CHAPTER III

GENESIS, ORGANIZATION, AND OBJECTIVES OF ALL BODO WOMEN’S WELFARE FEDERATION (ABWWF).
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As stated earlier, participation of Bodo women in politics prior to the struggle for Bodoland was considered as negligible. Bodo society, being a patriarchal society, did not encourage women to participate in the public sphere. Moreover, it was claimed that their lack of interest in public affairs in general and politics in particular was the reason behind their low level of participation in politics. Also the level of political awareness and political efficacy among the Bodo women were considered low as compared to women of other groups, in Assam.\(^{226}\)

However, during the struggle for Bodoland, it has been claimed that the Bodo women played a very significant role. It was seen that they have participated in large numbers in the struggle that the community was engaged in to gain political self-determination and to assert its ethnic and nationalistic pride and identity.\(^{227}\) When the demand for political autonomy for the Bodo people was mooted by a cross section of the Bodo society, including the student leaders, it was felt by the leaders of the struggle that Bodo women could play a contributory role not only in terms of their direct participation in the struggle but also contribute in terms of bringing about the overall welfare of the society. It was hoped particularly by the women that such participation would lead to their upliftment. As a result, the All Assam Tribal Women’s Welfare Federation (AATWWF) was formed in the mid 1987. The genesis and the formation of the AATWWF/ABWWF can be traced to that period of the struggle when ABSU emerged as the major organization to lead the struggle (1985-


It was during that period the ABSU leaders especially Upendranath Brahma encouraged women to participate in the struggle. He believed that even women could play a contributory role towards the development and welfare of the society. It is in this context that the AATWWF emerged with the initiative and support of the ABSU. Pramila Rani Brahma was the founder president of AATWWF. The AATWWF’s constitution states: “It is considered expedient to form a federation of the women folk belonging to all tribal groups of entire Assam to unite themselves in a common platform through mutual understandings being imbibed in a common ideology with a view to fighting for ensuring rights and justice of the tribal women in the spheres of socio-economic, political, educational, cultural and for their emancipation from their socio-domestic drudgery and thereby to enable themselves in rendering services to the promotion of the welfare and preservation of the indigenous self identity of all tribal groups living in Assam.”

They sought to look after the interests of the Bodo women, their economic problems, their overall development and more importantly the civil and political rights to be enjoyed by them. They also took up several measures to fulfill their objectives of fighting for equal rights, status and honour of women in the social, political, economic and cultural spheres, and thereby seeking to empower women and enable them to participate and much more in the political process. Also, preservation and self-determination of the Bodo identity became one of their primary agenda.

It may be noted here that at the time of its formation, AATWWF encompassed women from the tribal groups such as the Bodo, Garo, Mising, Tiwa, Karbi, etc.

Although this organization sought to speak for tribal women in general, their focus was primarily on Bodo women. As a result, women from other tribes began to feel alienated and started withdrawing from AATWWF membership. Therefore, the name of the organization was subsequently changed from AATWWF to All Bodo Women’s Welfare Federation (ABWWF) in the Third Annual Conference of the federation held at Tamulpur in 1993.\textsuperscript{230} It is seen that with the change in the nomenclature from AATWWF to ABWWF, membership to it was now reserved only for Bodo women. The objectives of ABWWF however remained the same. They sought to look for a democratic and peaceful solution to the various problems in society. The primary factor behind the origin and emergence of ABWWF was to bring overall upliftment of socio-political, educational, cultural status along with fighting against various atrocities and ill practices against Bodo women in society.

The ABWWF followed the ideology to build up the bond of unity through collective thought and action, to develop fraternity among all Bodo women through mutual understanding and co-sharing of nationalities, tragedies with the sense of belonging to ensure the welfare of the Bodo women, security and emancipation through the principle of self-determination within the framework of Indian nationalism and Constitution. Also, the ABWWF stands for equal rights and justice in order to free Bodo women from the hurdles of socio-economic bondage.

The aims and objectives of ABWWF are:

1) To move for the fulfillment of the will and aspirations of the women belonging to the Bodo community.

2) To fight for equal rights, status and honour of the Bodo women.

\textsuperscript{230}Sucheta Sen Choudhuri, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 101.
3) To remove the social evil practices and injustices from the society which seem to have become the cause of the retardation of Bodo women for their upliftment.

4) To fight for the reservation of quota in all government jobs and other educational and economic facilities for Bodo women particularly in Bodo majority areas.

5) To move the government for providing required medical care and facilities to the downtrodden Bodo women and their children.

6) To move the government for giving special exemption to the Bodo people from the implementation of the Family Planning Schemes considering the low numerical strength of the Bodo people as compared to that of other communities.

7) To encourage the Bodo women to organize and be part of various co-operative societies for financial independence in different sectors like weaving and textile production, agriculture and pisciculture, sericulture, livestock, super market, transportation, etc. and also to support the struggle for Bodoland through the benefits obtained from these sectors.

8) To move both the state and the central government to protect the lands and properties of Bodo people in order to ensure their socio-economic security.

9) To move the government in order to make necessary arrangements for the employment of the Bodo youths.

10) To urge the government regarding utilization of funds released from the central government under the sub-plan such as women and social welfare scheme and IRDP schemes, etc. for the achievement of economic benefits by the Bodo women.
11) To fight for the human rights and civil liberties of the downtrodden, exploited and oppressed Bodo community especially women in order to safeguard the prestige and status of women in particular and men in general.

12) To stand for the overall security and preservation of the linguistic, cultural, historical and traditional heritage of the Bodo community.

13) To maintain cordial relations with other women organizations belonging to different communities who were fighting for the welfare and upliftment of women during that period.

14) To maintain democratic and peaceful means while fighting for the overall welfare and upliftment of Bodo women in particular and Bodo community in general.\textsuperscript{231}

Thus, the ABWWF pledged to honour the genuine urge and aspirations of the Bodos with respect to the preservation of their distinct self-identity, apart from safeguarding the interests of Bodo women.

It may be noted here that the ABWWF worked in collaboration with the ABSU in terms of the Bodo issue; however, regarding women’s issues the federation was never guided by the dictum of any political organization or party which went against women’s interests. Further, the federation possessed all rights to choose or change the nature of its organization and working strategies as and when the situation demanded.

The Federation has its own flag of the size 3:2. The color of the flag is deep yellow bearing all the four margins embroidered with rows of mountain design “Hajw

\textsuperscript{231} Constitution, ABWWF, Kokrajhar
Agor signifying the traditional rich cultural heritage of the Bodos. The centre of the flag bears a “Full Rising Sun” of red color indicating the “radiation of ray-spectrum of knowledge and human spirit”, as well as signifying the mark of welfare, prosperity and sincere spirit of the Federation.

The Head Quarter of the Federation is situated in Kokrajhar (Assam) and the area of operation of the Federation covered all the Bodo dominated areas.

The ABWWF is an apex body and consists of five organizational levels, viz. central committee, district committee, anchalik committee, unit committee and village committee. The head office of the federation is located in Kokrajhar. The office bearers and executive committee manage and run the office. The committee at each level consists of president, secretary and executive members. The president presides over the executive committee meetings and is vested with executive powers. The general secretary carries out all correspondences under the directions of the president. The finance secretary cum treasurer is in charge of all transactions of the Union’s Funds. Publicity secretary is responsible for media coverage and publications. Arts and Cultural secretary is responsible for the promotion and preservation of the inherent arts and cultures.

The members of the Central Committee of ABWWF are selected from different District Committees at the end of each term. Further, the District Committee is constituted within a geo-political district and is comprised of the members selected from different Anchalik committees. The Anchalik Committee is constituted within a revenue circle or block with its members elected from different Unit Committees. The Unit Committee is constituted with not more than 14 villages with its members

\(^{232}\) *Constitution, ABWWF, Kokrajhar.*
selected from different Village Committees. The Village Committee is constituted within a village with its members selected from each family of the concerned villages. It may be stated here that the representation or official correspondence within different organizational levels is constituted from a lower level to the next higher level or vice-versa. The Village Committee is not entitled to make any direct representation or correspondence to the District Committee or Central committee.

Central Working Committee (C.W.C/ ABWWF):

The Central Working Committee (C.W.C) of ABWWF consists of all the executive members selected and the ex-officio members from all the district committees. The presidents and the general secretaries of all the district committees are the ex-officio members of the Central Committee. A minimum of 10 members from each district committee are nominated to be the members of C.W.C. The term of the office of the C.W.C. is two years. The C.W.C. is an apex body of the ABWWF which consists of the following office bearers:

1. President.

2. Two Vice-Presidents.

3. A Speaker.

4. A Deputy Speaker.

5. A General Secretary.

6. Two Joint Secretaries.

8. Four Organizing Secretaries.

9. One Literary-cum-Public Secretary.

10. One Assistant Literary-cum-Publicity Secretary.

11. One Cultural Secretary.

12. One Assistant Cultural Secretary.

13. One Games and Sports Secretary.

14. One Assistant games and Sports Secretary.

15. One Debate and Symposium Secretary.

16. One Assistant Debate and Symposium Secretary.

17. One Weaving and Co-operative Society Secretary.

18. One Assistant Weaving and Co-operative Secretary.

19. One Health, Family and Social Welfare Secretary.

20. One Assistant Health, Family and Social Welfare Secretary.

21. Five Advisers selected from amongst the distinguished women personalities in different fields.

District Working Committee (D.W.C./ABWWF)

The D.W.C. consists of atleast five members from each Anchalik Committee under its jurisdiction. The portfolio of the members of D.W.C is the same as C.W.C. of ABWWF. The term of the office of D.W.C. is of two years. The members of
D.W.C. meet six times a year. Any resolution (s) passed in the D.W.C. is communicated to the C.W.C. The quorum of the D.W.C. follows the same rule as that of the C.W.C. The D.W.C. has to consult the C.W.C. prior to taking up any measures regarding any vital issue.

Anchalik Working Committee (A.W.C./ABWWF):

The members of the Anchalik Committee hold the same portfolios as similar to that of C.W.C. and D.W.C. The members of the A.W.C. shall meet as many times as it requires. Any resolution (s) passed in the meeting of A.W.C. is communicated to the respective D.W.C. The quorum of the A.W.C. shall follow the same rule as applicable in the case of other higher organizational levels of the Federation. The term of A.W.C. is of two years.

Unit Working Committee (U.W.C./ ABWWF).

The members of the U.W.C. also hold the portfolio as the same like the C.W.C. and their term is of two years. The U.W.C. shall meet for as many times as it requires but not less than 12 times in a year. Also, the quorum of the U.W.C. shall follow the same rule as applicable in the case of other higher organizational levels of the Federation.

Village Working Committee (V.W.C./ ABWWF):

In the V.W.C., the portfolio of its members shall be the same as that of upper organizational levels if the concerning village has got the availability of required person eligible for the concerned position. In case of non-availability of required persons, such village can create certain indispensable portfolios and continue the
functioning of the V.W.C. The term of V.W.C is of two years and the quorum shall resemble to the one applied in the case of the Anchalik Committee.

Powers and Functions of the office bearers of ABWWF:

President:

1). The President of the C.W.C. shall be the supreme figure of the Federation.

2). The President shall preside over all the meetings and the opening sessions held on the occasion of a conference of the Federation.

3). She shall be responsible for maintenance of the discipline and decorum in the meetings.

4). She shall be entitled to present her Presidential address in a written or printed form in the opening sessions of a conference.

5). The President shall have the power to direct all her office-bearers to carry out the functions of the respective portfolios concerned.

6). The President alone shall have the power to issue a press statement in case of common interests or of interests concerning the Federation.

7). If a District Committee disobeys the rules and regulations of the Federation, in such situation the President shall have discretionary power to dissolve the D.W.C. with the approval of the C.W.C.

8). If any member of the C.W.C gets involved in any anti-organizational activities, the President shall have the power to expel or suspend the member for a period of 4 consecutive years with the advice of the C.W.C.
Vice-President:

1). In the absence of the President, any of the two vice-presidents shall have the authority to preside over the meetings.

2). In case of vacancy due to death, resignation or dismissal through impeachment of the President, the C.W.C. shall have the power to choose either of the two vice-presidents for the post of the President.

Speaker:

1). The speaker shall preside over the delegate session of the C.W.C. held on occasion of either a conference or a convention of the Federation.

2). The speaker shall have the power to preside over the meetings in case of the absence of the general secretary. Also, in the absence of neither of the two vice-presidents or the president, the speaker shall have the power to preside over the meetings.

General Secretary:

1). The general secretary shall mainly be responsible for any or all the activities of the Federation. For adoption of policies or in order to take decisions regarding certain crucial issues, she shall have the authority to recommend the policies to the C.W.C. in consultation with the President as and when necessary.

2). She shall maintain all the accounts of the Federation.

3). The Annual Report on the proceedings of the Federation shall be prepared and presented by her to be presented on the occasion of the Annual Conference of the Federation.
4). In case of certain crucial issues of common interest or interest concerning
the Federation, the general secretary in consultation with the president shall have the
authority to issue a press statement.

5). She shall have the power to direct either of the two assistant general
secretaries to carry out the activities of the ABWWF as and when felt necessary, in
the interest of the Federation.

6). She shall have the responsibilities of coordinating all the office bearers
aiming at smooth functioning of all organizational affairs.

Joint Secretaries:

1). In absence of the general secretary, either of the two joint secretaries, as
directed by the President shall function as the general secretary.

2). In the absence of the general secretary, any of the two joint secretaries shall
have the authority to preside over the meetings.

3). In case of vacancy due to death, resignation or dismissal through
impeachment of the general secretary, the C.W.C. shall choose either of the two joint
secretaries for the post of the general secretary.

Cashier/Treasurer:

1). The cashier shall be the custodian authority in matter of keeping the
organizational fund secured and sound. Also, all the membership fees collected from
the C.W.C. and general membership fee shall be received by the cashier.

2). In order to enhance the fund of the Federation the cashier shall have the
power to recommend financial policies to the C.W.C.
Organizing Secretary:

1). The organizing secretaries shall look after the organizational matters of the ABWWF.

2). They shall try to interpret the objectives and principles of the ABWWF to the masses by organizing seminars, discussions, circles, etc.

Literary cum Publicity Secretary:

1). The literary cum publicity secretary shall work for upliftment of literary activities among the Bodo women.

2). She shall be the editor of the magazines published by the Federation.

3). She shall be responsible for the organizational publicities.

Assistant Literary cum Publicity Secretary:

1). She shall assist the literary cum publicity secretary in discharging her duties

Cultural Secretary:

1). The cultural secretary shall convene cultural meets or festivals from time to time.

2). She shall have the authority to organize any cultural activities or functions as and when required.
Advisers:

1). The advisers shall put forward their suggestions in various aspects to the C.W.C.

2). They shall not be entitled to enjoy any voting right in the Federation.

3). The members in the advisory board are not permanent.

Executive members:

1). All the executive members shall have the right to deliver speech and vote in the C.W.C. and in the conference (s) of the federation respectively.

2). One tenth members of the C.W.C. shall have the power to convene the meeting of the C.W.C in case of absence of the president and the secretaries. Again one third of the total members of the C.W.C. shall be responsible to make a quorum of the meetings convened on such situation. The meetings convened under such situation shall be presided over by a senior member of the Federation.

Office bearers and executive members of the D.W.C., A.W.C., U.W.C and V.W.C.:

The powers and functions of the office bearers and executive members of the D.W.C., A.W.C., U.W.C and V.W.C. of ABWWF shall resemble to that of the office bearers and executive members of the C.W.C.

Membership:

It may be stated here that every bona-fide women belonging to the Bodo community of minimum 18 years of age were eligible be the member of ABWWF.
Women having membership of other organizations whose ideals and objectives are not in conformity with those of ABWWF were not entitled to be its members.

Every general member of the organization has to pay the membership fee of Rs. 2 collected on monthly basis. Further, every executive member of Central, District, Anchalik, Unit and Village Committees of ABWWF has to pay the annual membership fee of Rs. 25, 20, 15, 10 and 5 respectively.

The membership of any member is considered as invalid if she fails to pay the prescribed annual membership fees. Also, the membership of any member will be considered as invalid if the activities or role of the concerned member is found against the principles of ABWWF.

Funds and Finance:

The Central/District/Anchalik/Unit and Village Committee of ABWWF maintain separate funds of their own. The fund of the Central Committee is collected from donations and subscriptions from each individual, institutions and various other organizations. The funds of the District, Anchalik, Unit and Village Committee are collected through public donations. Further, the delegate’s fee received in the conferences of the Central/ District/Anchalik/Unit and Village Committee is deposited in their respective funds.

For the publication of magazines or journals, separate funds are collected through donations and subscriptions from the members of ABWWF. The General Secretary is responsible for the presentation of Annual Budget to the Central Committee of ABWWF. The General Secretary of each organizational level maintains
the official records such as receipt books, cash books, etc. of their respective committees.

Annual meeting and conference:

The federation meets twice in a year for their annual meetings. However, during the period of the struggle they met in accordance with the demand of the situation. In general, decisions are taken by the president in consultation with the executive committee. However, as and when the need arouse the general women members were also included in decision-making process which happened frequently during the struggle.

The Annual Conference of ABWWF took place after every two years and it still continues to be the same. A Reception Committee is formed to make necessary arrangements for holding the Annual Conference of the Federation. Further, the date and time of the Conference is fixed by the General Secretary of the Federation in consultation with the Reception Committee.

Election:

Elections will be held in case more than one member is proposed for a single office and in case none of the proposers withdraw their proposals. An elected Election Commissioner will conduct the election wherein each member from different district committees will have the right of a single non-transferable vote to exercise regarding the formation of a new working committee. The candidate having absolute majority of votes in her support shall be declared elected.

The emergence of ABWWF led to the political mobilization of the Bodo women in an organized way, and their role became noticeable. The ABWWF was
formed during the period of the struggle with a view to not only take part in the struggle but also to look after the interests of the Bodo women, their economic problems, their overall development and more importantly the civil and political rights to be enjoyed by women. The ABWWF played an important role in awakening political consciousness among Bodo women and their involvement in the struggle.233

The organization worked jointly with the ABSU and other Bodo ethnic organization and participated in various tripartite negotiations on Bodoland issue. It was also committed to spreading the aims and objectives of the ABSU movement to the rural areas, particularly among the illiterate Bodo women. Women of different age groups participated in the political struggle led by ABSU in village, district and state levels in the form of processions, dharnas, gheraos, rasta roko and rail roko programmes.234

It is interesting to note that though the Bodo society continued to remain primarily a patriarchal society, the ABSU encouraged women to take part directly in the struggle for Bodoland. Interestingly it was noted that the ABSU depended on the members of ABWWF for mobilizing people in areas that they did not have access to. Several foot marches were carried out across the Bodo areas under the leadership of Upendranath Brahma, and in all such programmes the ABWWF had played a significant role. Accordingly, while on the one hand the Bodo women under ABWWF agitated to secure social and political rights for their community, on the other hand, working through the federation, they also tried to address various evil practices prevailing in the society against women such as polygamy, witch hunting,

dowry death, various forms of sexual harassment including rape, molestation, domestic violence, etc., that plagued the Bodo society. Thus the emergence of AATWWF and ABWWF provided an important platform to look into matters related to not only the society but also women.

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