satisfy the socialist urge, present in the Assam Movement, the constitution of the AGP declared the establishment of a classless society in Assam as an objective of the party also. But with the passing of time, self-aggrandisement and protection of fractional interests became the objective of the leaders, and the motto of a classless society was forgotten. Thus, nature of factionalism in the party became too competitive leading to degeneration of the party. The AGP succumbed to factionalism and faced three vertical splits during its lifetime. As the whole span of life of the AGP is taken into consideration in this study, the trajectory of factionalism can be summarized into five stages. The diagram in Figure No 7.1 is an attempt to analyse the aforementioned fact. There were some objective conditions of factionalism in the AGP. These were:

- Equal status and power of the leaders
- Absence or weakness of the high-command. The central executive, which is a collective body, is regarded as high-command of the AGP.
- Lack of consensus regarding the distribution of political patronage.
- Self regarding interest overriding the loyalty to the party.

These conditions were not unique in the AGP. What is unique about factionalism in the AGP is that these objective conditions have remained constant in the party since its inception till present. It has been observed that factionalism continued to grow in the party whether the party was in power or out of power. Incessant factionalism weakened the organization of the party also. Due to factionalism, the lack of cohesion and inability of the AGP to foster the regional issues and people's interests was felt in the society. The trajectory of factionalism in the AGP since its inception is depicted in the following diagram.

Figure: 7.1
Phases of factionalism in the AGP



Source: Field data generated during the research

7.2 The homogenous concept of ideology and factionalism

The society in Assam, as it stands fragmented, was not so during the 1970s or early 1980s. The ethnic communities gradually disassociated themselves from the 'brihattar Asomiya jati' (Greater Assamese Nation) leading to a permanent rift in the Assamese society. Scholars have pointed out to autonomy movements, identity politics as potential reasons for fragmentation. But the findings of this research evidently proved that the degeneration of the regional political party due to factionalism had an adverse impact on the society in Assam. The 'peeling of onion effect' broke the cohesive character of the society posing a threat to the multi-

cultural traditions in Assam. This was a leadership crisis in the state which germinated in factionalism.

It is found after analysis of the data collected during this research that as Assam is a heterogeneous state in terms of demographic diversity, so exclusive policy of safeguarding the Assamese nationalism from adulteration and extinction is not a suitable political idiom here. This very fact is not appealing to the ethnic communities, so they parted with the AGP. There were debates over issues like mainstream Assamese culture *vs* the tribal culture, the official language *vs* the tribal and minority languages, the right to self-determination *vs* the greater Assamese national sentiment and others during the 1980s and 1990s. The AGP always found itself on edge during these controversies. So the main argument forwarded is that a regional political party which is not ideologically grounded or organisationally stable, fall prey to factional politics.

Thus, personal clash of interest is the most important factor behind factionalism in the AGP. The social environment in Assam since the 1980s was the second most important factor. The socio-political environment shaped the course of factional politics in the AGP and *vice versa*. The AGP claims to be the people's party in Assam. The party while trying to conform to the ideological domain set by the Assam Movement often faced internal dissensions. Efforts were made in the mid 1990s to widen the support base by forming coalition with the parties that represented the minorities and the Left ideology. But the effort was not welcomed by a section of leaders in the AGP. The party leaders were criticised in media for making compromise in its objective and for procrastinating the detection and deportation of the illegal foreigners. Specially, the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta faction that dominated the second tenure of the AGP in power (1996-2001) was severely criticised in the media and the opposite factions led by Bhriugu Kumar Phukan and Atul Bora tried to make most of it. Thus, the second tenure of the AGP was more disastrous and posed question mark on the capability of the regional force. The issue of corruption, social unrest, economic crisis etc became vantage point in

factional politics based on personal enmity and ego. In a nutshell, the homogenous concept of ideological basis for a regional political party set in a heterogeneous society bound to open it towards contradiction and factionalism. The lack of inclusive policy and paying least attention to the changing social environment made the AGP vulnerable to split.

7.3 The influence of location factor in factionalism

We emphasize in the present study that factionalism in Assam cannot be reduced to analysis of caste factor or religion. Instead of, the location or the unique setting of the state determined the course of factional politics in the AGP. Factors like sub-regional identity, language issues, development issues related to the minorities, political aspiration of the minorities were some of the pragmatic oratories that influenced factional politics in the AGP. There were divisions within the regional force during the Assam Movement, like the moderates and the extremists, having distinct outlook towards regional development. These two ideologically opposite divisions had different attitude towards the Center. The moderates later embraced the constitutional path and the extremists took the revolutionary path. Another caucus that emerged among the leaders of the AAGSP, the umbrella organization of the Assam Movement was the 'Gauhati University group' commonly controlled by the students and some teachers of the university. The 'University' and 'outside the university' gap sometimes soured the cooperation in the AAGSP. The AASU, representing the university faction differed with the already existing regional political parties of Assam like the PLP and the AJD on many occasions regarding the programs of the Movement. There were instances when the AASU faction managed to expel its rivals from the AAGSP. Atul Bora, the convener of the AAGSP, who was also the general secretary of the PLP was expelled as he later called for bandh (general strike) on August 14, 1984 in spite of opposition from the AASU.²¹² Nibaran Bora, the President of the PLP was expelled from the AAGSP as he was suspected of being close to the Congress party; Jatin Goswami, who represented the Asom Sahitya Sabha in the AAGSP, was expelled, as he annoyed

²¹² Atul Bora, *Abirata Sangram* (Guwahati: Maa Prakashak Gosthi, 2007), 50-56.

the AASU faction within the AAGSP. It is interesting to note here that the AASU and the AAGSP separately participated in the negotiations with the Government of India and issued separate notices, pamphlets later. These are some of the examples of existence of a factional rift in the Assam movement. But this aspect is not the focus of our study (may be taken into consideration later); yet these dimensions continued to hang on even after the formation of the AGP in 1985. Therefore, our initial argument is that factionalism in the AGP was rooted in the Assam Movement itself stands correct. In the word of Samir Kumar Das it was the 'incubation period' of the AGP.²¹³

Again coming back to the aspect of location, we have found that factional leaders while looking for consolidation in their home districts, made things difficult for the high-command in the party organization. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan hailing from the Sibsagar district had a strong support base in upper Assam. He allegedly took possession of important departments like the general administration, political affairs etc. besides the Home Department, that rendered the Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta powerless. The upper Assam lobby, behind the Home Minister Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, believed in his administrative ability and helped him in occupation of number of important Departments during the first tenure of the AGP Government²¹⁴ which are generally kept by the Chief Minister. These departments were later removed from Phukan's possession in a ministry reshuffle by Mahanta. This was the time when factional politics in the AGP came to limelight in 1988. In fact, Phukan had the administrative brain and Mahanta had the mass appeal during the Movement that made both the leaders complementary to each other.²¹⁵ Factionalism broke the bond between the two leaders and AGP as political party suffered. Later its support base dwindled due to factionalism, and the party failed to win elections on its own.

²¹³ Samir Kumar Das, *op. cit.*, 9.

²¹⁴ Atul Bora, *op. cit.*, 88.

²¹⁵ Mukul Barkataki, Personal interview, Guwahati, August 23, 2016.

Prafulla Kumar Mahanta represented the Nagaon district in middle Assam. Digen Bora, the former AASU leader from Nagaon, was the key policy maker in the Mahanta faction. In 1991, after the imposition of President's Rule in Assam, Bhrigu Kumar Phukan faction alleged that the Chief Minister Mahanta distributed almost 30 lakhs of rupees in his constituency illegally from the lottery revenue generated by the Government. During the second tenure, Mahanta as the Chief Minister allocated ten ministerial berths to his colleagues from the Nagaon District which angered other factional leaders like Brindaban Goswami and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, who were not included in the new Cabinet. So, factional groups functional in the party, which was a fact to reckon, were not accommodated judiciously. The old friendship ties, familiar location and kinship were crucial in faction formation in the AGP. This had led to the isolation of some regions in the party and ministry formation. The frustration of the deprived factions was so high that they refused to even sit together in party meetings. Eventually, the party split twice in 1998 and 2000. The first split led by Bhrigu Kumar Phukan resulted in the formation of the Asom Jatiya Sanmilan (AJS) which was not registered with the Election Commission of India. Later on, the followers of Bhrigu Kumar Phukan who were still in the AGP indulged in factional politics in the party. Ultimately, the party succumbed to its second split which was led by Atul Bora. After the split, the Trinamul Gana Parishad (TGP) was formed, and it remained as a separate political party till 2008. The ideology of this new political party was not different from that of the AGP; supporters were also drawn from the same political base leading to degeneration of the parent organization.

The location factor emerged again when the opposite faction, i.e., Brindaban Goswami faction came to the leadership in 2001. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta's faction was sidelined in the AGP. Mahanta in a bid to strengthen the party organization came into conflict with the then President Goswami. This time Goswami's faction avenged the alleged misdeeds of the Prafulla Kumar Mahanta's faction during the second tenure of the AGP in government. Mahanta flouted a new political party in 2005 namely the Asom Gana Parishad (Pragatisheel) in short the AGP (P). The debacle of the party in the Assembly election of 2006 is attributed to factional

politics between the two opposite factions in the AGP led by Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Brindaban Goswami.

7.4 The bi-factional patter in the AGP

Factionalism in the AGP was mostly bi-factional; two equally strong leaders led the factions. In the absence of any arbiter politician, factional rivalry was intense and harmful for the party organization. The factional leaders of the AGP were not accommodative politicians. So the sustainability of the issues raised by the factions was short lived and members of the factions shifted loyalty at their personal convenience. Accommodating politicians are easily accessible to the aid of his followers and constituents. Only Prafulla Kumar Mahanta with his soft-less-spoken attitude could build a formidable factional alignment in the AGP. His faction was relatively durable in the AGP. His name was involved in all the factional rivalries since 1980s till today. Therefore, it looks as if the factional pattern in the party was unifactional and one single faction continuously blocked the emergence of the rival factions. But Atul Bora, Bhriku Kumar Phukan and Brindaban Goswami factions fought to end the hegemony of Mahanta's faction in the AGP. As a whole, factionalism in the party became more competitive and later on it took a degenerative mode.

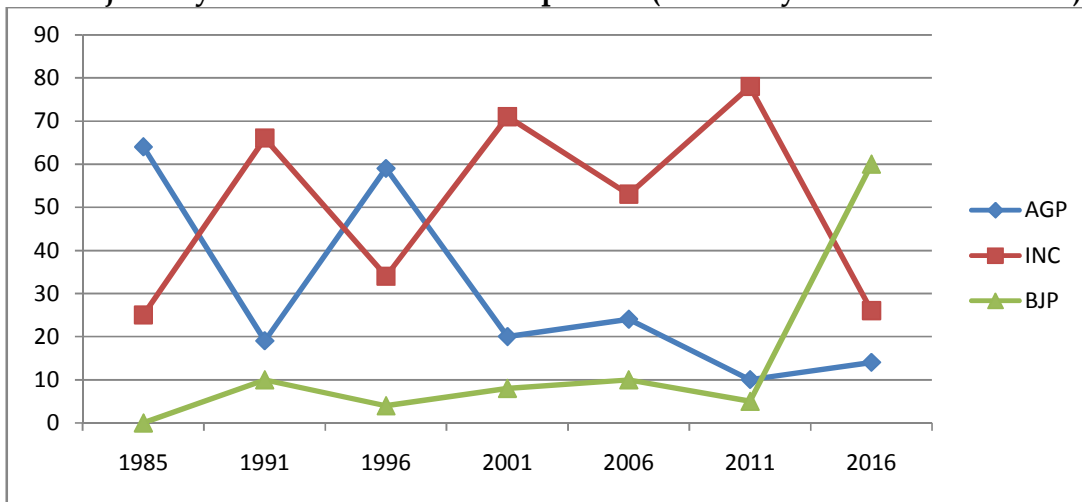
The factionalism in the AGP was superficial and confined to the top leaders at the headquarters in Guwahati. The factional leader of the AGP did not have landed property in the rural areas, or industrial resource in the urban centres. They had less control over local institutions to support their factional needs. The factional leaders of the AGP emphasised on the glory of the Assam Movement and their past sacrifices for the cause of Assam and the Assamese nationalism. They were not adapting to the changing idiom of politics in the 21st century. Therefore, the AGP could not form a grand alliance of ethnic communities in Assam in 2006 and 2011. They were looking for political partners, not communities. Continued reference to the Assam Accord and its implementation made the appeal of the party obsolete to the new generations. A political party exists not for the sake of capturing power

through elections. There are other roles to be played in creating public opinion, making people politically empowered, political education of the new generation and ventilating the people's grievances. But the faction-ridden AGP also failed in these responsibilities as well. Due to factionalism, the inclusion of young people into the party was hampered. Some young politicians of the AGP left the party aftermath of the Assembly election of 2011. Political ideologies of the party were reiterated by the national parties like the Congress, the BJP and others during the election campaign. As a result, AGP as a different brand representing regionalism in Assam lost its prominence. Now the new generation of Assam does not look at the party as an epitome of regionalism. Moreover, looking at the pragmatic aspect of politics, the patronising capacity of the AGP has dwindled since 2001, as it is out of power for almost 15 years. Therefore, the leaders of the party left the party in search of better political fortunes. This opportunism and personalised politics is another stumbling block of the AGP.

7.5 Impact of Factionalism on electoral performance of the AGP

As we have discussed in the second chapter, factional rivalry in the ruling party tend to increase in a condition of less of competition from the opposition party. The dominant ruling parties are more prone to intense factional politics. But in case of the AGP, it was seen that the party was constantly ridden with factionalism whether in power or out of power. Even during the period since 2001, the party saw more degeneration in terms of political success and intensification of factional rivalry, while it was in the opposition for more than fifteen years. The party succumbed to a 'prisoner's dilemma', and the grassroots workers held a negative attitude towards the leaders. The dilemma led to an exodus of the young leaders and even some senior leaders from the party. The following diagram reveals the downward journey of the AGP in electoral politics in both the Assembly elections and Parliamentary elections.

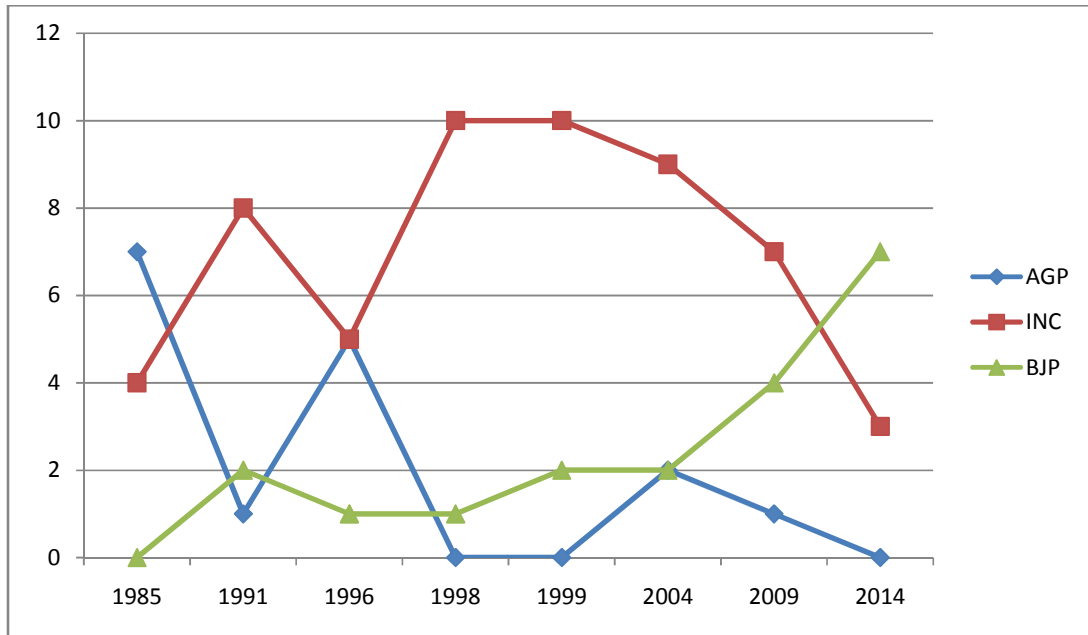
Figure: 7.2
The journey of the AGP in electoral politics (Assembly elections since 1985)



Source: www.eci.nic.in, the website of the Election Commission of India

As the above diagram clears it that the performance of the AGP in Assembly election since 2001 has become down. The X-axis represents the year of Legislative Assembly elections, and the Y-axis shows the seats won by the AGP, BJP and INC in Assam. A total number of Legislative Assembly constituencies in Assam is 126. Factionalism was the principal cause of its defeat in the Assembly election 2006. Afterwards, the party has degenerated as a political force. Therefore, this stage of factional politics is termed as degenerative factionalism in the AGP which started since 1996

On the other hand, the following diagram is a graphical presentation of Parliamentary elections in Assam since 1985. The X-axis represents the year of Parliamentary elections, and the Y-axis shows the seats won by the AGP, BJP and INC in Assam. Total parliamentary constituencies in Assam are 14. The AGP in the 21st century has not been able to rise as a formidable political alternative in Assam. Instead the national political parties like the BJP in a new *avatar* as the saviour of *jati, mati* and *bheti* emerged as an alternative to the Congress in front of the voters in Assam. The AGP lost its cohesive strength of a regional political party due to factionalism and its incapacity to cope up with the changing political idiom in Assam.

Figure: 7.3**The journey of the AGP in electoral politics (Parliamentary elections since 1985)**

Source: www.eci.nic.in, the website of the Election Commission of India

7.6 Concluding remarks

As mentioned in the first Chapter, the objective of our study is to analyse the conditions in which factions originate and to determine forces behind factional alignment or split. For this purpose elaborate chronological narration of the events leading to factionalism in the AGP and socio-economic conditions of the state is found necessary. Thus, the trajectory of political development in Assam during the last 30 years has been discussed in this research work. Factionalism as a political phenomenon is not uncommon. It is integrative as well as disintegrative. It might add to the strength of the political party by widening support base and include new members. Factionalism even helps in empowerment and political development of a semi-feudal and apolitical society. But for that, the political party concerned must play an accommodative role and adopt inclusive policies for the people, especially, in multi-ethnic societies like in Assam. In a less developed political atmosphere like that of Assam in the 1980s and 1990s, factionalism tends to be disintegrative. Lack of visionary leadership and lack of statesmanship amidst

incessant factionalism may result in degeneration of the social harmony and political ethics. This fact is found true during this study of factional politics in Assam. The success of political parties in developing societies is not measured only by electoral success. Political parties are the agents of change and must shoulder the responsibility of political development.

The party organization of the AGP was not equipped for such a role in the society. Initially, it depended on the AASU and the AAGSP organizations. There was a discussion in the AGP circle about forming a cadre-based party structure which did not materialized. Lack of ideological commitment and personality cult created by some leaders hindered the progress of the party organization. The personality cult enjoyed in the person of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, Atul Bora and Brindaban Goswami had different forms. Therefore, their role as factional leader was different. However, the charismatic effect of leaders like Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan evaporated as soon as the factional politics in the party started. Each while trying to corner the other in the party tarnished the growth of the party. Atul Bora and Brindaban Goswami were senior to Mahanta and Phukan. These two, especially, Atul Bora tried his hands on regional politics before the establishment of the AGP. Goswami and Phukan were founder leaders of the AASU, hence carried the legacy to the AGP. Therefore, factionalism between Prafulla Kumar Mahanta and Bhrigu Kumar Phukan was primarily motivated by ego and personality clash. But later on, when Prafulla Kumar Mahanta faction collided with the Atul Bora and Brindaban Goswami factions, issues like secret killing, corruption, economic problems due to underdevelopment, etc. made it inevitable. Because, anti-Mahanta factions intended to show solidarity with the independent regional force, active in politics, which was distancing away from the AGP due to bureaucratic nuisance and corruption.

It was observed that personality cult was an important factor in the factional conflict in the AGP. Factional politics also broke the cohesive character of the party organization. In the absence of a high-command structure like that of the national

political parties, all the factions in the AGP at different point of time invoked critical issues against each other. The factions used ideology as a tactic to envelop their self-interests and personal clashes between the leaders. Caste was not a crucial element in factional politics in the AGP. But the contending factions tried to malign each other as caste leader or anti-tribal leader. The tribal middle class in Assam, on the contrary, was a minute observer of factional conflict in the AGP and gradually trod their separate path of regional politics. As it was assumed in the hypotheses, lack of adequate representation of different regions, social segments in Assam played a catalyst role in factional politics of the AGP. For the tribal leaders, politics of the AGP was not inclusive and accommodative. This attitude of the tribal leaders alienated the party from the ethnic communities. The AGP lost its bases in Bodo areas, Karbi-Anglong, Dima-Hasao District, among the Tea-Tribe Adibasis and the Mising people. The party could not substantially create its strong support base in these areas and remained confined in some pockets in the Brahmaputra valley.



List of persons interviewed during the research

Type	Name	Affiliation
Sitting MLAs (7)	Atul Bora (Junior)	President of the AGP, cabinet minister of Assam & MLA from Bokakhat LAC
	Brindaban Goswami	MLA from Tezpur LAC
	Pradip Hazarika	MLA from Amguri LAC
	Pabindra Deka	MLA from Patacharkuchi LAC
	Prafulla Kumar Mahanta	MLA from Barhampur LAC & former Chief Minister of Assam
	Ramendra Narayan Kalita	MLA from Guwahati-West LAC
	Utpal Dutta	MLA from Lakhimpur LAC
Former MLA & MPs (15)	Alaka Sarma	Former MLA from Nalbari
	Atul Bora	Former General secretary of the AGP and cabinet minister, currently BJP leader & MLA from Dispur LAC
	Biraj Kumar Sarma	Former MLA from Guwahati-East LAC & cabinet minister
	Bubul Das	Former MLA from Jagirod & cabinet minister
	Durga Das Bodo	Former MLA from Paneri & minister, currently member of the Congress
	Gunin Hazarika	Former MLA from Kaliabar & cabinet minister
	Hiten Goswami	Former general secretary of the AGP & cabinet minister, now BJP leader and Speaker of Assam Legislative Assembly
	Zoi Nath Sarma	Former MLA from Sipajhar & cabinet minister, now member of the Congress
	Kamala Kalita	Former MLA from Chaygaon & cabinet minister
	Nurul Hussain	Former MLA from Hajo & Deputy Speaker
	Prasanta Kumar Barua	Former MLA from Bilasipara East
	Pulakesh Barua	Former MLA from Barkhetri & Speaker of the Assam Assembly, now member of the BJP
	Rekharani Das Boro	Former MLA from Barama & cabinet

		minister
	Thaneswar Bodo	Former MLA from Rangia & cabinet minister
	Jayashree Goswami Mahanta	Former AGP MP to the Rajya Sabha
Members of other political party (3)	Nazrul Islam	Former Congress MLA from Dhing LAC
	Ranoj Pegu	Former CEO, Mising Autonomous Council, Gogamukh & Currently BJP MLA from Dhemaji LAC
	Chandra Nath Borua	Former Associate Professor of Dhakuakhana College & Member of the CPI (M)
Academicians (10)	Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed	Former professor of Dibrugarh University, Director of OKDISCD, Guwahati and Director of Banikanta Kakati Research Center, KKHSOU, Assam
	Akhil Ranjan Dutta	Professor of Gauhati University
	Amiya Kumar Handique	Former Associate Professor, Dhakuakhana College
	Anuradha Dutta	Former professor of Gauhati University
	Basanta Deka	Former professor, Handique Girls College, Guwahati
	Lt. Deba Prasad Barooah	Former Professor & Vice Chancellor of Gauhati University
	Krishna Gopal Bhattacharyya	Former professor of Gauhati University
	Niru Hazarika	Former professor of Gauhati University
	Lt. Renu Devi	Former professor of Gauhati University
	Sakanya Sarma	Associate Professor of IIT Guwahati
Literary Persons (3)	Homen Bargohain	Former president of the ASS & former chief editor of Amar Asom, Guwahati
	Nagen Saikia	Former Professor of Dibrugarh University & MP to the Rajya Sabha as AGP legislator, Dibrugarh
	Hiren Gohain	Former Professor of Gauhati University & well-known critic, writer of Assam, Guwahati
Journalists (2)	Samudra Gupta Kashyap	The Indian Express, New Delhi

	Radhika Mohan Bhagawati	Editor of The Dainik Asom, Guwahati
Well wishers & former office bearers of the AGP (7)	Atul Goswami	Former NAGP leader, Dergaon
	Bhaskar Taludar	AGP Member, Tihu
	Debadutta Barkataki	Founder member, Guwahati
	Dizen Phukan	Guwahati, prominent businessman
	Indira Barua	Wife of Lt. Bhrigu Kumar Phukan, Guwahati
	Mukul Barkataki	Former leader of the AJD
	Dipankar Hazarika	Participant in the Assam movement
Sitting office bearers and members (8)	Bhola Hazarika	President, Dergaon District Committee
	Chanakya Das	Former office bearer, Guwahati
	Dhananjay Das	Guwahati
	Haren Sheel	Guwahati
	Jogesh Bikash Chetia	Dibrugarh
	Madhab Hazarika	Former office bearer, Guwahati
	Manoj Saikia	Publicity secretary, Central Executive committee
	Rupam Kalita	Sibsagar District Committee
Total	55 (Fifty five)	

Appendix

II

Interview schedule for the leaders of the AGP

Schedule No. _____

Date. _____

A. Personal information about socio-economic and political background

1. Name of the respondent :

2. Address :

2. Sex : Male/Female

3. Age :

Between 18 to 35	Between 36 to 50	Between 51 to 65	Above 65

4. Religion :

Hindu	Christian	Muslim	Other

5. Caste category :

General	OBC/MOBC	SC	ST

6. Mother tongue :

7. Education :

Up to HSLC	Under Graduate	Graduate/Post Graduate	Professional Diploma	Professional Graduate

8. Occupation and Income:

9. Did you belong to any organization or party prior to joining in the AGP?

10. Are you an office bearer or have you ever been an office bearer of the party?

B. Open ended questions

1. To which Assam Assembly constituency do you belong?
2. Did you contest any Assembly or Parliamentary constituency? Did you win the election?
3. Did you contest any local body elections, such as, panchayat or municipal? Did you win the election?
4. Do you think that due to factionalism you have ever lost in any election?
5. Do you believe that factionalism is a common feature in all political party? What is the effect of factionalism on the AGP?
6. When do you think factionalism was visible in the AGP and why? Was there any sub group? Who were the leaders of such factional groups?
7. What do you think are the causes of factionalism in the AGP?

- a) Is there any event or issue responsible?
 - b) Is it Ideology?
 - c) Is it power struggle?
 - d) Is it organizational matter?
 - e) Is it because of lack of experience?
8. Is caste or religious factor responsible for the growth of factionalism?
 9. Do you think there was personality cult in the AGP leading to the formation of sub-group in AGP?
 10. Why the ethnic groups and student bodies were dissatisfied with AGP Government?
 11. Why there was split in the party in 1991?
 12. When factionalism occurred, how the party organization of the AGP dealt with it?
 13. Was there a lack of understanding and trust among different groups forming the political party?
 14. Do you freely express your opinion about important issues within the party even if against the leaders? Have you ever opposed any party decision?
 15. Why some senior leaders were expelled from AGP and some left the party?
 16. How frequently the central committee leaders interact with the district and grassroots level office bearers in the critical issues?
 17. Give me some idea about the election management in AGP. How the leaders deal with the dissidents?
 18. Why did AGP forge an alliance with the communist party and the Jamiyat in 1996 election? How the alliance contributed to the outcome?
 19. Do you think the corruption charges and allegation of secret killings were the reasons of factionalism?
 20. What are the reasons, according to you, the reasons behind AGP's poor performance in the elections in 2001, 2006 and 2011?
 21. What are the circumstances leading to the split in 2005?
 22. Why do you think the performance of the AGP went down in the Assembly election of 2011 in comparison to 2006 election?
 23. What do your view about the future prospect of the AGP? Do you feel about any change required in the constitution or regulations in the AGP?
 24. What steps would you suggest to the AGP to revitalize itself?

-----X-----

Interview Schedule for Academicians/Intellectuals of Assam

Schedule No. _____

Date. _____

1. Name of the interviewee:
2. Institution:
3. I assume you are one of the founder/adviser/well-wishers of AGP? Do you agree?
3. Do you believe that factionalism is a common feature in all political party?
What is the role of factionalism in the AGP?
4. When do you think factionalism was visible in the AGP and why?
5. What do you think is the root of factionalism in the AGP?
6. Is caste or religious factor responsible for the growth of factionalism in AGP?
Please give opinion.
7. Do you think there was personality cult in AGP emerging out of the Assam Movement which led to factionalism later?
8. When did the factionalism occur, how the party organization of the AGP dealt with it?
9. Was there a lack of assimilation of different groups forming the political party in 1985?
10. What is your perception about internal democracy and communication within the party?
11. Why were the ethnic groups and student bodies dissatisfied with the AGP Government? Had the issue led to weakening of the party support base and subsequent factionalism?
12. Why did the split in the party in 1991 occur?
13. Why did the AGP forge an alliance with the communist party and Jamiyat Ulema in 1996 election? How did the alliance contribute to the outcome?
14. Why did the corruption charges and allegations of secret killing emerge during the tenure of AGP? Is it one of the reasons of factionalism?
15. To you what are the reasons for the defeat of the AGP in the elections in 2001, 2006 and 2011?
16. Why some senior leaders expelled? Why some did left the party and under what circumstances did the split take place in 2005?
17. Do you think any change is required in the AGP? If so, what kind of change?

-----X-----

Questionnaire administered to members and Office Bearers
of the AGP

Questionnaire No. _____

Date: _____

Socio-economic background of the respondent

1. Name :
2. District : Responsibility in the party:
3. Sex : Male/Female
4. Age : i) 18/35 ii) 36/50 iii) 51/65 iv) Above 65
5. Religion : i) Hindu ii) Christian iii) Muslim iv) Others
6. Caste : i) General ii) OBC iii) SC/ST iv) Others
7. Education : i) H.S.L.C ii) Under Graduate iii) Graduate
iv) Post Graduate v) Professionals (Diploma Holders etc)
vi) Professionals (Graduate & above)
8. Occupation and Income:

a) Source	b) Amount
i) Respondent's monthly salary income	1. 1000-5000
	2. 5001-10000
	3. 10001-25000
	4. 25001-50000
	5. 50001 and above
ii) Other source of household income:	

Objective questions

9. For how many years have you been a member of the Asom Gana Parishad?
10. Did you belong to any non political or political organization, NGO or any other party prior to joining in the AGP?
11. What is your opinion about the organization of the AGP today?

a) It is strong	b) It is relatively weak	c) No remark
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12. How much (out of ten) will you allot to the organizational capability of the AGP?
13. What is your personal feeling about the working of leadership in the AGP?
How much (out of ten) will you give to the leaders?
14. Do you think that the members in party meeting are given opportunity to freely express their opinion?

a) Yes	b) No
--------	-------
15. Do you think that the decisions in party meetings are taken through democratic process?

a) Yes	b) No
--------	-------

16. Do you feel that being a regional political party the AGP has put enough importance to the regional issues, matters etc?
a) Yes b) No, More importance needed
17. As you are representing a District Committee of the AGP, so does the leadership often discuss the local issue with you?
a) Yes b) No, not often
18. Do you feel that your locality, region or District has enough representation in the Central Committee?
a) Yes b) No
19. Do you agree that there were factional groups in the AGP, as in any other political party in Assam?
a) Yes b) No
20. If so, do you agree that factions occurred due to conflict among the leaders for personal reasons?
a) Yes b) No, the conflict was ideological
21. Is lack of organizational skill of the AGP a reason of factional conflict?
a) Yes b) No
22. Is lack of political experience or farsightedness a reason of conflict?
a) Yes b) No
23. As an active member do you feel that such factions weakened the status and support of AGP?
a) Yes b) No
24. Do you think that the poor performance of the AGP in elections is linked with factional politics?
a) Yes b) No
25. Do you think that as a regional political party like the AGP has been able to accommodate all ethnic and tribal groups through proper representation in party organization?
a) Yes b) No
26. Do you feel that ethnic identity assertion has weakened the regional force?
a) Yes b) No
27. Is it a reason behind the growth of factional politics?
a) Yes b) No
28. Do you think that change needed in the AGP today?
a) Yes b) No
29. In which areas do you think change needed?
a) In organization b) In leadership c) In Constitution d) In Ideology
30. Your suggestions for improvement:
-----X-----

General conferences of the AGP and elected presidents & secretaries

General conferences		President	Secretaries
Place	Date		
The Political Convention at Golaghat (The formation of the AGP and the organization)	13-14 October, 1985	Prafulla Kr Mahanta, Chief President Brindaban Goswami, President Biren Bodo, -do- Thaneswar Bodo -do- Ataur Rahman -do- Binod Goswami -do-	Bhriгу Kr. Phukan Biraj Kr Sarma Atul Bora (Senior)
1 st General Conference Mangaldoi	18,19,20 January, 1988	Prafulla Kr Mahanta, President	Bhriгу Kr Phukan Atul Bora
Prafulla Kr Mahanta handed over the charge of party president to Thaneswar Bodo in a general house meeting and Bodo remained so from May 6, 1991 to January 7, 1992			
2 nd General Conference, Guwahati	7,8,9 January, 1992	Paragdhar Chaliha, President	Atul Bora (Senior) Nagen Sarma
In 1993 the AGP and the NAGP reunited and Bhriгу Kr Phukan was given the post of Executive President for smooth functioning, Brindaban Goswami was included as Secretary			
3 rd General Conference, North Lakhimpur	27, 28,29 October, 1995	Prafulla Kr Mahanta President	Atul Bora Pradip Hazarika Sahidul Alom Choudhury Nagen Sarma
Prafulla Kr Mahanta continued to be the president of the AGP as per central General House decision in 1998			
4 th General Conference, Nagaon	29,30,31 January & 1 st February, 2001	Prafulla Kr Mahanta President	Pradip Hazarika Sahidul Alom Choudhury Birendra Prasad Baishya Chandra Mohan Patowary Kartik Hazarika Phani Bhusan Choudhury

Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, due to the election debacles in 1998, 1999 and 2001 came under pressure from within the party and the allegation of bigamous marriage made him to tender his resignation from the post of AGP president in 2001 and Brindaban Goswami became the President of the AGP on September 6, 2001.			
5 th General Conference, Tezpur	28,29,30 January 2004	Brindaban Goswami President	Birendra Prasad Baishya Chandra Mohan Patowary Hitendra Nath Goswami Phani Bhusan Choudhury Dilip Kr Saikia Atul Bora (Junior) Sarbanda Sonowal
6 th General Conference, Machkhowa, Guwahati (The necessary need of post of 'Working President' comes and was created vide constitutional amendment)	29,30,31 August, 2007	Brindaban Goswami President Phani Bhusan Choudhury, Working President	Birendra Prasad Baishya Chandra Mohan Patowary Hitendra Nath Goswami Girin Baruah Dilip Kr Saikia Atul Bora (Junior) Sarbanda Sonowal
Special General Conference, Uddeshan Hall, Guwahati	Sept. 21, 2008	Chandra Mohan Patowary, President Phani Bhusan Choudhury continued as Working President	Birendra Prasad Baishya Ramendra Narayan Kalita Hitendra Nath Goswami Girin Baruah Dilip Kr Saikia Atul Bora (Junior) Sarbanda Sonowal Nurul Hussain Padma Hazarika Kamala Kalita Jagadish Bhuyan
8 th General Conference, Guwahati	25, 26 April, 2012	Prafulla Kr. Mahanta Atul Bora (Junior) President Working President	
President Prafulla Kr Mahanta tool leave from his post due to his illness and Atul Bora (Jr.) took over the charge of President vide decision taken in General House meeting at party head office at Ambari, Guwahati, for six months. After that the General House meeting decides that Bora should continue as the full fledged president till the next General Conference to be held in 2016.			
9 th General Conference, Golaghat		Atul Bora (Junior) President	

Source: Haren Sheel, office Secretary, the headquarter of the AGP, Ambari, Guwahati, Assam

List of MPs elected to the Rajya Sabha from the AGP

Sl. No	Name of the MP to the Rajya Sabha	Tenure
1	Nagen Saikia	03-04-1986 to 02-04-1992
2	Bijoya Chakravarty	-do-
3	Bhadreswar Buragohain	10-04-1990 to 09-04-1996
4	Paragdhar Chaliha	15-06-1995 till his death on 22-06-1999
5	Arun Kumar Sarma	03-04-1998 to 02-04-2004
6	Jayashree Goswami Mahanta	24-08-1999 to 14-06-2001
7	Kumar Deepak Das	15-06-2007 to 14-06-2013
8	Birendra Prasad Baishya	10-04-2008 to 09-04-2014

Source: [https://wikipedia.org/wiki/ List of Rajya Sabha members from Assam](https://wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Rajya_Sabha_members_from_Assam) downloaded on March 11, 2017

*The Rajya Sabha or the Upper House of Indian Parliament consists of 250 members. Members are indirectly elected by the state legislators and the probability of a candidate winning from a party depends on the strength of the particular party in the state legislature. Assam is allocated 7 seats in the Rajya Sabha. When the AGP was strong in the Assam Legislative Assembly during 1985-1990, 1996-2001 it could elect three members on each period to the Rajya Sabha. During 2006-2011 period the AGP was in the opposition, yet it had 24 MLAs, so the party could send two MPs to the Rajya Sabha. Otherwise, representation of the AGP leaders in the Upper House of the Indian Parliament is negligible.

List of MPs elected to the Lok Sabha from the AGP

Sl.No.	Name of the parliamentary	General elections to the Indian Parliament							
		1985	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004	2009	2014
1	Karimganj (SC)	X	X	X			X	X	
2	Silchar	X	X	X			X	X	
3	Autonomous	X	X	X			X	X	
4	Dhubri	X	X	X			X	X	
5	Kokrajhar (ST)	X	X	X			X	X	
6	Barpeta	Ataur Rahman	X	X			X	X	
7	Gauhati	Dinesh Goswami	X	Prabin Sharma			X	X	
8	Mangaldoi	Saifuddin Ahmed	X	Birendra Prasad Baishya			X	X	
9	Tezpur	X	X	X			X	Joseph Toppo	
10	Nowgong	Muhiram Saikia	Muhiram Saikia	Muhiram Saikia			X	X	
11	Kaliabar	Bhadreswar Tanti	X	Keshab Mahanta			X	X	
12	Jorhat	Paragdhar Chaliha	X	X			X	X	
13	Dibrugarh		X	X			Sarbananda Sonowal	X	
14	Lakhimpur	Gakul Saikia	X	Arun Kumar Sarma			Arun Kumar Sarma	X	
Total		7 (Seven)	1 (One)	5 (Five)	Zero	Zero	2 (Two)	1 (One)	Zero

- The name and serial number of the parliamentary constituencies in Assam is according to the data provided by the Election Commission of India (ECI)

Source: www.eci.nic.in website of Election Commission of India

List of MLAs elected to the Assam Assembly from the AGP since 1985 to 1996

Sl.No	Name of the LAC	Reserved /UR	District	General elections to the Assam Legislative Assembly			
				1985	1991	1996	Remark
1	Ratabari	SC	Karimaganj				
2	Patharkandi	None	Karimaganj				
3	Karimaganj North	None	Karimaganj			Sirajul Haq Choudhury	Expired
4	Karimaganj South	None	Karimaganj				
5	Badarpur	None	Karimaganj				
6	Hailakandi	None	Hailakandi				
7	Katlicherra	None	Hailakandi				
8	Algapur	None	Hailakandi	Sahidul Alom Choudhury	Sahidul Alom Choudhury	Sahidul Alom Choudhury	Expired
9	Silchar	None	Cachar				
10	Sonai	None	Cachar			Anowar Hussain Laskar	
11	Dholai	SC	Cachar				
12	Udharbond	None	Cachar				
13	Lakhipur	None	Cachar				
14	Barkhola	None	Cachar				
15	Katigora	None	Cachar				
16	Haflong	ST	Dima Hasao				
17	Bokajan	ST	Karbi Anglong				
18	Howraghat	ST	Karbi Anglong				
19	Diphu	ST	Karbi Anglong				
20	Baithalangso	ST	Karbi Anglong				
21	Mankachar	None	Dhubri			Aminul Islam	
22	Salmara South	None	Dhubri				

23	Dhubri	None	Dhubri				
24	Gauripur	None	Dhubri	Aniruddha Singh Choudhury		Banendra Muchahary	
25	Golakganj	None	Dhubri	Dalim Roy			
26	Bilasipara West	None	Dhubri				
27	Bilasipara East	None	Dhubri			Prasanta Kr Barua	
28	Gossaigaon	None	Kokrajhar			Rajendra Muchahari	
29	Kokrajhar West	ST	Kokrajhar				
30	Kokrajhar East	ST	Kokrajhar				
31	Sidli	ST	Chirang				
32	Bongaigaon	None	Bongaigaon	Phani Bhusan Choudhury	Phani Bhusan Choudhury	Phani Bhusan Choudhury	Active
33	Bijni	None	Chirang				
34	Abhayapuri North	None	Bongaigaon		Bhupen Roy	Bhupen Roy	
35	Abhayapuri South	SC	Bongaigaon			Rabin Banikya	
36	Dudhnai	ST	Goalpara			Akon Rabha	
37	Goalpara East	None	Goalpara			Jyotish Das	
38	Goalpara West	None	Goalpara				
39	Jaleswar	None	Goalpara				
40	Sorbhog	None	Barpeta				
41	Bhabanipur	None	Barpeta	Surendra Nath Medhi		Surendra Nath Medhi	
42	Patacharkuchi	None	Barpeta	Pabindra Deka		Mohan Das	Active
43	Barpeta	None	Barpeta	Kumar Deepak Das			Active
44	Jania	None	Barpeta				
45	Baghbar	None	Barpeta				
46	Sarukhetri	None	Barpeta	Dinabandhu Choudhury			Expired
47	Chenga	None	Barpeta				
48	Boko	SC	South Kamrup			Jyoti Prasad Das	
49	Chaygaon	None	South Kamrup	Kamala Kalita	Kamala Kalita	Kamala Kalita	Active
50	Palasbari	None	South Kamrup	Jatin Mali	Jatin Mali	Jatin Mali	
51	Jalukbari	None	Kamrup Metro	Bhriugu Kr Phukan	Bhriugu Kr Phukan(NAGP)	Bhriugu Kr Phukan	Expired

52	Dispur	None	Kamrup Metro	Atul Bora	Atul Bora	Atul Bora	Left
53	Gauhati East	None	Kamrup Metro	Biraj Kr Sarma		Biraj Kr Sarma	Active
54	Gauhati West	None	Kamrup Metro	Ramendra Narayan Kalita	Ramendra Narayan Kalita	Ramendra Narayan Kalita	Active
55	Hajo	None	Kamrup	Kamakhya Charan Choudhury	Badan Baruah(NAGP)	Nurul Hussain	Active
56	Kamalpur	None	Kamrup	Moidul Islam Bora	Hiteswar Deka(NAGP)	Moidul Islam Bora	Expired
57	Rangiya	None	Kamrup	Thaneswar Bodo	Thaneswar Bodo	Thaneswar Bodo	Active
58	Tamulpur	None	Baksa	Bhaben Narjee			
59	Nalbari	Non	Nalbari	Nagen Sarma	Nagen Sarma	Nagen Sarma	Expired
60	Barkhetry	None	Nalbari	Pulakesh Barua		Pulakesh Barua	Left
61	Dharmapur	None	Nalbari	Chandra Mohan Patowary		Chandra Mohan Patowary	Left
62	Barama	ST	Baksa	Rekharani Das Bodo	Paniram Rabha(NAGP)	Rekharani Das Bodo	Active
63	Chapaguri	ST	Baksa	Suren Swargiary	Suren Swargiary		
64	Panery	None	Udalguri	Durga Das Bodo			Left
65	Kalaigaon	None	Darrang	M M Rai Choudhury		M M Rai Choudhury	
66	Sipajhar	None	Darrang	Zoii Nath Sarma	Zoii Nath Sarma	Zoii Nath Sarma	Left
67	Mangaldoi	SC	Darrang	Nilomoni Das		Hiren Kumar Das	
68	Dalgaon	None	Darrang			Abdul Jabbar	
69	Udalguri	ST	Udalguri				
70	Majbat	None	Udalguri				
71	Dhekiajuli	None	Sonitpur			Joseph Toppo	Active
72	Barchalla	None	Sonitpur	Prafulla Goswami		Prafulla Goswami	Expired
73	Tezpur	None	Sonitpur	Brindaban Goswami	Brindaban Goswami	Brindaban Goswami	Active
74	Rangapara	None	Sonitpur				
75	Sootea	None	Sonitpur	Rabin Saikia		Padma Hazarika	Left
76	Biswanath	None	Sonitpur			Probin Hazarika	
77	Behali	None	Sonitpur				
78	Gohpur	None	Sonitpur	Ganesh Kutum		Ganesh Kutum	Expired
79	Jagiroad	SC	Marigaon	Moti Das	Bubul Das	Bubul Das	
80	Marigaon	None	Marigaon	Surendra Bora			
81	Laharighat	None	Marigaon				

82	Raha	SC	Nagaon	Umesh Chandra Das	Gahin Chandra Das	Gahin Chandra Das	
83	Dhing	None	Nagaon				
84	Batadroba	None	Nagaon	Digen Bora		Digen Bora	Expired
85	Rupohihat	None	Nagaon				
86	Nowgong	None	Nagaon	Girindra Kr Barua			Active
87	Barhampur	None	Nagaon	Prafulla Kr Mahanta	Prafulla Kr Mahanta	Prafulla Kr Mahanta	Active
88	Samaguri	None	Nagaon			Atul Kumar Sarma	
89	Kaliabor	None	Nagaon	Gunin Hazarika		Gunin Hazarika	Active
90	Jamunamukh	None	Hojai			Khalilur Rahman	
91	Hojai	None	Hojai				
92	Lumding	None	Hojai			Hazi Abdur Rouf	
93	Bokakhat	None	Golaghat	Balobhadra Tamuli			Expired
94	Sarupathar	None	Golaghat	Binod Gowala	Binod Gowala	Binod Gowala	Active
95	Golaghat	None	Golaghat	Debeswar Bora		Atul Bora (Junior)	Active
96	Khumtai	None	Golaghat	Probin Kumar Gogoi			Expired
97	Dergaon	SC	Jorhat	Bhaben Bharali			Active
98	Jorhat	None	Jorhat	Abhijit Sarma	Hitendra Nath Goswami	Hitendra Nath Goswami	Left
99	Majuli	ST	Jorhat	Padmeswar Doley	Padmeswar Doley	Karuna Dutta	
100	Titabar	None	Jorhat	Deba Kumar Bora		Hemanta Kalita	Left
101	Mariani	None	Jorhat	Naren Tanti			
102	Teok	None	Jorhat	Lalit Rajkhowa	Renu Poma Rajkhowa	Renu Poma Rajkhowa	Active
103	Amguri	None	Sibsagar	Pradip Hazarika		Pradip Hazarika	Active
104	Nazira	None	Sibsagar				
105	Mahmara	None	Sibsagar	Chandra Arandhara		Hiranya Kr Konwar	Expired
106	Sonari	None	Charaideo	Bhadreswar Buragohain			
107	Thowra	None	Sibsagar	Barki Prasad Telenga			Left
108	Sibsagar	None	Sibsagar	Prodip Gogoi			
109	Bihpuria	None	Lakhimpur	Kesharam Bora		Kesharam Bora	
110	Naoboicha	None	Lakhimpur	Jagat Hazarika			
111	Lakhimpur	None	Lakhimpur	Utpal Dutta		Utpal Dutta	Active

112	Dhakuakhana	ST	Lakhimpur	Bharat Narah	Bharat Narah		Left
113	Dhemaji	ST	Dhemaji	Dilip Kr Saikia	Dilip Kr Saikia	Dilip Kr Saikia	Expired
114	Jonai	ST	Dhemaji	Phani Ram Tayeng		Pradan Barua	Left
115	Moran	None	Dibrugarh	Kiron Kr Gogoi			
116	Dibrugarh	None	Dibrugarh				
117	Lahowal	None	Dibrugarh	Dipen Tanti			Left
118	Duliajan	None	Dibrugarh				
119	Tingkhong	None	Dibrugarh	Atul Koch			
120	Naharkatia	None	Dibrugarh	Kusumbar Tairai Gogoi			
121	Chabua	None	Dibrugarh	Bhaben Barua			
122	Tinsukia	None	Tinsukia				
123	Digboi	None	Tinsukia				
124	Margherita	None	Tinsukia				
125	Doomdooma	None	Tinsukia				
126	Sadiya	None	Tinsukia	Jyotsna Sonowal		Jagadish Bhuyan	J Sonowal
Total		SC-8, ST-16, UR-102		63 (Sixty three)	24 (Twenty four) (AGP-19, NAGP-5)	59 (Fifty nine)	

Source: www.eci.nic.in, website of Election Commission of India.

Appendix VIII (a)
List of MLAs elected to the Assam Legislative Assembly from the AGP since 2001 to 2016

Sl.No	Name of the LAC	Reserved/UR	District	General election to the Assam Legislative Assembly			
				2001	2006	2011	2016
1	Ratabari	SC	Karimganj				
2	Patharkandi	None	Karimganj				
3	Karimganj North	None	Karimganj				
4	Karimganj South	None	Karimganj				
5	Badarpur	None	Karimganj				
6	Hailakandi	None	Hailakandi				
7	Katlicherra	None	Hailakandi				
8	Algapur	None	Hailakandi	Sahidul Alom Choudhury		Sahidul Alom Choudhury	
9	Silchar	None	Cachar				
10	Sonai	None	Cachar				
11	Dholai	SC	Cachar				
12	Udharbond	None	Cachar				
13	Lakhipur	None	Cachar				
14	Barkhola	None	Cachar				
15	Katigorah	None	Cachar				
16	Haflong	ST	Dima Hasao				
17	Bokajan	ST	Karbi Anglong				
18	Howraghat	ST	Karbi Anglong				
19	Diphu	ST	Karbi Anglong				

20	Baithalangso	ST	Karbi Anglong				
21	Mankachar	None	Dhubri				
22	Salmara South	None	Dhubri				
23	Dhubri	None	Dhubri				
24	Gauripur	None	Dhubri	Banendra Kr Mushahary			
25	Golakganj	None	Dhubri				
26	Bilasipara West	None	Dhubri	Ali Akbar Miah			
27	Bilasipara East	None	Dhubri	Prasanta Kr Baruah	Prasanta Kr Baruah		
28	Gossaigaon	None	Kokrajhar				
29	Kokrajhar West	ST	Kokrajhar				
30	Kokrajhar East	ST	Kokrajhar				
31	Sidli	ST	Chirang				
32	Bongaigaon	None	Bongaigaon	Phani Bhusan Choudhry	Phani Bhusan Choudhry	Phani Bhusan Choudhry	Phani Bhusan Choudhry
33	Bijni	None	Chirang				
34	Abhayapuri North	None	Bongaigaon	Bhupen Ray		Bhupen Ray	
35	Abhayapuri South	SC	Bongaigaon		Rabin Banikya		
36	Dudhnai	ST	Goalpara				
37	Goalpara East	None	Goalpara				
38	Goalpara West	None	Goalpara				
39	Jaleswar	None	Goalpara				
40	Sorbhog	None	Barpeta				
41	Bhabanipur	None	Barpeta		Manoranjan Das		
42	Patacharkuchi	None	Barpeta				Pabindra Deka
43	Barpeta	None	Barpeta		Gunindra Das		Gunindra Das
44	Jania	None	Barpeta				
45	Baghbar	None	Barpeta				
46	Sarukhetri	None	Barpeta				
47	Chenga	None	Barpeta		Liakat Ali Khan		
48	Boko	SC	South Kamrup		Jyoti Prasad Das		

49	Chaygaon	None	South Kamrup		Kamala Kt. Kalita		
50	Palasbari	None	South Kamrup				
51	Jalukbari	None	Kamrup Metro				
52	Dispur	None	Kamrup Metro				
53	Gauhati East	None	Kamrup Metro				
54	Gauhati West	None	Kamrup Metro		Ramendra Narayan Kalita		Ramendra Narayan
55	Hajo	None	Kamrup		Nurul Hussain		
56	Kamalpur	None	Kamrup				Satyabrata Kalita
57	Rangiya	None	Kamrup				
58	Tamulpur	None	Baksa				
59	Nalbari	Non	Nalbari		Alaka Sarma		
60	Barkhetry	None	Nalbari				
61	Dharmapur	None	Nalbari		Chandra Mohan		
62	Barama	ST	Baksa				
63	Chapaguri	ST	Baksa				
64	Panery	None	Udalguri				
65	Kalaigaon	None	Darrang			Mukunda Ram	
66	Sipajhar	None	Darrang	Zoii Nath Sarmah			
67	Mangaldoi	SC	Darrang		Hiren Das		
68	Dalgaon	None	Darrang	Abdul Jabbar			
69	Udalguri	ST	Udalguri				
70	Majbat	None	Udalguri				
71	Dhekiajuli	None	Sonitpur	Joseph Toppo	Joseph Toppo		
72	Barchalla	None	Sonitpur				
73	Tezpur	None	Sonitpur	Brindaban Goswami	Brindaban Goswami		Brindaban Goswami
74	Rangapara	None	Sonitpur				
75	Sootea	None	Sonitpur		Padma Hazarika	Padma Hazarika	
76	Biswanath	None	Sonitpur			Probin Hazarika	
77	Behali	None	Sonitpur				
78	Gohpur	None	Sonitpur				

79	Jagiroad	SC	Marigaon	Bubul Das			
80	Marigaon	None	Marigaon				
81	Laharighat	None	Marigaon				
82	Raha	SC	Nagaon				
83	Dhing	None	Nagaon				
84	Batadroba	None	Nagaon				
85	Rupohihat	None	Nagaon		Abdul Aziz		
86	Nowgong	None	Nagaon	Girindra Kr Baruah	Girindra Kr Baruah		
87	Barhampur	None	Nagaon	Prafulla Kr Mahanta	Prafulla Kr Mahanta	Prafulla Kr Mahanta	Prafulla Kr Mahanta
88	Samaguri	None	Nagaon				
89	Kaliabor	None	Nagaon	Gunin Hazarika	Keshab Mahanta	Keshab Mahanta	Keshab Mahanta
90	Jamunamukh	None	Hojai	Khalilur Rahman			
91	Hojai	None	Hojai				
92	Lumding	None	Hojai				
93	Bokakhat	None	Golaghat				Atul Bora (Junior)
94	Sarupathar	None	Golaghat		Binod Gowala		
95	Golaghat	None	Golaghat				
96	Khumtai	None	Golaghat		Probin Gogoi		
97	Dergaon	SC	Jorhat		Sushila Hazarika		Bhabendra Nath
98	Jorhat	None	Jorhat	Hitendra Nath Goswami			
99	Majuli	ST	Jorhat				
100	Titabar	None	Jorhat				
101	Mariani	None	Jorhat				
102	Teok	None	Jorhat				Renupoma
103	Amguri	None	Sibsagar		Pradip Hazarika		Pradip Hazarika
104	Nazira	None	Sibsagar				
105	Mahmara	None	Sibsagar				
106	Sonari	None	Charaideo				
107	Thowra	None	Sibsagar				
108	Sibsagar	None	Sibsagar				

109	Bihpuria	None	Lakhimpur				
110	Naoboicha	None	Lakhimpur				
111	Lakhimpur	None	Lakhimpur	Utpal Dutta		Utpal Dutta	
112	Dhakuakhana	ST	Lakhimpur			Naba Kumar Doley	
113	Dhemaji	ST	Dhemaji	Dilip Kr Saikia			
114	Jonai	ST	Dhemaji				
115	Moran	None	Dibrugarh	Sarbananda Sonowal			
116	Dibrugarh	None	Dibrugarh				
117	Lahowal	None	Dibrugarh				
118	Duliajan	None	Dibrugarh				
119	Tingkhong	None	Dibrugarh		Anup Phukan		
120	Naharkatia	None	Dibrugarh			Naren Sonowal	
121	Chabua	None	Dibrugarh				
122	Tinsukia	None	Tinsukia				
123	Digboi	None	Tinsukia				
124	Margherita	None	Tinsukia				
125	Doomdooma	None	Tinsukia				
126	Sadiya	None	Tinsukia	Jagadish Bhuyan			
Total		SC-8, ST-16, UR-102		20 (Twenty)	25 (Twenty Five, AGP-24, AGP(P)-1)	10 (Ten)	14 (Fourteen)

Source: www.eci.nic.in, website of Election Commission of India.

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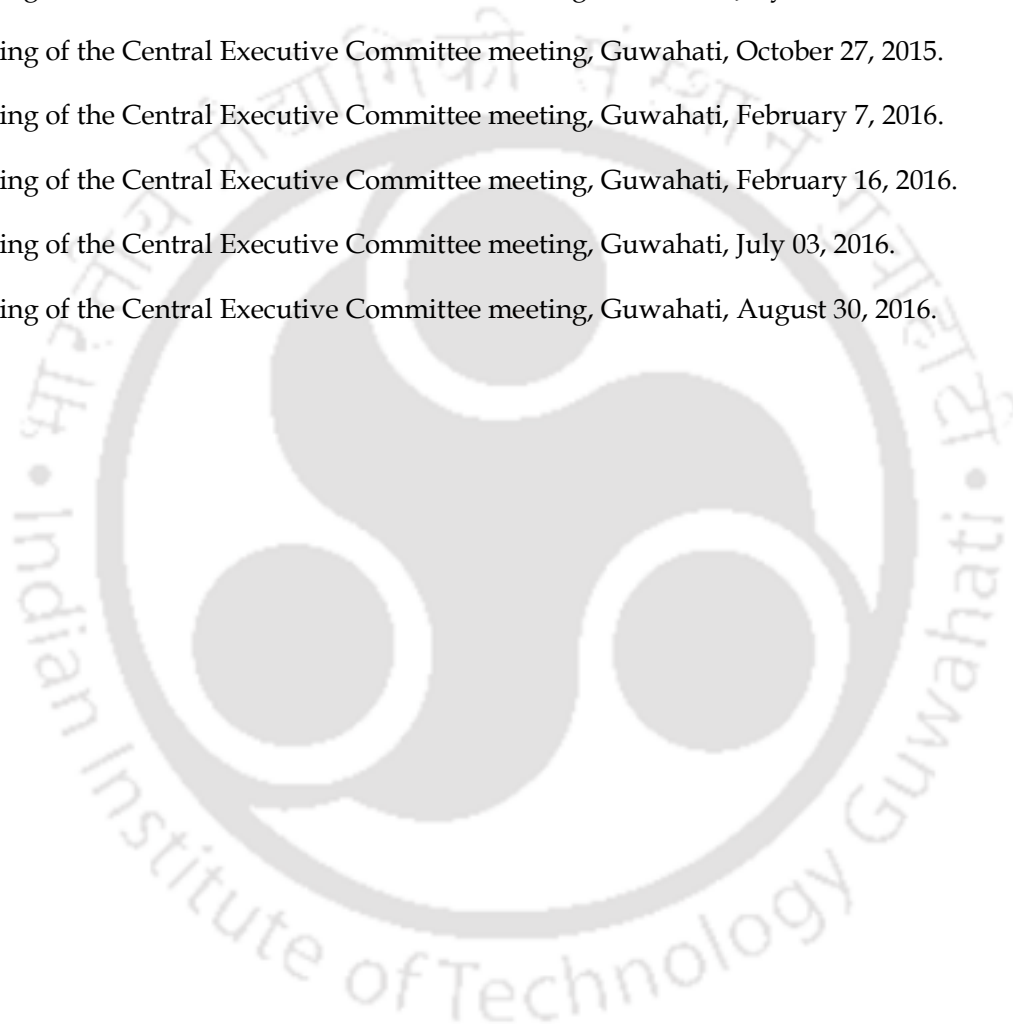
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